

Rwandan Women No More

Female *Génocidaires* in the Aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

Erin Jessee

Abstract: Since the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the current government has arrested approximately 130,000 civilians who were suspected of criminal responsibility. An estimated 2,000 were women, a cohort that remains rarely researched through an ethnographic lens. This article begins to address this oversight by analyzing ethnographic encounters with 8 confessed or convicted female *génocidaires* from around Rwanda. These encounters reveal that female *génocidaires* believe they endure gender-based discrimination for having violated taboos that determine appropriate conduct for Rwandan women. However, only female *génocidaires* with minimal education, wealth, and social capital referenced this gender-based discrimination to minimize their crimes and assert claims of victimization. Conversely, female elites who helped incite the genocide framed their victimization in terms of political betrayal and victor's justice. This difference is likely informed by the female elites' participation in the political processes that made the genocide possible, as well as historical precedence for leniency where female elites are concerned.

Keywords: gender norms, genocide, perpetrators, Rwanda, transitional justice, women

In 2013, as part of a fourth-year course on the Ethnography of Political Violence, I assigned my students a brief newspaper article on Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, the onetime minister of family and women's affairs who during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda enacted various forms of violence against women affiliated with Rwanda's Tutsi minority population (Landesman 2002). The

article documents Nyiramasuhuko's shift from politician responsible for ensuring the well-being of Rwandan women and children, to *génocidaire* responsible for ordering the mass rape and murder of Tutsi women, among other atrocities.¹ It draws on interviews with family members and friends, as well as women who survived the extreme acts of brutality Nyiramasuhuko devised. Her criminal allegations attracted the attention of the Office of the Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which charged her with eleven counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, making her the first woman to stand trial for such crimes before an international court of law.²

In looking over my students' reading responses before class, I noticed that several had failed to complete the reading, describing it as "too graphic" and "horrific", and in one instance, prompting a student to question her sanity for having chosen to enroll in a course on political violence. Yet the Nyiramasuhuko piece was no more graphic than other readings we had discussed in the course thus far, nor did it describe events or forms of violence with which the students were unfamiliar. During the subsequent class discussion, it became evident that it was not the graphic nature of the violence being described that my students found difficult to engage with, but rather the fact that the violence had been devised and enacted by a woman, not to mention a mother and politician charged with the protection of families. My students were used to readings that presented women as victims, survivors, and bystanders of political violence, but not as enthusiastic perpetrators. Furthermore, my students recoiled against the fact that so much of the violence ordered by Nyiramasuhuko directly targeted women. Many felt that as a woman, Nyiramasuhuko should have been above inflicting sexual violence upon other women. As a result, they found the reading difficult to complete: it challenged too many of their preconceived notions about what constituted appropriate behavior for a woman, even in the midst of political

upheaval, civil war, and genocide. Had she been a man, we concluded, her criminal actions would have seemed less distressing.

My students were not alone in holding female perpetrators of mass atrocities to a higher standard than their male counterparts. Though rooted in different cultural, historical, and political contexts, a similar pattern persists in post-genocide Rwanda, where female *génocidaires* are frequently subject to prison sentences disproportionate to the crimes they commit, as well as gender-specific forms of social and political discrimination.³ Indeed, it is a phenomenon with which Rwanda's female *génocidaires* seem acutely familiar, as gender-based discrimination was a common theme throughout their life-history narratives that they used to claim space as victims in the post-genocide period. However, not all female *génocidaires* appeared equally vulnerable in this regard. The low-level female *génocidaires* I interviewed—Category 2 or 3 perpetrators who typically came from rural farming communities, had minimal education, and married young—routinely complained of gender-based discrimination.⁴ However, the high-level female *génocidaires* I interviewed—Category 1 perpetrators who came from more privileged backgrounds—more often complained of non-gender-specific political and social forms of discrimination similar to those cited by their male counterparts.⁵

This article explores the roots of this phenomenon and its deeper meaning for ethnographic inquiry related to female *génocidaires*. I begin by articulating the methodological limitations inherent in conducting ethnographic fieldwork among convicted female *génocidaires* in Rwanda, and the various ethical negotiations that resulted. I then examine the changing status of women within Rwandan society in historical perspective to contextualize the experiences of three female *génocidaires*—Devota, Egidie, and Valerie—whose narratives then become the focus of the article. These three women come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and

regions, making their experiences broadly representative of the cultural, historical, and political processes affecting female *génocidaires* in the post-genocide period. I argue that although female *génocidaires* are perhaps judged disproportionately for their crimes due to Rwandan customs that govern women's behavior even during periods of crisis, the effects are felt and expressed most keenly by women of lower socioeconomic status. However, ethnographers must exercise caution in engaging with these narratives of victimization. In my experience, female *génocidaires* often leveraged their experiences of discrimination and disenfranchisement to distract attention away from their criminal actions during the 1994 genocide, which poses a critical challenge for analysis.

Ethnography among *Génocidaires*?

Ethnographic inquiry surrounding recent or ongoing mass atrocities is fraught with challenges, from formulating an ethically and methodologically sound research design, to gaining access to regions or communities affected by violence and political upheaval, to making sense of the often competing narratives that result from fieldwork with participants who have been polarized by personal experiences of mass violence and its aftermath. Yet the work of pioneering ethnographers such as Carolyn Nordstrom (1997), Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993, 1997, 2002), Antonius Robben (1996, 2000, 2005), and Alexander Hinton (2002, 2005) demonstrates the value of applying ethnographic methods and theory to the study of mass atrocities. By embedding themselves in communities and conflicts, and documenting the experiences of individuals whose lives have been intimately affected by violence, they have revealed the complexities of political violence, from its more subtle everyday manifestations in the structures

that surround us to less frequent but more overt episodes of war, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

With this in mind, I conducted 8 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Rwanda in 2007 and 2008 with the purpose of examining the symbolic capital associated with particular patterns of violence that had emerged surrounding the 1994 genocide (Jessee 2010).⁶ I conducted multiple life history and thematic interviews with more than 50 Rwandans who had been directly affected by the 1994 genocide as survivors, *génocidaires*, and/or bystanders, as well as Rwandan government officials, academics, and community leaders. Of these participants, 20 were *génocidaires* who had either confessed or been convicted of crimes related to the 1994 genocide, and were serving sentences in one of Rwanda's prisons.⁷ Though I had hoped to interview an equal number of male and female *génocidaires*, women proved more difficult to recruit, and in the end only 8 women consented to participate in the project. Despite the small sample size, their narratives are broadly representative of the estimated 2,000 female *génocidaires* serving sentences in Rwanda—a cohort that is widely discussed, though with primary emphasis placed on survivors' and government officials' accounts of their criminal actions, as well as court transcripts, rather than the firsthand accounts of the women themselves (African Rights 1995; Brown 2013; Hogg 2010; Sharlach 1999). As a result, there is much we do not know about Rwanda's female *génocidaires*.

