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Claudine Kuradusenge  
*George Mason University*

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## Denied Victimhood and Contested Narratives: The Case of Hutu Diaspora

Claudine Kuradusenge  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, Virginia, USA

***Abstract:** Based on 46 interviews conducted in a 2-month period, this article explored the identity narrative of three generations of the Hutu Diaspora community living in Belgium. Through a analysis of the Rwanda's National Identity policy and political categories, the research aimed to explore important themes such as sense of self and other, victimhood, and homeland through the lenses of the perpetrator group. Moreover, it was essential to investigate the trans-generational impact the perpetrator label has on the next generations. By looking at the Hutu population, the study was opening the door to the exploration of contested memories of survival for the perpetrator group. The complexity of the Hutu identity and their contested and competing narratives offered a fascinating approach to the study of mass atrocity as well as the field of conflict Resolution. This new generation of well educated, young Hutu has the power to shape the future of Rwanda in a very important way.*

***Keywords:** Hutu, diaspora, identity, victimhood, Rwanda*

### Introduction

Today, we are the Palestinians; the only problem is that we don't have intifada and don't have terrorists. Who knows, maybe we are creating the terrorists of tomorrow.

– Participant #17

In this article, I intend to explore the stories the Hutu Diaspora in Belgium tell about themselves and how they position themselves vis-à-vis Rwanda. As Diaspora, they have an important connection to their homeland. Their actions and understanding of who they are strongly impacts the sociopolitical decisions the Rwandan government's Foreign Ministry make. In this article, I explore the creation of the official Rwandan narrative crafted by the Rwandan government and how this narratives has influenced its Rwandan citizens, through an analysis of the National Identity Policy, Law N. 18/2008 relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, and Law N. 47/2001 of the 18/2008 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism.<sup>1</sup> After analyzing the construction of this official narrative about what Rwandan identity is, I connect Rwanda with its Diaspora through a historical understanding of the diasporic waves of Rwandans moving in and out of Rwanda. Finally, through in-depth interviews, I connect Rwanda and its policies to the Hutu in Belgium. It is important to understand the connections Rwanda has with its Diaspora. The way the official narratives and laws are portraying the Diaspora has a great influence on the different, sometimes competing, narratives that are created in the diasporic communities.

The Rwandan Diaspora, as the Rwandan government refers to it, is a "negative Diaspora" — that is, a hostile Diaspora that stands against current Rwandan politics. Moreover, the Rwandan government mostly associates the "negative Diaspora" with Hutu communities. These communities are believed by the current Rwandan government to still support, or to be associated with, the government calls the previous "Hutu government" (including the "Hutu" regimes that committed the 1994 genocide). This negative Diaspora, therefore, is largely seen as a Diaspora that is primary composed of Hutus who are seen as enemies of the state. As such, this Diaspora has shaped a competing narrative to the official Rwandan narrative and highlighted the impact diasporic communities have on their homeland. As Lily Cho presents, the diasporic identity is not only a brand, it is an reminder of the past, a recollection of times when things were different, and most of all, it is an unsettling feeling of being caught in a time and place that are not necessarily right.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Justice in Jeopardy: The First Instance Trial of Victory Ingabire* (2013), accessed October 27, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR47/001/2013/en/>.

<sup>2</sup> Lily Cho, "The Turn to Diaspora," *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, no. 17 (2007), 19.

the mix of this diasporic status, the Hutu communities represent this complexity of being caught in a narrative that is a daily reflection of the darkest time in their history, yet being not totally part of the new vision of the state of Rwanda and experiencing an uncanny, unsettling feeling of not being home.

Identity in this article is taken to mean the process by which “people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how people understand their possibilities for the future.”<sup>3</sup> This multidimensional definition suggests that there is more than one identity within a person. People’s identities can be categorized into two different groups, a personal individual identity and a group identity. The individual identity is created in the “process of self-reflection or the understanding of the ‘self.’”<sup>4</sup> Our individual identity exists in connection to the world, to understand what or who we are by understanding what or who we are not. Therefore, identity can be seen as a collection of different features from an “individual’s culture of origin.”<sup>5</sup> Those features allow one to create relationships with people who share the same features.<sup>6</sup> By creating a group of people sharing many of the same features, we identify ourselves, not only as an individual with a self-identity, but also as a member of a group possessing a collective or social identity. In the context of Rwanda where forms of identity based violence (genocide) were the primary reasons why so many people were forced into Diaspora between 1960 and 2000, studying identity formation and Diaspora consciousness is a crucial component to understand the trans-generational narratives created within the last couple decades. It is also an important competent to understanding and promoting justice and reconciliation among Rwandan communities in Rwanda and abroad.

### **The Construction of the New Rwandan Official Narrative**

In a span of three months, Rwanda experienced one of the darkest and bloodiest times in its history. The 1994 genocide did not only traumatize Rwandans within, but it also affected Rwandans who were abroad, as well as the international community. Over two decades later, its aftermath is still very present in the minds, actions, and hearts of many. The genocide is usually described as an ethnic conflict, where Hutus decided to kill their Tutsi neighbors. Almost one million were killed and about two million became refugees.

In the wake of this tragedy, a new Tutsi government took over the destroyed country and intended to rebuild it. With time, the narrative of the events of 1994 changed. While the case started off being referred to as the Rwandan Genocide—implying that the genocide happened to all of Rwanda as a country and society—the narrative shifted to calling the events the Genocide Against Tutsi and Moderate Hutus. Finally, the narrative crystalized and was officially named by the Rwandan government, the Genocide Against Tutsi. This change of narrative was not only promoted by the government, but adopted legally through the enactment of a National Identity policy under law N. 14/2008 on 04/06/2008, and Law N. 18/2008 relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, and Law N. 47/2001 of the 18/2008 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism.<sup>7</sup>

The Rwandan government’s stated reason for implementing a national identity policy was to fight against “the radicalized mentality of the past.”<sup>8</sup> The new government emphasized a national Rwandan “identity, hoping that [citizens could] replace ethnicity as a basis for identity.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Judy Dyer, “Language and Identity,” in *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*, ed. Carmen Llamas et al. (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006), 103.

<sup>4</sup> Karina V. Korostelina, *Social Identity and Conflict: Structures, Dynamics, and Implications*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 36.

<sup>5</sup> Judy Dyer, “Language and Identity,” 101.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Laroche, Frank Pons, and Marie-Odile Richard, “The Role of Language in Ethnic Identity Measurement: A Multitrait-Multimethod Approach to Construct Validation.” *Journal of Social Psychology* 149, No. 4 (August 2009), 514.

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, *Justice in Jeopardy: The First Instance Trial of Victory Ingabire*.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Hintjens, “Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda,” *Ethnicities* 8, (March 1, 2008), 6.