The methodology that surrounded my fieldwork among female *génocidaires* would be unrecognizable to most classical ethnographers. While I immersed myself in everyday life in Rwanda, engaging Rwandans, wherever possible, in casual conversations, and otherwise seeking out opportunities for participant observation, the circumstances of my fieldwork in Rwanda's prisons were often beyond my control. I acquired a research permit through the Ministry of

Internal Security that gave me permission to interview *génocidaires* in five prisons, but was not given permission to enter the main prison buildings. In each case, I conducted interviews in a private office just inside the prison gate where the prison administrators worked, but removed from where the *génocidaires* lived out their daily lives. Thus, I was unable to see for myself the conditions under which my participants lived, or observe or experience firsthand any of the challenges or limitations they described in narrating their post-genocide lives.

Language was an additional challenge. Prior to arriving in Rwanda, I had studied French—then Rwanda’s second official language—with the understanding that it was widely spoken by Rwandans. Upon arriving in Rwanda, however, it became clear that a transition away from Rwanda’s Francophone colonial past was under way, orchestrated by Rwanda’s ruling party—the predominantly Anglophone Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).⁸ Speaking French was associated with the pre-genocide regimes of Hutu presidents Grégoire Kayibanda (1962–1973) and Juvénal Habyarimana (1973–1994), and so most Rwandans embraced the transition—at least in public—to avoid being labeled political dissidents by the RPF. Furthermore, French rarely proved helpful outside of Rwanda’s cities, as many rural Rwandans had completed only a few years of education and spoke Rwanda’s indigenous language, Kinyarwanda, far more fluently than French. As a result, I found myself relying on Rwandan research assistants who provided simultaneous translation from Kinyarwanda to English, and helped transcribe all recorded interviews to ensure accuracy.

My reliance on research assistants introduced unexpected challenges. In post-genocide Rwanda, where discussion of ethnic categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa has become taboo, my research assistants’ ethnicity, as perceived by individual participants, quickly translated into assumed political loyalties.⁹ Both of my research assistants were of Rwandan Tutsi descent, but

based on their accents, manner of dress and relative affluence, fluency in English, and occasional resistance to Rwandan social norms, my participants often immediately recognized them to be returnees or old caseload refugees—Rwandans who had grown up in diasporic communities throughout the Great Lakes region of Africa, their families having fled periods of anti-Tutsi violence associated with the 1959 Hutu Revolution and the subsequent leadership of Hutu President Grégoire Kayibanda (Burnet 2012: 237n3).

Among government officials—most of whom are members of the RPF, not to mention themselves Tutsi returnees—hiring returnees as research assistants opened doors. My research assistants could relate to officials’ experiences of exile and return to Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide to help rebuild the nation, establishing immediate bonds on several occasions. During initial meetings, several officials expressed relief upon learning my research assistants were returnees, often noting that they would, as a result, be better positioned to help me make sense of the “New Rwanda” and the lies to which I would allegedly be exposed while speaking with *génocidaires* and rural Rwandans. Among survivors, however, my research assistants’ backgrounds could introduce tensions, particularly in the early stages of recruitment and establishment of informed consent. It appeared that shared Tutsi heritage was rarely sufficient to overcome the perceived political differences between those Tutsi who had been born and raised in Rwanda and Tutsi returnees. Many Rwandan Tutsi, as survivors of the 1994 genocide, were resentful of returnees who in most instances had been spared the worst of the genocide, yet were perceived as consistently receiving preferential treatment from the RPF. Much like the government officials with whom I met, Rwanda-born Tutsi often assumed that my research assistants, as returnees, would be loyal to the RPF, which they frequently claimed was oblivious to the needs of rural Rwandans, and was quick to persecute civilians who spoke out

against the poverty and fear that characterized everyday life in their communities.¹⁰ As a result, initial conversations and interviews were often guarded, with survivors only opening up about their lived experiences and interpretations of life surrounding the 1994 genocide and post-genocide Rwanda after they felt confident that we were not government informers. Among *génocidaires*, my research assistants were similarly assumed to be government agents, which often introduced a combative tone to the subsequent conversations and interviews that again took time to overcome. Thus, in early interviews, *génocidaires*' narratives often reflected the "sensitization" they had received as part of *ingando*—a rehabilitation program that educates *génocidaires* in the ways of the "New Rwanda"—while in later interviews, they spoke more openly (Thomson 2013: 51).

My research assistants, meanwhile, often found it difficult to put aside their personal political opinions, particularly when dealing with individuals who decided to voice interpretations of Rwandan history that did not align with the RPF's official narrative—a subject that is closely controlled by the RPF's nationalized commemoration and transitional justice programs.¹¹ As a result, I learned to clarify even the smallest details with my research assistants to allow me to distinguish between what was actually said by my research participants, and my research assistants' interpretations, which they sometimes offered unprompted, to correct what they perceived to be a false understanding or politically subversive interpretation of events. Such strategies were particularly necessary in the prisons where, due to government restrictions, I was not permitted to bring recording equipment beyond a pen and notebook. As such, we spent a great deal of time verifying individual participants' narratives and checking preliminary findings they might have informed to ensure that my subsequent representations of their narratives were accurate. Easing the process, over time my research assistants came to understand that I was not

interested in merely establishing a factual historical account of what happened in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, but in examining how Rwandans from different backgrounds made sense of their experiences of violence and its aftermath.

For my part, my fieldwork in the prisons took place during my first trip to Rwanda in 2007 and 2008. As a young Canadian woman with no prior experience in Rwanda, I was unaware of the highly politicized research setting I would be encountering, as it was rarely discussed in the literature on the region, nor did I have many contacts who had experience working in the country.¹² As a result, I was poorly prepared for the tensions I encountered in the prisons between my research assistants and the *génocidaires* who were interviewed, as well as within Rwanda more generally. Likewise, I was poorly prepared for the tensions associated with the subtle forms of government surveillance and interference I encountered throughout my fieldwork. On an average day, I navigated polite requests from prison directors and other administrative staff to meet at the end of my interviews, at which time I was asked for the names of the people I had interviewed and the content of our conversations. The reason they cited for wanting to see my fieldnotes was to ensure that the *génocidaires* I interviewed were not confessing to crimes in addition to those for which they had been convicted, opening up the possibility that the officials intended to use my fieldnotes to bring new legal charges against my research participants. My refusal to provide this information, citing the terms of the ethics approval I had received from my university and the need to maintain my research participants' confidentiality, as well as minimize harm to them, was first met with attempts to negotiate: one prison administrator offered to arrange further interviews with released prisoners in the community if I turned over my fieldnotes, and another offered to open up the prison archives to me so I could compare my fieldnotes with the files they had on the prisoners I had interviewed.

My continued refusal to share information provoked increased hostility from one prison director in particular, and ultimately led me to discontinue my fieldwork in the prisons a few weeks before my fieldwork was scheduled to end. Furthermore, it left me keenly aware of the risks inherent in conducting ethnography in Rwanda's prisons and other institutions wherein researchers often have little power to protect the confidentiality of the *génocidaires* with whom they work, so long as they are reliant on the goodwill of official gatekeepers.