<sup>9</sup> Hilary Power, “Unresolved Identity Conflicts as a Barrier to Reconciliation in Rwanda,” *International Public Policy Review* 7, no. 2 (2013), 5.

Talking about ethnic identities became illegal because it was presumed that Belgian colonizers had installed them. Consequently, in order to enlighten and help the country progress and free itself from old mentalities, the Rwandan Patriotic Front attempted to erase the initial, ethnic identities of Rwandan citizens.<sup>10</sup> Yet, though ethnic identification was prohibited, it remained an important part of the cultural and social fabric of the Rwandan society, continued to be expressed in private spheres, and continues to structure people's lives. Unfortunately, "it can be said that the act of genocide and its memory have strengthened the boundaries and the self-identification on either side of the divide even as ethnic categories have disappeared from identity cards and official social and political engineering."<sup>11</sup> Due to the government's imposition of a collective identity, the ethnic identities have become increasingly important, even more so than before the 1994 genocide.<sup>12</sup> This government attempt to impose unity on the population by outlawing ethnicity and deploying a de-ethnicized discourse, Andrea Purdeková argues, stands paradoxically in contrast to the "silent engineering" of the Rwandan government to make ethnicity a de facto cornerstone of the practice of politics.<sup>13</sup> One advantage of this de-ethnicized discourse is that to outside observers—especially observers in the West who associate African identities and conflicts with backwardness and violence—outlawing ethnicity makes Rwanda seem like a developed, progressive, and modern African country.<sup>14</sup> Within the context of Rwandan politics inside and outside of Rwanda, furthermore, the discourse of removing ethnicity to create "unity" is important for creating the legitimacy of the current government.<sup>15</sup> Through this construct, tacitly or explicitly asserting one's ethnicity in public life is seen as promoting «disunity,» which marks individuals as targets of government or social suspicion because of their ethnic identity. The state policy of attempting to eliminate ethnicity as a dividing line between Rwandans—either by accident or by design—has therefore resulted in reifying ethnic identity and concretizing social and political lines between Hutus and Tutsis.

Hillary Power has argued that "such deep-seated identities and attitudes cannot be expected simply to disappear; though they may be publicly silenced, they may remain intact. Failing to address them negates the possibility of dismantling and neutralizing them."<sup>16</sup> The imposed, unified Rwandan national identity thereby silences people and attempts to erase their former identities through a one-dimensional narrative created by the government. Yet, as other narratives are dismissed and seen as illegal, people are still discriminated against and even persecuted based on the Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa identities. Ethnic identities were thereby transformed into newly created political identities that reflected the new policies the Rwandan government was implementing.<sup>17</sup> Because these political identities are so closely attached to the official memory of the 1994 genocide, Rwandan citizens were essentially divided into categories of victimhood and perpetration. Mahmood Mamdani and with Eugenia Zorbas, have explored this categorization of Rwandans not only socially, but also in the legal system of the new Tutsi regime. As Mamdani has stated, the state language and official and popular discourse in Rwanda divides the population into five categories:<sup>18</sup>

1. The returnees are mainly Tutsi exiles who returned to Rwandan after the RPF came to power in July 1994. They have not experienced civil war or genocide and their English (or Swahili) is frequently better than their Kinyarwanda.

<sup>10</sup> Hintjens, "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," 10.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Purdeková, "Beyond De-Ethnicisation in Post-Genocide Rwanda," Unpublished Working Paper. Department of International Development, Oxford University. (2009), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Hintjens, "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," 8.

<sup>13</sup> Andrea Purdeková, *Making Ubumwe: Power, State and Camps in Rwanda's Unity-Building Project* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 84-85.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>16</sup> Power, "Unresolved Identity Conflicts," 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Hintjens, "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 266-267.

2. The refugees can be either Old Caseload (OCL) refugees, pre-1994 mostly Tutsi refugees, or New Caseload (NCL), post-1994 mostly Hutu refugees.
3. The victims are both Tutsi and moderate Hutu. However, surviving victims are only Tutsi (see below), who either survived the genocide or who had survived previous anti-Tutsi massacres (OCL refugees). NCL refugees are not considered victims, or survivors.
4. The survivors are only Tutsi. The logic here is that the genocide was aimed only at Tutsi. It follows that any Tutsi who was in Rwanda at the time of the genocide and who is alive today is a survivor. The word is not used for any Hutu who was in the country during that same period.
5. The perpetrators category is perhaps the clearest evidence of the endurance of the Hutu/Tutsi dialectic, despite the official national unity ideology. "The assumption is that every Hutu who opposed the genocide was killed. The flip side of this assumption is that every living Hutu was either an active participant or a passive onlooker in the genocide. Morally, if not legally, both are culpable. The dilemma is that to be a Hutu in contemporary Rwanda is to be presumed a perpetrator."<sup>19</sup>

The Rwandan government generally avoids using Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as political identities. But it has adopted what can be called a "genocide framework," from which it categorizes the population politically.<sup>20</sup> As Mamdani has argued, "the 1994 genocide is singled out as an event producing the only political correct categories for identification and guidelines' for state policy."<sup>21</sup> By dividing the Rwandan population into victims, survivors, and perpetrators the government limited the process of overcoming the trauma of the genocide and any past suffering the country has experienced. The controlled, single-sided narratives and the suppression of the ethnic identities has created obstacles to the reconciliation process. It also deepens the societal and identity-based separations among the ethnic groups, and creates new understandings of the trauma experienced during and after the genocide by forcing people into categories.

Therefore, the one-sided narrative created by the government, that only the Tutsi were victims of the genocide, not the Hutu, dismissed other narratives that could have potentially evolved. The official narrative does not deny that Hutus also died, but rather that only Tutsi deaths represent deaths due to genocide. Thus, only Tutsi can be recognized as victims of genocide. To say that a Hutu is a victim of genocide is thereby an act of denying the Tutsi genocide—a criminal offense in Rwanda. This national identity policy, and the way the government has decided to implement it, has helped to deepen divisions, not promote reconciliation. Those seen as the victims, survivors, and returnees are principally Tutsis, while the perpetrators are almost exclusively Hutus. Rwandans are now divided into ethnic and political lines, paradoxically, through the government's claim that it is removing ethnicity from politics.