On Rwandan Women: Ideals and Expectations

Before delving into the narratives constructed by female *génocidaires* in the prisons, it is important to consider the shifting status of Rwandan women in Rwandan society over time. This analysis is limited by the fact that there are significant gaps in the historical and anthropological record related to Rwandan women and the gender norms that have influenced their everyday lives at different periods in Rwanda's past. Whereas Rwandan women have made significant contributions to Rwandan history that were preserved in oral histories prior to the colonial period—particularly as Queen Mothers (*umugabekazi*) within Rwanda's monarchy—many of these accounts have been lost or diminished over time as the colonial interests of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European historians took precedence. Until recently, the resulting German, French, and English historiographies on Rwanda were dominated almost entirely by myths and accounts of Rwandan political elites affiliated with the royal court, in which Rwandan women were, with few exceptions, mentioned only in passing and only in instances where they had a significant influence on Rwandan politics.¹³

Nonetheless, modern experts on Rwanda suggest that in the decades immediately prior to the genocide, Rwandan women were largely excluded from politics, commerce, law, and

education compared to their male compatriots (Burnet 2011, 2013; Jefremovas 1991; Karake 1998; Nowrojee 1996; Sharlach 1999). The ideal for Rwandan women was to be reserved, submissive, respectful, silent, and maternal, focusing their energies on maintaining a respectable household and raising polite children (Burnet 2013). Women who did not conform or who actively resisted such expectations could be publicly mocked and ostracized for transgressing Rwandan gender norms. For example, Villia Jefremovas (1991: 379) observed that “the language of public morality and stereotype is one weapon ... used by both men and women to interpret, manipulate, validate, or negate control over labour, resources and surplus” produced by women.

Some of the strongest taboos limiting women’s activities in the past have pertained to violence. Prior to 1973, it was relatively uncommon for Rwandan women to participate in warfare, beyond providing indirect morale and materiel support to their male family and community members.¹⁴ Women were not allowed on the battlefield until after the fighting had ceased, and were even prohibited from handling weapons, as it was believed that this would bring bad fortune upon the owner, resulting in his death or serious injury. This does not mean that Rwandan women were unable to inflict physical violence on others in everyday life if they so chose: they have an impressive reputation in Rwandan popular culture, even today, as poisoners and deft manipulators, particularly when it comes to Rwanda’s political arena. For example, Kanjogera is a classic and often referenced example of a Rwandan woman who—with the support of her brothers—used murder, lies, and manipulations to initiate a civil war that culminated in the assassination of her adopted son, King Rutarindwa (1895–1896), and the ascension to the throne of her biological son, King Musinga (1896–1931) (Des Forges 2011: 14–17). She is remembered in popular culture as a dangerous and bloodthirsty individual who

paralyzed with fear political opponents who otherwise might have attempted to wrest political power for themselves and their clans (Jessee and Watkins 2014: 52. To this end, the nickname “Kanjogera” is occasionally applied to presidential first ladies Agathe Habyarimana (née Kanziga) and Jeannette Kagame (née Nyiramonji), both of whom are said to have exercised a high degree of influence in Rwandan politics through their husbands.

However, the inclusion of ordinary Rwandan women in conflict and warfare has been more recent. In 1973, surrounding a brief military coup that saw Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana rise to power, Rwandan women were—for the first time—active participants in political violence, in this instance targeting Rwanda’s Tutsi minority population and affiliates of the regime of the previous president, Grégoire Kayibanda.¹⁵ African Rights (1995) collected testimonies from around Rwanda that recalled Hutu women as enthusiastic participants in anti-Tutsi massacres in 1973, informing the authorities which people were Tutsi, participating in the torture and murder of civilians, and looting from the dead. According to Luc Reydams (2013), many African Rights reports were informed by data and analysis provided by the RPF—hence, its overarching tendency to portray female perpetrators of ethnic and political violence in Rwanda in rather simplistic terms: as enthusiastic perpetrators motivated in particular by anti-Tutsi hatred. Nonetheless, their 1995 report accurately notes that once the 1973 massacres ceased, the perpetrators were not brought to justice, nor were reparations offered to surviving Tutsi. The Habyarimana regime, while initially appearing sympathetic to the Tutsi minority population, proved little better than the Kayibanda regime at asserting and protecting their rights. Therefore, participation in the 1973 massacres—including that of Rwandan women—although not unnoticed or forgotten by the survivors, was never prosecuted.

With the RPF invasion of Rwanda in 1990, Rwanda entered into a period of political upheaval. As news of RPF atrocities against Hutu civilians in the north spread to other regions of Rwanda, and allegations that Rwanda's Tutsi population was providing support to the *inyenzi* spread through various extremist media outlets, Rwanda's recently reintroduced multiparty system split along ethnic and political lines.¹⁶ Fearing that the consequences of the RPF invasion would include a return of Tutsi domination, many Hutu civilians were drawn to the platforms of the Mouvement républicain national pour la démocratie et le développement (MRND) and the increasingly extremist Coalition pour la défense de la république (CDR) parties.¹⁷ With the creation of the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi militias, and the Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), these Hutu Power-based parties began priming the Hutu majority for violence. Female political elites, such as First Lady Agathe Habyarimana, Minister of Family and Women's Affairs Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, and RTLM journalist Valerie Bemeriki, among others, were allegedly key actors in this shift toward ethnic and political extremism.

Then, on 6 April 1994, Habyarimana's plane was shot down as it attempted to land in Kigali.¹⁸ Habyarimana's Presidential Guard mobilized immediately, executing Hutu moderate and Tutsi politicians in Kigali. Over the next few weeks, the violence escalated to become a genocide of Tutsi civilians and their perceived collaborators, including in some instances Hutu and Twa civilians whose only crime was to refuse to participate in the murder of their neighbors. By the time the RPF wrested control of the nation in late July, an estimated 400,000 to 800,000 civilians—most of whom were members of Rwanda's Tutsi minority—were dead.¹⁹ An additional 2 million civilians followed the remnants of the Hutu Power movement into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), creating the foundation for two decades of political upheaval and violence in the Kivus.²⁰

In the post-genocide period, some of the barriers affecting women in Rwanda's public sphere are diminishing. Whereas in pre-genocide Rwanda, women predominantly gained status through their modest behavior, marriage, and raising of well-mannered children, the RPF is pursuing a policy of gender inclusivity that encourages women's involvement in all levels of the government and allows them to inherit, hold property, and exercise economic autonomy. Following the September 2013 parliamentary elections, women hold 64 percent of the seats in Rwanda's parliament (Government of Rwanda 2013). This is a stark contrast to pre-genocide Rwanda, in which women filled no more than 17 percent of parliamentary seats, and occupied no mayoral or prefect positions (Nowrojee 1996; Sharlach 1999). More generally, Burnet (2011: 303) finds that women in post-genocide Rwanda enjoy "increased respect from family and community members, enhanced capacity to speak and be heard in public forums, greater autonomy in decision-making in the family, and increased access to education."

However, Rwandan women still face many struggles when it comes to realizing gender equality. In particular, rural women often find it difficult to assert themselves independently from their husbands, fathers, or brothers, or to take on roles that are perceived to be the sole domain of men. For example, Jennie Burnet has documented modern usage of the phrase *Ni igishegabo*—translated as "she's a big man-woman"—to insult women who are outspoken and aggressive, despite the fact that these traits are prized when displayed by Rwandan men (Burnet 2012: 45). Similarly, Marie Berry's (2013) work among Rwandan women who composed the nation's informal or agricultural sectors found that the benefits of gender equality policies were not being realized except among a small minority of Rwandan political elites. This trend emerges in large part from the cost-prohibitive nature of education and rents and permits for small businesses, and the various forms of structural violence to which many rural Rwandan women

are vulnerable precisely because their lack of success contradicts the image of the “New Rwanda” that the RPF is determined to uphold. In sum, it seems that Rwandan women political elites are better positioned to take advantages of the RPF’s policy reforms for promoting gender equality than their rural counterparts, though even this conclusion is subject to debate. Recently, Susan Thomson (2015) argued that while Rwandan women’s visibility in public life is at an all-time high, their ability to shape their nation’s future is limited by the fact that President Kagame and his advisers dominate parliament, making it difficult for women parliamentarians to implement meaningful changes. She concludes that “[t]he number of Rwandan female parliamentarians glosses over their limited role in policymaking, the continued marginalization of the vast majority of Rwandan women, and the government’s superficial commitment to democratic governance” (Thomson 2015: 20–21).

A similarly complex picture emerges from the narratives of female *génocidaires*. The following discussion begins with the narrative of Devota—a peasant woman turned *génocidaire* whose experiences of gender-based discrimination within the prison system and in post-genocide Rwandan society more generally undermined her ability to self-identify as Rwandan and as a woman. Her experiences are broadly representative of the six other rural female *génocidaires* with whom I worked. Each of these women fit within the categories of salaried poor (*umukene wifashije*), poor (*umukene*), “destitute” (*umutindi*), or living in abject poverty (*umutindi nyakujya*) prior to the genocide, placing them among the majority of Rwandans at the bottom of the social hierarchy.²¹ However, I then turn to the cases of Egidie and Valerie—two female *génocidaires* who demonstrated remarkable resilience to this gender-based discrimination. I argue that this resilience emerges in part from their heightened political and social status prior to and during the 1994 genocide. Though both women were educated professionals, and exercised

varying degrees of political power within their communities far beyond what their rural counterparts enjoyed. And while they too presented themselves as victims, their complaints were framed in terms of political oppression and manipulation, rather than gender-based discrimination.

A “Weak Woman”: Devota

Devota was, by all accounts, a monster. Prior to our first meeting, prison administrators and *génocidaires* alike had referenced her as a particularly infamous figure within the prison who, during the genocide, killed unarmed Tutsi women and children in particularly brutal ways using household implements. Adding to her fearsome reputation, she was heavily pregnant during the genocide—a factor that would have allowed her to excuse herself from the violence. Nonetheless, Devota allegedly chose to participate in the torture and murder of her Tutsi neighbors. Her crimes were so brutal and so widely condemned by her surrounding community that several people had voluntarily testified against her before *gacaca*—a locally conceived system of dispute resolution that was adapted by the RPF to address the backlog of *génocidaires* awaiting trial.²² Devota had further demonstrated her monstrous nature by allegedly appearing remorseless before *gacaca*, refusing to confess to the crimes of which she had been accused or apologize to the surviving families of the people she had harmed.²³

Devota did not consent to be interviewed because she had a strong desire to assist with an international project on the 1994 genocide and its aftermath. Conversely, like so many convicted perpetrators, she saw each interview as an opportunity to glimpse the world beyond the prison where she had lived uninterrupted since her arrest in 2001. There was also an element of opportunism underlying her consent, as she asked as her first point of business whether there was

anything I could do to help those prisoners, like herself, who were imprisoned unjustly because of petty jealousies and lies rather than due to actual criminal activities. She admitted that she had been found guilty of killing Tutsi women and children by stabbing them with small wooden skewers used for cooking meat brochette, and sentenced to fifteen years. However, Devota maintained she had committed no such crimes during the genocide. She had witnessed a murder, and had asked the victim's family for forgiveness for failing to intervene on the victim's behalf. She also confessed to looting the homes of murdered Tutsi in her community. But in terms of the Category 2 crimes of which she was accused, Devota maintained her innocence, and lamented the harsh sentence she had received.

Throughout our interviews, Devota consistently described herself as "just a normal person" who, as a woman, was in no way capable of the crimes of which she had been accused. She explained that prior to the genocide, she had been a poor farmer. Her family was often unable to afford food beyond what they grew, and for this reason, Devota was illiterate and had minimal education. She claimed she never felt unsafe in the years prior to the genocide, and felt no animosity toward her Tutsi compatriots. She only began feeling unsafe after the genocide when a neighboring merchant, fearing imprisonment by the RPF, threatened her so she would remain silent after she witnessed him murder a Tutsi man during the genocide. While Devota knew the man's murder was wrong, at the time she did not interfere because the victim had a reputation in her community for being proud and selfish. The merchant's decision to commit murder was motivated by the fact that the victim had refused to lend the merchant money some months earlier.

As for the other charges against her, Devota claimed that a Tutsi neighbor with whom she had lived for many years in peace had invented the story of her having killed Tutsi women and

children with brochettes. Prior to her 2001 arrest, her accuser's cousin had asked to buy Devota's land. Devota refused, and shortly after was arrested on suspicion of murdering Tutsi during the genocide. She was adamant that her imprisonment was punishment for her refusal to sell her land. After her arrest, her land would have passed to her husband and children to cultivate or sell. Devota had not seen or heard from them since she had arrived in prison, and so had no idea what they had decided to do. She suspected, however, that her arrest had prompted her family to sell and to leave the community so as to minimize the social stigmatization they would otherwise endure for supporting a *génocidaire*.²⁴

However, Devota's story changed in important ways over the course of our interviews. While she continuously professed her innocence, she added details that further stressed her identity as a victim in the post-genocide period. She repeatedly referred to herself as a "weak woman" who was incapable of torture or killing anyone, and stressed how being in prison had negatively and unjustly affected her life. She stated that she was no longer Rwandan or a woman—that both aspects of her identity had been taken from her by those responsible for her imprisonment. In her opinion, women were defined by staying at home and taking care of their husbands and children, a privilege that Devota had been denied since her arrest in 2001. As a result of her arrest and inability to care for her family, they had apparently rejected her, having never visited her in prison. Devota realized they were likely suffering as well due to her arrest: in addition to the loss of her labor, the families of *génocidaires* were often subject to subtle forms of discrimination within their communities. When the rumors of her complicity in the 1994 genocide began to circulate, Devota recalled that people began passing her on the street without greeting her, and refusing to buy her produce. It was worse for a woman, she argued, because

women were supposed to be pure and incapable of harming others, but her husband and children were certainly being stigmatized too.