This distinction of manufacturing a Tutsi identity as an identity of victim, survivor, or returnee, and a Hutu identity as an identity of perpetrators, can be observed in the political arena and justice system. A 2002 survey illustrated the extent to which the Tutsis, mainly the RPF members, held power in Rwanda:

- Of Rwanda's twelve prefects, seven are Tutsi, five are *returnees*, and 11 of the 12 prefects are members of the RPF;
- Of the twelve commissioners on the National Unit and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), nine are Tutsi and four are *returnees* (no political affiliation is cited);
- Of the twenty-two Supreme Court Judges, fourteen are Tutsi and fifteen are *returnees* (no political affiliation is cited);
- Of the twenty-eight heads of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), twenty-three are Tutsi and twenty-four are members of the RPF (no figure available for *returnee* proportion);

<sup>19</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*. 267; Eugenia Zorbas, "Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Journal of Legal Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*. 266.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

- Of Rwandan's fifteen ambassadors, thirteen are RPF members, and twelve are Tutsi (no figure cited for *returnees*)<sup>22</sup>

In addition to control the narrative of the genocide and its population, since the RPF took power in Rwanda, private citizens, political opponents, journalists, human rights activists, and others have been persecuted, harassed, imprisoned, and tortured by the Rwandan authorities.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, what crystalized the official Rwandan narrative was Law N. 18/2008 relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, which regulates freedom of expression, and Law N. 47/2001 of the 18/2008 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism. According to Law N. 18/2008 relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, genocide ideology "is an aggregate of thoughts characterized by conduct, speeches, documents and other acts aiming at exterminating or inciting others to exterminate people based on ethnic group, origin, nationality, region, color, physical appearance, sex, language, religion or political opinion, committed in normal periods or during war."<sup>24</sup> Law N. 47/2001 of the 18/2008 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism, defines discrimination as "any speech, writing, or actions based on ethnicity, region or country of origin, the color of skin, physical features, sex, language, religion or ideas aimed at depriving a person or group of persons of their rights as provided by Rwandan law and by International Conventions to which Rwanda is a party." The law furthermore defines sectarianism as "the use of any speech, written statement or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflicts among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination mentioned in article one." The law then proceeds to state that the "deprivation of a person of his/her rights is the denial of rights provided by Rwanda [sic] Law and by International Conventions to which Rwanda is a party."<sup>25</sup> Both laws were created to restrict the freedom of speech, to prevent Rwandans from openly expressing their disagreements with Rwandan policies, and one might say, to prevent reconciliation after the 1994 genocide in the name of promoting reconciliation. Due to the unclear language in the laws, the incumbent government in Rwanda has been using the laws to suppress opposition and censure human rights defenders and journalists.<sup>26</sup> The selective narrative put forth by the government has left no room for discussion.

Through these laws, the Rwandan government has created legal means that ensure the promotion of one, single narrative, which holds that the Tutsi were the victims and the Hutus were the perpetrators. This has had several consequences. First, it has closed the door to anyone who could offer a counter narrative—even a modest narrative, such as one that did not deny the actuality of the violence and killing that happened in 1994, but merely suggested that moderate Hutus were also victims of genocide, would be illegal under these two laws. Second, the laws have shaped the political sphere, sidelining parties that are in disagreement of the governments' policies. Third—and this may be the most important consequence—the laws have left room for the government to interpret its own legal framework and apply it in the way it wants. This creates the arbitrary rule of law and allows the government to silence, repress, arrest, and kill citizens along de facto ethnic lines, in the name of preventing ethnic divisions.

### Rwanda and its Diaspora

How do the dynamics in the politics of identity in Rwandan affect the Rwandan negative Diaspora that attempted to maintain a connection to their homeland? As Lily Cho has written, "no one is born

<sup>22</sup> Zorbas, "Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda," 44–45.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph, Umuvugizi – The Voice of Rwanda "Amnesty International Report Puts Rwandan Among Top Human Rights Abusers." (March 2016), accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.umuvugizi.com/?p=5423&lang=en&PageSpeed=noscript>. One very good example among many for control the Rwandan government is exercising over its narratives is the blockage of the Umuvugizi website that was a controversial satire news outlet. The Umuvugizi website is no longer accessible.

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, *Safer to Stay Silent: The Chilling Effect of Rwanda's Laws on 'Genocide Ideology' and 'Sectarianism'*, 2010, accessed November 2, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR47/005/2010/en/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

diasporic. Rather, one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence [and resettlement].<sup>27</sup> The idea of a diasporic status and the Rwandan state has had a long connection. Its first wave of Diaspora were Tutsi escaping the 1959 and 1960's instabilities, which were created by the Rwandan struggle for independence and the establishment of a new Hutu state.<sup>28</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Hutus fled the country fearing that the RPF government was erecting a Tutsi protection government. This Hutu emigration constituted the second wave of the Rwandan Diaspora.<sup>29</sup> Later, in the early 2000s, both Hutus and Tutsi fled an increasingly oppressive Rwandan government. In the immediate post-genocide years, those who returned to Rwanda are estimated to be 25-40% of the Rwandan population. These returnees are people who lived abroad in Uganda, Burundi, DR Congo, and Tanzania among other places, and trekked back to Rwanda for the first time since 1994.<sup>30</sup> Even the current government is believed to be composed of Ugandan returnees. This first wave of Tutsi Diaspora has been described as a "victim Diaspora," or as heroes since the RPF, the political party that stopped the genocide and took over the country, was largely composed of Tutsis returning to the country.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the second wave of Hutu Diaspora who left Rwanda after the RPF seized power has been seen as problematic, framed as the villains, and almost by definition anti-government because they are Hutu. Believed by the Rwandan government to be sympathizers of the former President Habyarimana's regimes, many are seen as threat to the current Republic of Rwanda. Yet, in the face this attempt to forcibly define them politically accord to their ethnicity, many in this second wave Diaspora have questioned or rejected the official narratives of the genocide and attempted to create a counter-narrative that would incorporate a different side of the story.

As a Diaspora that exists because of conflict, the second wave Diaspora is similar to conflict-based Diasporas, which "frequently have a prominent role in framing conflict issues and defining what is politically acceptable."<sup>32</sup> As Lyons argues, such "Diaspora groups created by conflict and sustained by traumatic memories tend to compromise less and therefore reinforce and exacerbate the protracted nature of conflicts."<sup>33</sup> The current government is aware of the complex dynamic that constitutes the antagonized and isolate Diaspora communities. After all, many who are currently in the government were actively playing a role in Diaspora politics before the 1994 genocide, when they were in the Diaspora. Therefore, the current Rwandan government has created initiatives to reconnect with its Diasporas, by dividing the Diaspora into three categories: a positive Diaspora that supports the state, and a skeptical Diaspora whose members may be converted, and finally a hostile Diaspora beyond reach.<sup>34</sup> With the creation of the Diaspora General Directorate (DGD), the Rwanda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation embarked on a program to unify the Diaspora community who were willing to adhere to the new vision of Rwanda. The DGD created initiatives to carry out this policy objective, such as the *One Dollar Campaign*, which encourages people in the Diaspora to donate and support "vulnerable genocide survivors."<sup>35</sup> The most skeptical members of the Diaspora were invited to come and witness the process the country had gone through. Those who remained critical of the direction of the country, politically and socially, were interpreted as being part of the negative Diaspora, and perceived to still be sympathizers of the previous Hutu governments. This distinction cast them as enemies of the

<sup>27</sup> Cho, "The Turn to Diaspora," 21

<sup>28</sup> Peter Uvin, "Prejudice, Crisis, and Genocide in Rwanda," *African Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (1997), 96.

<sup>29</sup> Simon Turner, "Staging the Rwandan Diaspora: The Politics of Performance," *African Studies* 72, no. 2 (August 2013), 269.

<sup>30</sup> Hintjens, "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Cohen and Nicholas Van Hear, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008); Turner, "Staging the Rwandan Diaspora," 269.

<sup>32</sup> Terrence Lyons, "Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Analysis," *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 4 (December 2007), 530.

<sup>33</sup> Lyons, "Conflict-Generated," 530.

<sup>34</sup> Turner, "Staging the Rwandan Diaspora," 274.

<sup>35</sup> Republic of Rwanda, "Rwanda Diaspora Global Network," *Diaspora General Directorate*, 2010, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://www.rwandandiaspora.gov.rw/index.php?id=64>.

state of Rwanda, because they were believed to represent a potential danger to the well being of the state.<sup>36</sup>

These Hutu diasporic communities who are seen as potential dangers to the Rwandan state are the subjects of this research. Those who are still in exile, and still considered dangerous by the current Rwandan government, have been affected by the single-sided narratives and are even more marginalized because official narratives position them as genocide sympathizers, not genocide victims. This genocide labeling continues to have a great impact on the Hutu community, more than twenty years after the 1994 genocide. Many Hutus who lost loved ones cannot overcome the indignity of not being recognized as victims of the genocide by the Rwandan government. Hutus who had no role to play in the genocide have to live with the label of perpetrator, while Tutsis are recognized as the victims. If Hutus in Rwanda try to uncover objective truth or seek to complicate this simplistic narrative—either through scholarship or journalism, by simply asking around, or even expressing an opinion that might not be popular—they will most likely be incarcerated for violating law against genocide ideology. Those outside the country are confronted with strict censorship when trying to advocate for their loved ones. Like other Diaspora communities, the Rwandan Diaspora has created means to creating knowledge about their situation, and the situation of their networks of friends and family living in Rwanda. Some have taken to establishing watchdog groups, while others fight to have their victimhood recognized against an increasingly oppressive Rwandan state.<sup>37</sup>

In this article, I explored how Hutus have understood their own identity and what types of narratives that have used to cope with the 1994 Genocide as well as the Rwandan official narrative of the genocide. Going even further, I investigated how these narratives have shaped their trans-generational community dynamics and how the new generations have understood their place and roles vis-à-vis the current political tensions between Rwanda and its Diaspora. In other words, the official narrative of the genocide promoted by the Rwandan government has had an impact on the identity transformation of Hutus, as a whole, as well as on the individual level of identity transformation.

Narrative Analysis is a methodology used in the field of Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) to explore the stories, or narratives, people tell about conflict. This approach recognizes—when it comes to how people respond to and act in conflict contexts—that it is the narratives people construct about their experiences that matter more than the actual historical events that happened to them or the things they actually did. It is through the exploration of people's stories that we understand the interpersonal and intergroup dynamics and the context of events that led to people in conflict to make certain decisions, and respond in certain ways. Likewise, it is by exploring and understanding the constantly evolving and changing stories people tell about themselves that we can understand the dynamic and constantly changing context in which they are living. Consequently, the narratives are at the base of their understanding of who they are and are reflections of the processes where by people make and remake meaning of their past experiences. CAR scholars study these narratives in order to understand how and why particular communities tell stories about themselves, in order to understand how conflict has shaped the dynamics with the community, especially when the stories are transmitted through generations. The goal is, therefore, through the analysis of people's narratives of the past, to understand how people currently understand their own subject positions and see themselves as social actors.<sup>38</sup>

Through Narrative Analysis, I used different approaches to explore the stories that were constructed and told by my interview subjects. The first approach I used is what narrative scholars

<sup>36</sup> Turner, "Staging the Rwandan Diaspora," 274.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Turner, "Cyberwars of Words: Expressing the Unspeakable in Burundi's Diaspora," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34, no. 7 (September 2008), 1165.

<sup>38</sup> For more, see Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Explorations of Narrative Identity," *Psychological Inquiry: An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory*, Vol. 7 No. 4, (1996), 365; Jefferson S. Singer, "Narrative Identity and Meaning Making Across the Adult Lifespan: An Introduction," *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (June 2004), 447; William H. Sewell Jr., "Introduction: Narratives and Social Identities," *Social Science History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), 483; and Sara Cobb. *Speaking Violence: The politics and Poetics of Narrative in Conflict Resolution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 22.

in CAR call “Thematic Analysis.”<sup>39</sup> Thematic Analysis emphasizes the “content of a text, ‘what’ is said more than ‘how’ it is said, the ‘told’ rather than the ‘telling.’”<sup>40</sup> The second approach is a Structural Analysis, to focus on “the way a story is told. Although thematic content does not slip away, focus is equally on form—how a teller by selecting particular narrative devices makes a story persuasive.”<sup>41</sup> Finally, an Interactional Analysis was used to highlight the dialogue or conversation taken place between the participant and the interviewer.<sup>42</sup>

### The Survey

This paper is based on 46 interviews conducted between July 2014 and September 2014. In-depth one-on-one interviews were intended to explore the diasporic Hutu identity formation through the stories and narratives that the participants provided. The interviews were divided using a thematic approach. Eight principle questions complementing the surveys’ information centered on narrative identity, conception of homeland, and sense of victimhood guided this study. I used both purposive and random sampling. Pre-determined characteristics such as ethnicity, age groups and gender helped determine my population sample. After doing so, I used snowball sampling by asking participants to refer me to the next person they thought I should meet and interview.

### Interviews

The participants were divided into three age groups: from 18 to 30 years old, from 31 to 45 years old, and 46 years old and older. The first age group was composed of young adults who were either very young at the time of the 1994 genocide, or born in host countries. They are mostly influenced by their parents’ narratives and the media since they either did not experience the atrocities or were too young to understand what was happening. The second group was a little bit older. They were teenagers or young adults at the time of the genocide. They have a personal understanding of the narratives of the genocide, but still have been influenced by their host countries’ narratives and cultures. Their narratives are based on their own understanding of the conflict, and the narratives told by their elders and the external world. The third group was the generation of parents and grandparents. At the time of the genocide, they were active members of Rwandan society. Politically, socially, and economically, they were citizens. This was the group that lost the most, and developed deep chosen traumas that they could transmit to younger generations. This older group tended to be nostalgic for their lives before the civil war and genocide. Their narratives, their understanding of the conflict, and their roles in the Rwandan community are still influential.