Devota was formally denied other privileges. Unlike male *génocidaires*, who occasionally perform community labor and related activities outside the prison, Devota was confined to her shared cell or the room where she worked with other women to make and repair prisoners' uniforms.²⁵ Adding to her suffering, Devota found her gender had been further rendered obsolete by the conditions imposed upon her as part of everyday prison life. In particular, she found the shapeless pink uniform worn by *génocidaires* demoralizing because it obscured both her gender and her individuality. Combined with the shaved hairstyle demanded by the authorities to prevent the spread of lice, Devota felt there was nothing to distinguish her from the countless other women prisoners with whom she lived. As a result, Devota suffered far more than she felt she deserved, particularly given she was innocent.

Devota's narrative was broadly representative of the challenges faced by the other Category 2 and 3 female *génocidaires* I interviewed in the prisons. In terms of background, they were all subsistence farmers from rural communities whose lives were characterized by moderate to extreme poverty. As a result, they had achieved only basic levels of education, and had married young in order to provide their families with much-needed dowries. They had multiple children, and prior to the 1994 genocide, had viewed child rearing and the maintenance of their homes and farms as their primary responsibilities. None of them admitted to having harbored or even known about the possibility of anti-Tutsi sentiments prior to the start of the 1994 genocide, and in discussing their alleged crimes, only one woman ever confessed to participating in the acts of torture and murder of which she had been accused.²⁶ The other Category 2 and 3 female *génocidaires* confessed only to informing on Tutsi, revealing their hiding places to the attackers,

and looting the properties that were left behind. In all instances, they claimed their actions were not motivated by anti-Tutsi sentiment or genocidal intent, but rather by fear of social repercussions within their communities if they refused to support the killers, as well as occasional indifference to the fates of the victims due to a history of interpersonal conflict within the community.

In addition, these low-level female *génocidaires* frequently referenced the gender-based discrimination they endured and its impact on their ability to identify as Rwandan women. They endured abandonment by some, if not all, of their family members—particularly their husbands and children—because their complicity in genocidal violence was inevitably interpreted as evidence that they were monsters, in addition to being bad wives and mothers. Unlike the male *génocidaires* I interviewed, who received visitors according to their family's resources and were given gifts of valuable commodities like sugar to improve their well-being in the prisons, low-level female *génocidaires* claimed to receive little support from the outside world. They instead relied on the goodwill of prison administrators or prisoners who were willing to share or purchase necessities on their behalf in exchange for money or sexual favors. The resulting system of exploitation was not something that female *génocidaires* could discuss in much detail given it still surrounded them and they were dependent upon it for their daily survival, but they all acknowledged its existence and the negative impact it had on their morale.

Pride and Resilience: Egidie and Valerie

However, some female *génocidaires* seemed better positioned to resist the gender-based discrimination that surrounded them. Egidie and Valerie were alone among the female *génocidaires* I interviewed in that they enjoyed heightened status within the prisons related to

having held positions of political prominence prior to the genocide. This in turn appeared to insulate them against some of the gender-based discrimination that negatively affected the lives of their more rural and less educated compatriots. In Egidie's case, while her family initially relied on agriculture for their day-to-day survival, they were wealthy compared to their surrounding community. As such, Egidie was not required to work full-time in the fields. She completed her education without interruption, married into a high-status family, and pursued a career as a cell-level government official, while raising seven children.

Egidie's career was a source of pride throughout her life history. While by no means the highest position a woman could attain, becoming a cell leader with the start of the civil war in 1990 set her apart from the Rwandan majority economically, politically, and socially. Egidie attended government meetings at the local and national level in which she observed growing tensions among MRND members, several of whom joined the CDR in 1992. Around this time, the local police and military began arbitrarily arresting Tutsi elites, and in several instances, killed people—whether Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa—who tried to intervene.

Despite growing tensions and violence in her community, Egidie remained committed to her work, even as her responsibilities shifted. Early in 1993, she was told to prepare her office: her superiors said the enemy was coming to take Rwanda, and there would not be enough land and wealth for everyone. Egidie was instructed to watch for spies in the community, and report all new arrivals to the local police so they could be thoroughly investigated. Simultaneously, during meetings with district-level authorities, she observed weapons being distributed to the men in her office, and heard rumors that they were being trained to protect the community against the *inyenzi*.

In the weeks leading up to the genocide, Egidie was ordered to create lists of all Tutsi living in the area. Though she claimed she did not know their purpose, she recalled feeling fearful. There was a heightened police and military presence in her community, and everyone seemed to be joining the Interahamwe, which in her experience made them drink too much, carry weapons, and act like they were above the law. Egidie discussed fleeing with her family, but they concluded there was no place to go. Other Rwandan towns were rumored to be experiencing the same problems, and with everyone being watched, it was not safe to be an outsider.

Nonetheless, the 1994 genocide caught Egidie by surprise. She awoke on 7 April 1994 to the news that President Habyarimana had been murdered by the *inyenzi* and that all of Rwanda was at war with the Tutsi—not just the RPF. In the days following Habyarimana’s assassination, rumors about the political killings in Kigali circulated and in her community a handful of Tutsi elites—those, she claimed, who were not well-liked—were murdered. However, for Egidie the full brutality of the genocide did not become evident until some weeks later, when she witnessed an attack on an elderly neighbor by a mob who wanted the woman’s cattle. Egidie immediately brought the six Tutsi orphans who had been living with the woman into her home in an effort to rescue them from a similar fate. But local soldiers soon discovered Egidie’s deception, and, in an effort to take the three girls as sex slaves, beat all but one of the orphans to death. Egidie continued to hide the surviving child and helped him recover from his wounds before encouraging him to flee.

As the RPF advanced on Egidie’s community, she and her family decided to flee with the remnants of the interim government toward the DRC. In justifying this decision, Egidie did not, like other *génocidaires* I interviewed, mention the atrocities being perpetrated by Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) troops against Hutu civilians.²⁷ Instead, her decision seemed motivated by

loyalty and opportunism—specifically, the realization that her career prospects and security were likely better with the interim government. But as the RPF restored peace in Rwanda and the genocide and related mass atrocities came to a close, Egidie and her family decided to return home and take up farming—the only option available to them, she noted, as Hutu and ex-MRND loyalists. They lived peacefully until 2007, when their neighbors formally accused Egidie and her husband of having been directly responsible for the murder of Tutsi civilians during the genocide. Egidie acknowledged that in the case of her husband, these accusations were true—he had participated in the murder of countless Tutsi civilians at the roadblocks in their community. But she maintained that she had never directly harmed anyone and had been wrongly imprisoned.

Like Devota, Egidie often referred to herself as a victim. However, in complaining about her situation, Egidie did not resort to the same complaints of gender-based discrimination that were common among lower-level female *génocidaires*. Indeed, she seemed to have had a different experience of prison life in many regards: her pink uniform, though still basic, was well-fitted and subtly decorated; she received continued support from her extended family in the form of regular visits and gifts of sugar and other valuable commodities; and in discussing her life before the genocide, she simultaneously exhibited pride and demanded respect for her many accomplishments. And while she condemned the RPF for imprisoning her without a fair trial, she blamed victor’s justice—the fact that the RPF had won the war instead of the interim government—for her fate. Not once during our interviews did she reference her gender identity to explain why she was incapable of perpetrating the crimes of which she had been accused, for example. In fact, her frustrations surrounding having been identified, charged, and convicted as a *génocidaire* were very similar to those of the male *génocidaires* I interviewed, as were her complaints about her quality of life in the prison, which in the rare instances when she raised the

subject, focused on overcrowding and the general lack of good food. Overall, she did not seem invested in presenting herself as a victim of gender-based discrimination.