Among the forty-six participants, eighteen (39%) were part of the group between 18 and 30 years old. Sixteen (34%) of the participants were part of the group between 31 and 45 years old. The last group, which was composed of the parents and grandparents who were 46 years old and older, represented 27% of all the participants. With all three groups combined, there were a total of forty-six participants, with twenty-three women and twenty-three men.

Privacy and anonymity was insured to the participants, which allowed them to fully express their opinion and potential criticisms. For this reason, I did not use the interviewees’ names, but rather numbered them. Safety was a major concern for many of them. This led to conducting interviews in different venues, times, and dates. Given that the subject group of these interviews are seen as, and treated by the Rwandan Government as, a negative diaspora, most of them expressed during our initial contact that they were willing to help and openly answer questions as long as they could not be identified. They feared that the Rwandan government might go after their family in Rwandan or abroad.

### Results

Forty-six people were interviewed, both in French and Kinyarwanda, for this qualitative data

<sup>39</sup> Catherine K. Riessman, “Narrative Analysis,” in *Narrative, Memory and Everyday Life*, ed. Nancy Kelly et al. (Huddersfield, UK: University of Huddersfield Press, 2019), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Table 1. Participant Data Collection.

Group I: 18-30	Group II: 31-45	Group III: 46+
<b>Group I Participants (18)</b>	<b>Group II Participants (16)</b>	<b>Group III Participants (12)</b>
2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 20, 21, 23, 24, 32, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41	1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19, 22, 25, 26, 33, 34, 36, 45	16, 17, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 37, 42, 43, 44, 46

23 Women, 23 Men

collection. Three important themes based on the research question led the discussions. They were: identity, narrative, homeland. Within each group (group I – 18-30, group II – 18-45, group III – 46+), nuanced responses were observed. In terms of the theme of identity, the participants used very determined identities; some identities were more salient than others. Additionally, negative terms or terms related to otherness or unwantedness were used to describe how they felt, who they have become, and the perceived labels society has imposed upon them such as perpetrators and outsiders. The dominant themes that emerged in their stories of themselves—what can be called their narrative identity—were trauma and victimhood. Many recognized that they have not yet overcome their own traumas, and signaled that these traumas have increased in recent years with the competing narratives they have been facing. The politics of identity labeling, and the stigmas that come with them, have shaped their understanding of themselves and consequently have transformed and reshaped their own stories. Thus, the single-sided narrative of the genocide that presents Tutsis as a group as good, and Hutus as a group as bad, has transformed their narratives of their own identities into counter-narratives—a narrative of others, or outsiders external to Rwandan society.

In terms of how the interview subjects felt about their Diaspora and homeland, they feel closely attached to Rwanda and its politics. Very few, of course, contested the genocide itself. Most saw themselves as playing the role of watchdogs, and have assumed a responsibility to report and denounce the current Rwandan government and what they see as government crimes. Others have expressed the desire to just be left alone and be allowed to move on.

## Discussion

### *The Transformation of Identities*

The Hutu identity in diaspora has been shaped and transformed by the official narrative of the genocide as well as by the social labels and stigmas that came with it. Some have ignored or rejected their ethnic identity as Hutu, or even their national Rwandan identity, while others have embraced these identities, adopted them, and have strongly held onto them. Among all the participants, the youngest had created the most radical responses to their socially constructed understanding of what their Hutu and Rwandan identities were supposed to be. Yet, it is clear that identity or the lack of a chosen identity has affected the entire diaspora community. A very interesting example of identity transformation within the younger group was given by Participant #4, when she stated, “I don’t see myself as more Rwandan than Dutch or Belgian. I know I am because of my parents, but it does not define me.” In reaction to the different narratives that dictate her identity, she has chosen to accept or reject all identities. Others, like Participant #5, have not even tried to be immersed in their parents’ cultural identity. He stated, “I did not even know that I was Hutu. I knew that I was Rwandan and that my father was Hutu, but never really made the connection.” Both Participants #4 and #5 emphasized the saliency of their Belgian identity by stating things like, “I created myself here, I can’t see my plans coming true in Africa,” said Participant #4 and “I live here, grew up here, that’s all that mattered, expressed Participant #5.” Adopting or not the Hutu or Rwandan identity does not always seem to be a matter of choice. Growing up in diaspora has an impact on what type of information this young generation is exposed to, and how they relate it to who they are and their homeland, Rwanda.

This idea of not belonging to a single identity or nation is not specific to the younger group. In the words of Participant #34, “I stopped asking questions about my ‘Hutuness’ and embraced the

life and blessings I have now. I try to avoid conversations on identity and Rwanda." Similar to both Participants #4 and #34, Participant #46 stated, "We should stop talking about Hutu, Tutsi, or even Rwandans. It does not help us to rebuild ourselves." However, this idea of moving away from the identity debates was not very common. Of all the 46 participants, very few disassociated themselves from their identity—ethnic, national or other. Yet, very much like the Rwandan government's position, Participant #46 stated that the concept of ethnic identity did not matter much but, unlike the Rwandan government's position, the participants believed that the imposition of a national identity did not make much sense either. The discussion surrounding identity, and which identity should be promoted, in Participant #46's view, detracts from the reconstruction and reconciliation of the Rwandan people.

Rather than rejecting or reshaping their identities to fit society's expectations or their new lives built in the aftermath of the genocide, a large number of the participants have embraced both national and ethnic identities as way of reconstructing themselves. Some have taken on their Hutu identity and made it salient in reaction to their lack of acknowledged victimhood. Others have primarily adopted their national identity. Participant #10 reflected on his identities by stating, "Among my numerous identities, the Rwandan is the strongest; sadly, I cannot embrace it... yet my Hutu identity has influenced my life in particular ways." Participant #11 explained that first of all, he is Hutu because that's what has shaped him, then he is Rwandan, then a refugee, and, last of all, a Belgian. Participant #33 supported the argument that part of her identity was formed and shaped by social pressures and stigmas. She stated, "I am the soul of my loved ones. Don't ask me to change who I am because someone blames them for the worst. I am proud to be a part of them." For many being Hutu is a reality. They see themselves as Rwandan, but as Rwandans who were born Hutu and had to take on this identity. As Participant #38 explained, being a Hutu Rwandan has affected the way people have treated and seen him. "I am Hutu because people don't allow me to choose. It was an action reaction. I don't deny or reject my parents' identities. I am who I am and who my parents wanted me to be."

Despite the fact that their Rwandan identity is the one used to describe them in most settings, their Hutu identity is still part of who they are and influences their environment. Socially, Hutus are called Rwandans, but their Hutuness is still influencing the ways they live and understand their roles within their given society. Participant #2, who was born and raised in Belgium, emphasizes this idea of socially, forced dual identities, by stating:

Because I am black, people always ask me where I am from. I usually just say Rwanda, but then the famous questions are always asked. 'Are you Hutu or Tutsi?' And 'Aren't the Hutus the bad people who one day decided to kill their neighbors?' Without even wanting it, I am labeled and classified by 'other.'

Thus, many participants struggled with their identity. Participant #9 explained that despite her new Belgian identity, she was still not completely Belgian. She felt the same about her Rwandan identity; but, because it had been so long since she lived there, Rwanda did not really seem like home either. She said, "here you are a stranger because of your skin color; there you are stranger because you are not from there anymore." This idea of belonging nowhere is a continuous factor in the interview subjects' identity formation and sense of self, and Participant #9 used the terms "damaged or troubled identities" to define who they have become and how they see themselves. Participant #21 emphasized a similar idea of belonging nowhere when she said, "despite the fact that I've lived here for three-fourths of my life, I am not Belgian. If I go back to Rwanda, I will not be Rwandan either." She used the terms "damaged or troubled identities" to define who she has become and how she sees herself. As Participant #32 explained her struggle by saying, "I traveled the world looking for myself, until I realized that I had lost my identity 20 years ago. Now, I am an empty vessel, a product of others' mistakes."

The interview subjects, by-in-large, express a sense of being caught between two competing social forces of exclusion and othering. On the one hand, they were living in a society that defined them as others because they had dark skin. On the other hand, they were being defined as others by the Rwandan government in its attempt to direct Rwandan society towards defining Hutus in

the diaspora as either genocidaires, genocide sympathizers, or at the least a socially and politically dangerous element. Give this double exclusion, "the question of identity is very complex, especially for Rwandans ... the society will always define you as an outsider ... which makes me seek that outside land, which is Rwanda," stated Participant #15. He continued by saying, "for people like me, we would like to define ourselves as Rwandans, but we don't know that country (Rwanda) we would like to define ourselves as Belgians, but the society does not define us as such; it is like we are stateless." Being stateless, an outsider, or even unwanted are themes that prevailed in many interviews. Many of the participants expressed an emptiness that was created by the fact that the official narrative of the current Rwandan government presents them as this negative diaspora, as a danger to their own homeland. Yet, they do not have the sense that Belgium is their country either, but rather simply a host land. Being from nowhere and belonging nowhere is a traumatic fact that is affecting the younger generations, and has shaped their stories and narratives. Participant #11 expressed this theme when he stated, "I identify myself as a Belgian, originally from Rwanda; as a refugee because I am not home." Participant #15 said, "I see myself as a Belgo-Rwandan, a refugee, as a young activist who loves his country...but when I was young, I couldn't say I was Hutu."

In conclusion, there is no single, well-drafted idea or definition of the Hutu diasporic identity formation. This study shows that there is no single framework that can incorporate all members of this diaspora into a single rubric. Some individuals have decided that they wanted, and needed, to move on and forget the past, which also meant getting away from the debates over ethnic and national identity. Others said they could not escape stereotypical understandings of what Rwandans and Hutus are, but rather had to learn how to live with them. Finally, others decided to embrace their Hutu identity because it was imposed on them by ways of promoted stereotypes and developed stigmas, which have been affecting them for years. This last group expressed a constant struggle within themselves over their sense of belonging and homeness. This was the group that largely saw themselves as stateless, caught somewhere in between Belgian and Rwandan society, in between a Belgian and Rwandan homeland.

#### *Nothing is Better than Home*

When someone thinks about diaspora and homeland, what comes to mind is well described by Participant #19. She said, "20 years ago, I lost my home. Now, I have a normal life here in Belgium, a family and a good job, but yet, I still feel empty inside because there is nothing better than home." The idea of home, this magical place where one felt safe, has a challenging, paradoxical connotation when it comes to Hutus and Rwanda. As explained above, their narratives and recent identities have been formed by, and in response to, the labels and stories their homeland has promoted about and against them. Participant #45 explained the dilemma he has constantly faced. He said,

Home, where is home? Rwanda has taken away our pride, our heritage, and our loved ones. President Kagame has rebuilt the country on the blood of innocent Hutus, so how can I call Rwanda my home? Yet, it seems like I am [a] thorn. It is in my heart; it is who I am. My Rwanda might be not the same as before, but Rwanda is still the place [where] my parents taught me my values, and principles. Rwanda is the heritage I want to leave for my children.

For the Hutu Diaspora, their homeland is source of pain, but it still is their homeland. Participant #28 reaffirmed this idea of homeland as a special place when she stated, "I am my country; I am my ethnic group. It is on my mind, my language, my dreams, and blood." She went on by saying "what saddens me is that I will probably die here, away from my country." The oldest generation does not see any hope to ever go back home. The land they left behind has changed and is not the same as they remember.

Even the younger people who were born in Belgium or were brought there at a young age have an interesting connection to Rwanda. Participant #23 elaborated on Rwanda by saying, "I am a Rwandan, who was born in Belgium, grew up in Belgium, but Rwanda is my heart, my blood, and it is my heritage." The country they know was created through their parents' memories and stories. The land they cherish is challenged by the current Rwanda. Perhaps accepting that Rwanda would most likely never be the same is part of the daily struggle they have to deal with. Participant

#16 said, "Rwanda is not the Rwanda we knew back then. The only thing we can pass on to our children is their brain."

Sadly, according to the participants, Rwanda has become a faraway, almost unreachable homeland for Hutus. Its president and politics have limited critical thinking and open dialogue. The few that had gone back said that Rwanda is not what they once knew or what they had hoped. Participant #4 explained that there is "still pain in the air, even on the surface, we can feel unease." Participant #12 said, "Rwandan politics is a lost cause. Look at those who go back and try to change things, they end up in prison." This sense of unease is mostly based on the facts that Rwanda is not a democratic country, its laws are discriminatory, and its president is believed to have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of genocide, according to many participants.<sup>43</sup> Rwanda and its narrative have become a very heavy burden for the new generations. Participant #15 described the dominant and oppressive environment that has been imposed onto them. He stated,

When we hear "Rwandan," we hear genocide. I don't think that there is a Rwandan on the earth who is proud to hear the word genocide, which made them deny their identity. When we hear 'Hutu' it is even worse. People see genocidaire; if you did not commit the genocide, your parents did.