A similar pattern was evident in my interviews with the infamous RTLM journalist Valerie Bemeriki.²⁸ Valerie did not like speaking about her family or her family's associates in any detail, nor was she particularly open about her past prior to 1993, when she joined the RTLM. At the time when our interviews occurred, she was writing a memoir and was determined to minimize the stigmatization her family would endure. Certain general features of her early family life could be discerned from her broader life history, however. For example, Valerie was clearly well-educated, having completed primary and secondary school, followed by higher education in France facilitated by friends of her parents. This suggests that her family was comparatively wealthy and well-connected enough to provide their daughter with ample opportunities for personal and professional development.

Valerie's rise to prominence began in 1990 with the start of the civil war. Valerie seemed fairly unique among *génocidaires*: despite having had minimal interest in Rwandan politics prior to 1990, she claimed to understand immediately that the RPF invasion represented a serious threat to Rwanda's political stability, and particularly the well-being of the Hutu majority. She was swept up in what she referred to as the "wind of multipartyism" and joined the MRND, which she accurately perceived to be the most powerful party and the most likely to champion the rights of the Rwandan people in the fight against the RPF. After a brief stint as a secretary for a high-level MRND official who fired her for having a minor disability, she began taking night classes with the intention of becoming a journalist. Shortly after, Valerie was hired to write for an MRND newspaper. She quickly gained a following within the MRND for her skills in

advocating ceaselessly for Hutu rights and mercilessly criticizing the other parties, particularly the RPF.

With the creation of the RTLM in 1993, Valerie was invited to apply for a position as a radio broadcaster. The interview process involved passing exams that tested political knowledge and writing skills, and meeting high-level MRND officials who quizzed candidates on their political beliefs and adherence to the official history that dominated Rwanda under the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes.²⁹ As someone who had gained a reputation for writing on the failure of the 1959 Hutu Revolution to secure the long-term political dominance of the Hutu majority, Valerie had no trouble in the interview. She was hired with the following guidelines: say only positive things about the MRND; say only negative things about the RPF; and contradict anything that the RPF's Radio Muhabura was saying about their plans for Rwanda's future.³⁰

Early in 1994, these guidelines were expanded to include spreading anti-Tutsi propaganda more generally, such as publicizing instances where Tutsi were allegedly killing Hutu civilians or naming alleged RPF spies in particular communities. Valerie went along with this shift in policy because at this point she had learned enough about RPF atrocities against Hutu civilians to know that the RPF, should they win the civil war, were intent on destroying the Hutu. Furthermore, she did not attempt to verify the information she was being given because she knew that everything she wrote or said would be passed through the RTLM's censorship committee, and that there would be extreme consequences for challenging any story or angle that was being promoted by the RTLM leadership. In hindsight, however, Valerie recognized that she had been a pawn: she claimed she thought she was saving lives by rallying people against the

RPF and, later, Rwanda's Tutsi minority population, when in actual fact she was priming Rwandans to accept and participate in the murder of innocent Tutsi.

Valerie's criminal actions did not stop at broadcasting propaganda in the months preceding the genocide, however. Following Habyarimana's assassination, Valerie took to the airwaves to condemn the RPF for murdering Rwanda's president because she thought that as a woman, the only weapon she had to help win the war was her radio show. As the genocide gained momentum, she traveled around those regions of Rwanda that were not yet occupied by the RPA, and made public appearances in which she dressed as a member of the Interahamwe and gave speeches aimed at inciting anti-Tutsi violence, sometimes encouraging people to kill specific groups of Tutsi refugees that were passing through their communities. In discussing her actions during this period, Valerie repeatedly noted that she said only "what people wanted to hear" and that if she had refused to participate in these political meetings, the MRND would have simply found someone to replace her.

However, transcripts of her RTLM broadcasts and speeches during this period suggest that Valerie was a more enthusiastic participant than she was willing to admit, and that, as in the case of many other *génocidaires*, she was attempting to minimize her criminal responsibility.³¹ She further minimized her complicity in the 1994 genocide by frequently revisiting the subject of how most high-level MRND leaders had managed to flee Rwanda in the last days of the 1994 genocide, leaving mid-level collaborators like herself to bear criminal responsibility for the genocide. She used Agathe Habyarimana as an example of a woman who had done much to organize and incite violence from behind the scenes, and who was nonetheless living comfortably in France.³² Valerie revisited this theme of political betrayal and disenfranchisement

throughout our conversations, condemning her superiors within the MRND and RTLM for having abandoned her and the other civilian *génocidaires* to stand trial in their place.

Unlike Egidie and the other female *génocidaires*, however, Valerie did not hold the RPF accountable for her imprisonment, nor did she seem hostile toward the RPF more generally. She expressed gratitude and optimism when speaking about the RPF: gratitude for having saved her from a horrible life as a refugee in the DRC by arresting her; and optimism for release once the RPF realized she had been a pawn for the MRND.³³ However, she was also set apart from most of the female *génocidaires* I interviewed at that time by her refusal to blame her imprisonment and subsequent suffering on the fact that she was a woman, preferring to condemn her superiors in the MRND for having manipulated her and then left her to take responsibility for their crimes.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this article has been to address the tendency for Rwandans and the international community more generally to dismiss female *génocidaires* solely as monsters, in large part due to the preconceived gender norms that surround ideals for women's behavior in times of peace and conflict. In Rwanda, this tendency has negatively impacted the lives of female *génocidaires* in several ways: they endure stigmatization from their families, their communities, and Rwandan society more broadly that can range from abandonment to disproportionately severe prison sentences compared to their male counterparts. Peasant female *génocidaires* appear to feel this gender-based discrimination more keenly than elite female *génocidaires*, or at the very least are more vocal in framing their claims to victimization in the post-genocide period in these terms. They recognized that by having allegedly participated in the torture, murder, and mutilation of their Tutsi compatriots, they were perceived as having violated

important taboos related to women's conduct and were being punished accordingly. As an example of this, I have drawn upon interviews with Devota, who expressed resentment and dismay at the fact that her identity as both a Rwandan and a woman had been obliterated through the process of being arrested, imprisoned, and tried for Category 2 and 3 crimes. Devota maintained her innocence, arguing that the allegations against her were motivated by interpersonal conflict arising from a land dispute. However, once labeled a *génocidaire*, Devota found herself caught up in Rwanda's transitional justice system in which her refusal to confess and express remorse for her alleged crimes was treated as an additional offense, resulting in a disproportionately harsh prison sentence. The narratives of Egidie and Valerie then provided contrasting examples of elite female *génocidaires* accused of more serious Category 1 crimes. Both women seemed more resilient to the gender-based discrimination endured by Devota, or at the very least, used different vocabulary to frame their disenfranchisement in the post-genocide period.