Although they are in diaspora, Rwanda's politics still affect them. One important point of agreement for all the participants is the role of President Kagame in the atrocities committed prior, during, and post-1994 genocide. Participant #3 raised several questions in which President Kagame is portrayed as the source of all conflict. He said, "What did Rwandans do, what did we do to God to give us a criminal like Kagame ... Kagame is not only a criminal, he is a genocidaire ... how can the international community support a genocidal regime?" Participant #14 continued by saying, "President Kagame committed crimes against humanity, war crimes, and even genocide. He does not hide it in his speeches. Those who believe that he did not are mistaken." Participant #7 stated, "Justice in Rwanda needs to be based on democracy and there is no justice in Rwanda, it is only partial. Because the current government was involved in the genocide, justice can't happen." This idea that President Kagame is source of all problem in Rwanda and abroad undermines or questions the sincerity behind the different initiatives undertaken by the Rwanda government to reach out to all its diaspora community. It also reinforces the idea that the Hutu diaspora is dangerous to the ideology President Kagame has imposed on Rwanda. The participants see no real common peace, reconciliation, or sense of justice in their current homeland.

Therefore, according to the participants, a new regime needs to be established, and Kagame and the RPF should not be part of it. Rwanda needs to become democratic and most of all needs to have real justice, the participants tended to believe, not the justice created and implemented by Kagame. Participant #40 believes that "as long as Kagame is in power or protected by the international community, we [Hutus] are doomed to be the villains." Participant #17 went on by saying "Today, we are the Palestinians; the only problem is that we don't have intifada and don't have terrorists. Who knows, maybe we are creating the terrorists of tomorrow?" This distinction between Hutus

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<sup>43</sup> Much scholarship has sought to demonstrate that the over-simplified narrative of the Rwandan genocide has limited the justice and reconciliation processes. By focusing on the crimes committed by extremists Hutu and not investigating all the crimes, even those committed by the RPA and RPF government, the international community has allowed President Kagame to be seen as a model of peace while ignoring or pushing aside many of the atrocities for which he is responsible. As early as 1995, Alison Des Forges wrote a Human Rights report detailing all the crimes committed by the RPF and the decisions taken to either explain or ignore some of their implications. She argued, "The RPF massacred groups of unarmed civilians at a number of locations in eastern, central, and southern Rwanda after combat was finished and the government forces were gone from the area. These deliberate slaughters of noncombatants were clear violations of international humanitarian law" (Des Forges 1995, 401). Helen Hintjens expressed concerns about the not so peaceful future of Rwanda when she talked about the "renewed threats of civil war and genocide" that are often explored in the academic spheres (Hintjens 2008, 8). Filip Reyntjens detailed the body of literature and Human Rights organization reports that demonstrate the systematic violence the RPF is responsible for, especially in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. Finally, international organizations such as Amnesty International, African Watch, Organization of African Unity have reported that the Rwandan Patriotic Front committed crimes against humanity as early as 1990 and continued in the 2000s.

and Tutsis goes against the Rwandan government's national identity policy. The policy might seem like a step toward reconciliation but it is very widely criticized by all the participants. Policies such as the national identity have increased the criticism of the government and cast shadows over the justice system. Most participants thought it was contradictory for the government to use Tutsi narratives to present or portray the genocide and then legalize the use of ethnicity, since Hutus are not seen as victims of the atrocities. According to Participant #7, this has made the reconciliation process unsuccessful. Participant #10 stated, "in the case of Rwanda, many feel that there was not justice. The Hutu, as a victim, he was never heard in the local, regional, or international court." He said of the term genocide, "The problem is its application. The discussion is that the amount of death responds to the criteria, but the circumstances were so mysterious that it does not always fit all the criteria." Very critical of the different laws and initiatives the international community and President Kagame have established, the participants emphasized the importance of mutual dialogues among both Hutus and Tutsi as groups, and not under the umbrella of the imposed national identity policy. Many stressed that the recognition of their ethnic victimhood is essential for the reconciliation process and the creation of a new homeland.

#### *Homeland and Victimhood Narratives*

Before exploring the idea of homeland and victimhood, it is essential to mention that not everybody associates these two ideas (homeland and victimhood) with each other. Many did distance themselves from these concepts, trying to move on and begin a new life in Belgium. Yet, the idea of the only so-called real victims of genocide were the Tutsi victims, not Hutus, was a significant theme in the interviews. Participant #10 shared his opinion on this, saying, "I just want the world to know that I am innocent. I shouldn't apologize for other's mistakes... my family lost loved ones, where is the justice there?" Participant #32 also shared her pain by saying, "What about my loved ones who were murdered? Because I am not Tutsi, I cannot be called a victim." This normative narrative that was created along the lines of victim and perpetrator, hero and villain, portray the dilemma many express. The single narrative of Hutu perpetrator and Tutsi victim has reinforced the pain and trauma the participants expressed when they talked about their personal suffering and their family lost. Many have lost family members, and struggle to reconcile their lack of recognition. Participant #41 expressed his dilemma by stating,

I have a hole in my heart. I grew up without my parents, so what kind of man am I supposed to become? If I am my father's son and my grandfather's grandson, then I am nothing more than a memory. My identity was shaped by my lost ones and the lies people tell about my people. I am a victim.

Hintjens echoed their concerns and pain by arguing "Hutu killed or injured because they refused to kill Tutsi, refused to use a gun, sought not to inform or tried to protect Tutsis [or simply refused to participate to the atrocities], should be considered victims of genocide, or survivors."<sup>44</sup> Participant #18 explained the level of trauma and victimization that most Hutu have to live with when she says, "Now people called what happened to them a 'Hidden Pain.' We are only surviving. There is not justice for Rwandans, only Tutsi justice. We show a good image but what is in our heart is not that, we are hurt, we have hatred." Because of that she believes that people cannot forget. "How can I forget that my parents were killed, that my brother disappeared, that my loved one were killed that same day? I cannot forget." This lack of the recognition of the Hutu victimhood seems to have affected interview subjects' narratives of the events. The idea of forgive and forget has shaped their understanding of the reconciliation process. Not allowing them to mourn for their loved ones has pushed them to ask questions regarding the meaning of the justice process so highly spoken about in Rwanda.

In addition to feeling a lack of victimhood and believing that Kagame and his regime need to change, most participants struggle with the term genocide. They have a hard time agreeing on using

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<sup>44</sup> Hintjens, "Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda," 23.