Taken together, these narratives suggest that we know very little about the lived experiences and legal journeys of female *génocidaires* within Rwanda, due in part to the tendency to cast them in sensationalist terms as monsters. My ethnographic encounters with female *génocidaires* demonstrates the value of engaging with these women not only through trial transcripts and related legal materials, for example, but as complex human beings with lives beyond the genocide. As part of this, these women—while perhaps guilty of having committed crimes related to the 1994 genocide—have also endured suffering in the post-genocide period, arguably disproportionate to that of their male counterparts. Thus, by providing these women with space to discuss their lived experiences surrounding the genocide on their own terms, a more nuanced series of images of female *génocidaires* emerges: one that challenges the common

perception of female *génocidaires* as monsters and establishes a framework for considering these women as full human beings capable of acts along the spectrum between brutality and kindness. Furthermore, this framework could provide a starting point for a more accurate understanding of how women come to be involved in genocide, as well as cross-cultural comparison of women's criminal actions in other episodes of political violence.³⁴

That said, this is not a popular framework for post-genocide Rwanda: many Rwandans, particularly genocide survivors and returnees, understandably find it morally repugnant to approach the plights of convicted *génocidaires* with empathy or compassion, as do many Rwandan and foreign scholars (Tertsakian 2011: 211). During interviews with survivors and government officials, I was often warned against allowing myself to be taken in by the lies and manipulations of *génocidaires*. And indeed, I did encounter rumors, lies, evasions, denials, and silences that often complicated my ability to make sense of my participants' life history. Such meta-data was frequently present not only in my ethnographic work with *génocidaires*, but also in my interviews with government officials, returnees, genocide survivors, and other participants. But as noted by Lee Ann Fujii, the presence of this meta-data, while requiring careful contextualization, does not render the overall ethnographic encounter irrelevant. Conversely, discussion of rumors, lies, evasions, denials, and silences can "open up new forms of dialogue and public debates, which can lead to disclosures of new truths and knowledge" (Fujii 2010: 240). In the case of this article, it has prompted deeper consideration of how individual Rwandan women came to be labeled, whether justly or unjustly, as *génocidaires*, and how their subsequent post-genocide experiences of Rwanda's transitional justice program then differed accorded to their socioeconomic status.

Erin Jessee is a lecturer at the Scottish Oral History Centre at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. She uses oral historical and ethnographic methods to study civilians' experiences of transitional justice in the aftermath of mass human rights violations, and has extensive experience in Rwanda, Uganda, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. To date, she has published peer-reviewed articles in *History in Africa*, *Oral History Review*, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, and *Forensic Science International*. She also has a book manuscript, "Negotiating Genocide: The Politics of History in Post-Genocide Rwanda," currently under review with Palgrave Macmillan's Studies in Oral History series. erin.jessee@strath.ac.uk.

Acknowledgments: First and foremost, I wish to thank my Rwandan research assistants and participants for sharing their time and life histories with me. I am also grateful to my fellow presenters and invited experts at the "Approaching Perpetrators" workshop in 2014 for providing invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper, as well as to my two anonymous reviewers. The preparation and writing of this article was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, and the Canadian International Development Agency's Students for Development Internship.

Notes

¹ The term *génocidaire*, while rooted in the French word *génocidé*, is distinctly Rwandan and refers to individuals who committed crimes during the 1994 genocide, from organizing and inciting violence against Rwanda's minority Tutsi population to directly participating in the

violence through acts such as informing on civilians who were in hiding, looting Tutsi-owned properties and possessions, and/or raping, torturing, and murdering Tutsi civilians. In Rwanda today, the term is primarily applied to members of the nation's Hutu majority who have been convicted for perpetrating atrocities against Tutsi civilians during the 1994 genocide. However, those wrongfully accused or released, having only committed minimal crimes like looting during the genocide, often find that the label follows them throughout their lives.

² On 24 June 2011, Nyiramasuhuko was found guilty of seven charges, including genocide and incitement to commit rape as a crime against humanity, and was sentenced to life in prison (ICTR 2011).

³ Nicole Hogg (2010: 81) argues that female *génocidaires* who participated indirectly in the genocide frequently received preferential treatment related to the “chivalry” of men, whereby “male witnesses, investigators, prosecutors and judges are so infected by gender stereotypes that they either cannot perceive of women as criminals or feel protective towards them in spite of their suspected or proven criminality.” However, when direct criminal responsibility for murder, mutilation, or other serious crimes was established, female *génocidaires* were “regarded as ‘evil’ or ‘non-women’ and treated with the full force of the law” (Hogg 2010: 71).

⁴ According to the revised 2004 genocide law, Rwanda acknowledges three categories of *génocidaires*. Category 1 includes individuals who occupied positions of leadership surrounding the genocide and who were responsible for planning and organizing the violence. Typical sentences range from 25 years to life. Category 2 encapsulates individuals who participated in murders and serious attacks, and warrants sentences from 3 to 30 years depending on the number and severity of the crimes and whether the accused confesses. Category 3 is for individuals who

are accused of crimes against property, and is typically punished through reparations (Tertsakian 2008: 354).

⁵ In addition to the eight female *génocidaires* I interviewed, I interviewed twelve men who had been convicted of crimes related to the 1994 genocide.

⁶ In addition to this initial research trip, I returned to Rwanda in 2011 and 2012 to conduct shorter fieldwork visits for a different project.

⁷ The decision to interview only those *génocidaires* who had confessed or been convicted of crimes resulted from the ethics review process at my university, which was adamant that I not recruit anyone who might expect a reduced sentence or who might face new charges as a result of their participation in the study. The 20 convicted *génocidaires* I interviewed represent a small fraction of the estimated 175,000 to 210,000 individuals who are believed to have direct criminal responsibility for organizing and implementing the genocide (Straus 2004).

⁸ The RPF was formed in Uganda and so most of its original members are fluent English speakers with minimal knowledge of French. Upon wresting control of Rwanda in July 1994, the RPF implemented a number of policies aimed at rejecting Rwanda's colonial past under German and later Belgian rule, and ensuring the prosperity of its members. Rwanda became part of the Commonwealth in 2009 and adopted English as an official language. Over the years, English has displaced French as the second official language of Rwanda, with profound implications for the political and economic landscape of the nation (Steflja 2012).

⁹ Rwanda's post-genocide policy of national unity and reconciliation has made public discussion of ethnicity taboo, with the stated goals of eliminating ethnic divisionism and ensuring the long-term political stability of the nation (Thomson 2013: 108).

¹⁰ For example, several leaders of IBUKA—an umbrella group for genocide survivors' organizations—were forced into exile in 2000 following the allegedly government-orchestrated assassination of Assiel Kabera, the brother of IBUKA's vice president Josué Kayijaho (Longman 2011: 30). The leadership of the Rwandan League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LIPRODHOR) has been vulnerable to similar forms of intimidation over the years, and as of 2013, individuals believed to be more favorable to the RPF have overtaken its board (HRW 2013).