the term and its meaning in the case of Rwanda. Some denied it and others talked about a double genocide. For some, even the definition of genocide is problematic. Participant #10 explained, "We still need to work on the definition of genocide in Rwanda, because many people's stories don't fit the narrative." Many of the participants reject the idea that what happened between April and July of 1994 was premeditated or deliberate, which is essential in the definition of genocide. Participant #18 elaborated this idea by saying, "based on my experience, there was not premeditation. Before the war, we used to live together. We were fine. When the RPF attacked Rwanda that is when the ethnicity became salient. Before then, we were fine." Participant #11 expressed the same concerns when stating, "the word genocide is not properly used, but that is because of [the] media and propaganda. The RPF [was] the one that premeditated the genocide and helped it take place." Many interview subjects disagreed with the genocide being depicted as one single event, with out any background context in most cases. For them, the civil wars that preceded the genocide, and the years that followed it, are as significant as the notorious 100 days in 1994 because this historical context helps portray a larger and more complicated picture, and helps redefine the understanding and symbolism behind narratives of perpetration and victimhood. Consequently, in order to really understand the civil war and genocide that took place, we should not limit the discussion to 1994, Participant #45 said. Participant #11 added, "Too often, people limit themselves at the 1994 period, and there forget the 1990 civil war and after July 1994. There have been other atrocities, so it is difficult to forget." A large number of the participants follow the same reasoning as Participant #11, and blame the Rwandan government for focusing on one particular series of events in 1994 and dismissing the rest of the violence before and after as less severe because it was not genocide, and thereby institutionalizing the genocide narrative in Rwanda and abroad that Hutus were uniformly perpetrators and Tutsis were uniformly victims. It is believed that the general understanding on the genocide and the world's attitude toward the victim and perpetrator labels have helped shape the dominant categorization created in the post-Rwandan genocide. By not linking the Rwandan civil war and the atrocities that took place after July 1994, the separation between the victims (Tutsi) and perpetrators (Hutu) is reinforced.

In addition to that, the term double genocide was mentioned several times regarding the 1994 genocide and the years that followed. Participant #16 stated, "In Rwanda, [there] was a Tutsi genocide, but there was also another genocide that started in 1990 that continued until 1999, against Hutu. Using the term double genocide is not denial [of] the Tutsi genocide. One genocide plus one genocide equal two not zero." The same participant, Participant #11, continued, "the term Rwandan Genocide does not make sense, because we will need to know who and against who. It is more appropriate to say genocide against Hutu and a genocide against Tutsi." Participant #14 stated "there was a Tutsi genocide in 1994, and a genocide of Hutu in the refugee camps and DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo], post-1994." As noted in many cases, there is an irony behind using the term "genocide against Tutsi." The participants agreed that if there is legally no ethnic groups in Rwanda, but only Rwandans, it is a paradox to create a narrative that would be so forcefully promoting the use of ethnicity as a way to understand the genocide, to rebuild the country, and promote reconciliation.

Interestingly, even the initial date of the genocide is contested.<sup>45</sup> Participant #3 stated that "April 7<sup>th</sup> [the day the genocide started according to the Rwandan government] does not represent anything; it is only a political move made by the RPF and Kagame." Participant 7 elaborated by saying that "April 6<sup>th</sup> is a dangerous date for the RPF because two Hutu presidents were assassinated. On this date, it is implied that justice is needed, which scares Kagame." Both participants point out that Rwanda is very politicized. The dates that are supposed to be representing the beginning of the genocide are contested among the groups. According to Participant #3, the date that should be considerate is April 6 not April 7. Participant #7 states that April 7 was chosen in order to hide the shooting down of the presidential plane, which was according to him, executed by the RPF. The official state narrative, Participant #7 made clear, benefits from forgetting that the 1994 genocide

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<sup>45</sup> Out of the 46 interviews conducted, 28 specially talked about the fact that within a larger Rwandan community around the world, the narrative of when the genocide began is contested and highly political. Additionally, 21 participants said it began on April 6<sup>th</sup>, at the assassination of President Habyarimana. Seven said it began on April 7<sup>th</sup>.

started with the killing of a Hutu president. In their interviews, both participants stressed that the date selected as the beginning of the 1994 genocide was a political move the RPF made in order to hide their actions in instigating the cycle of violence that ultimately resulted in the genocide, and to suppress the Hutu victimhood of that same cycle of violence.

Finally, the participants feel that even their status as a Diaspora community is controversial and contested by the Rwandan government. Participant #17 explained this point by saying that “according to the Rwandan government, Diaspora is only for Tutsi. You and I [Hutus] are not recognized as Diaspora.” Participant #11 added,

Here [in Belgium] the Diaspora is composed of the embassy representatives or RPF allies. It is like we are not allowed to be called Diaspora. For example, if there is a celebration, you cannot go because you don't belong or are [not] recognized as Diaspora. If you go, you can be physically harmed.

Participant #13 stressed the issue of diaspora by stating “Diaspora, which Diaspora are we talking about? Last time I check[ed], Diaspora is only for Tutsi. Here, I am a Rwandan who is not allowed to be himself and enjoy his heritage.” Yet, they used the word Diaspora to describe Hutu communities of Rwandans. Participant #17 said, “as Diaspora, the first responsibility is to understand why we left home, the second is to accept his or her Rwandan identity in exile, and the third is to understand why we are Hutu in exile.” Not being accepted as part of the Diaspora, or part of the victim Diaspora, the participants are part of a group the Rwandan government contests, or at least questions, and attempts to delegitimize by saying that if they really wanted to go back to Rwanda, they could do it. To move from being part of the negative diaspora to the more accepted victim diaspora, the individuals would need to publically affirm and recognize the progress of the current Rwanda government and promote its narratives and sociopolitical evolution.

## Conclusion

Exploring the Belgian Hutu Diaspora allows scholars to look past the label of negative Diaspora imposed by the Rwandan government, to examine the different narratives that were created in after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Shaped by the labels created in the post 1994 Rwandan genocide, the people who live in these communities have experienced identity transformations that are not only influenced by the geographic location that defines their Diasporic status, but also by narratives created in Rwanda. The idea that only Hutus were perpetrators of the 1994 genocide has influenced the participants' narratives and their understanding of their position vis-a-vis these narratives. These double or damaged identities helped mold their sense of otherness in relation to Rwanda, but also in the host-country Belgium. As many participants pointed to, their identities and stories were formed partially in response to the narrative established by the RPF, the party that emerged victorious from the Rwandan civil war in 1994, which was concretized through the National Identity policy under law N. 14/2008 on 04/06/2008, and Law N. 18/2008 relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology, and Law N. 47/2001 of the 18/2008 on the Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism.

Transmitted from generation to generation, this narrative of trauma and otherness has become part of the daily struggle of the communities of the interview participants. The current Belgium Hutu Diaspora community is trying to make sense of its own struggle, with many fighting against what they see as unjust stigmatizations imposed on them by President Kagame's regime. Some have returned to Rwanda to witness the changes and reconnect with their homeland, yet participants expressed an uncanny feeling regarding the culture of silence imposed by the law, and the self-silencing the population of Rwanda has imposed on itself to avoid reparations and prosecution. The interview subjects expressed a sense that Rwanda has become an authoritarian country willing to scare individuals in the Diaspora and intimidate them into silence. This fear that their own narratives could endanger family members who remained in Rwanda, and the sense of alienation imposed upon Hutus living in Belgium, has shaped the way this Diaspora has responded to and coped with its stigmatizations. Seen and treated as the wrong kind of diaspora, they have formed

themselves as in opposing to the current government and, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, created counter-narratives that are, for many of them, rightly founded.

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