¹¹ In referencing nationalized mourning and commemoration, I am building on a conversation initiated by Jennie Burnet (2009: 80–110; 2012: 92–109).

¹² Elsewhere, Susan Thomson (2010) and Jesse (2011) have characterized Rwanda as a “highly politicized research setting” in which the government seeks to control how Rwandans speak about the 1994 genocide, and Rwandan history more generally.

¹³ For rare examples of Rwandan women whose impact on the nation’s history has been documented in oral tradition and written histories, see that of Rwanda’s first Queen Mother, Nyiratunga, who fought to have a woman included among the court’s ritualists during her reign (Watkins 2014), or Nyirarucyaba, daughter of Rwanda’s mythical founder Gihanga, who is considered responsible for the domestication of the first cattle (Mukarutabana n.d.).

¹⁴ There are a number of exceptions to this statement throughout Rwandan history, wherein elite Rwandan women—mostly Queen Mothers such as Nyiramongi (Vansina 2004: 144, 151) and Kanjogera (Des Forges 2011: 22–23), or spiritual leaders such as Nyirashirembere (Vansina 2004: 137), who led a rebellion against the Tutsi population in Fugi—committed atrocities.

¹⁵ Though referred to as a bloodless coup, over the next two years many of Kayibanda's inner circle were executed, while Kayibanda was intentionally starved to death (Prunier 1995: 82).

¹⁶ According to Stephen Kinzer (2008: 34), the Tutsi exiles first referred to themselves as *inyenzi* (cockroaches) in the early 1960s "to symbolize their nocturnal habits and their conviction that no amount of effort would eliminate them. Later their enemies began to use it, arguing that it was appropriate because the rebels, like cockroaches, were filthy invaders who defiled clean places."

¹⁷ Several studies of perpetrators of the 1994 genocide (Fujii 2009; Mironko 2004; Straus 2006) have found that Hutu civilians rarely participated explicitly due to a genocidal desire to annihilate the Tutsi. Straus (2006) argues that fear was a common motivating factor for participation, in particular the belief that if the predominantly Tutsi RPF gained control, the Hutu would experience renewed repression, similar to that which they allegedly endured while ruled by the predominantly Tutsi monarchy prior to Rwandan independence in 1962 (Jessee and Watkins 2014). In addition, Fujii (2009: 12) argues local conceptions of ethnicity merely provided a script according to which people acted out violence. In the absence of blinding ethnic hatred, the more common factor that motivated Hutu peasants to commit atrocities was a desire to maintain, reinforce, or establish new social and political ties within their communities in anticipation of a Hutu victory.

¹⁸ Controversy has emerged over which parties to the conflict are responsible for Habyarimana's assassination. A Belgian journalist reported that two French soldiers were responsible for the assassination, while Etienne Sengegera, the Rwandan ambassador to the DRC alleged that Belgian peacekeepers were to blame (Prunier 1995: 213–214). RPF supporters allege that Habyarimana's inner circle had him assassinated because they felt he had betrayed the Hutu

cause (Des Forges 1999: 182). In 2010, the Rwandan government released the “Mutsinzi Report” (Republic of Rwanda 2010), which argues that the Rwandan Armed Forces were responsible for engineering and implementing Habyarimana’s assassination. These findings were loosely confirmed by the preliminary “Trévidic report” (Trévidic and Poux 2012), though critics have noted that both the Mutsinzi and Trévidic reports failed to take into consideration the testimonies of ex-RPF combatants who claim Kagame was responsible for orchestrating Habyarimana’s assassination (Schofield 2012).

¹⁹ The number of victims of the 1994 genocide is controversial, with mid-range estimates—including the one cited by Alison Des Forges (1999: 15–16) that is cited here—concluding that between 400,000 and 800,000 Rwandans died.

²⁰ This mass flight was in part made possible by Opération Turquoise, a French peace-keeping initiative that was allegedly intended to provide protection to civilians in eastern Rwanda. In practice, it created a safe corridor for Hutu elites responsible for organizing and inciting the genocide to flee Rwanda and, at least momentarily, escape the RPF (Des Forges 1999: 682–684).

²¹ Rwandans are roughly divided according to six socio-economic categories. The majority peasant population consists of those who live in abject poverty (*abatindi nyakujya*), those who are destitute (*abatindi*), and those who are merely poor (*abakene*). Next are those peasants with the economic means to support themselves, often as elected officials (*abakene bifashijje*). Rwanda’s more privileged and wealthy minority is then divided as either rich but lacking money (*abakungu*) or rich (*abakire*). Thomson (2013: 6–7, 16–17) argues that this socio-economic hierarchy connotes more than a person’s financial security, but also indicates how vulnerable they are to emotional or physical neglect by government officials and state-led interventions.

²² This is notable because for many Rwandans, *gacaca* constitutes a source of tension within the community (Ingelaere 2009; Rettig 2011; Thomson and Nagy 2011). For example, survivors are often coerced by district-level officials into testifying against accused *génocidaires*, and in the process, can bring violence upon themselves from the families and friends of the person against whom they testify. In other instances, civilians report fearing land disputes and other forms of interpersonal conflict within their communities could prompt members of their community to make false allegations against them.

²³ In Rwanda, accused *génocidaires* can receive reduced sentences if they confess and demonstrate remorse before *gacaca*. This presents a particular challenge for those who have been wrongly accused, however. If found guilty based on witness testimonies and circumstantial evidence, the wrongly accused may receive disproportionately harsh sentences compared to actual *génocidaires* who confess to having perpetrated actual crimes.

²⁴ While many peasant Rwandans have family in prison for crimes related to the genocide, people often choose to distance themselves lest their support for their loved one be misinterpreted by the authorities as support for their alleged genocidal actions or resistance to national unity and reconciliation, prompting the authorities to take a negative interest (Tertsakian 2011: 212).

²⁵ In *Le Château*, Carina Tertsakian (2008) describes these work spaces, and the women's sections of Rwanda's prisons more generally, in more positive terms, highlighting the camaraderie that exists between women and their efforts to make life within the prisons more pleasant.

²⁶ Esperance, a young mother of two, confessed to committing murder as part of a larger mob that surrounded a Tutsi neighbor and beat her to death using clubs. Esperance was unsure who struck the lethal blow, but as a “weak woman” she argued she was incapable of having committed murder. Nonetheless, she confessed to this murder, as well as to indirect complicity in several other murders where she cheered on the attackers. For these crimes, she was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

²⁷ The RPA was the military arm of the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

²⁸ Valerie insisted I use her real name. My other *génocidaire* participants requested that their anonymity be maintained, and so I use pseudonyms in all other instances.

²⁹ Under presidents Kayibanda and Habyarimana, Rwandans were taught an official narrative that demonized the Tutsi minority and their monarchy for having enslaved the Hutu majority during Rwanda’s pre-colonial and colonial periods (King 2014; Newbury 2002).

³⁰ In 1991, the RPF created Radio Muhabura in an effort to spread pro-RPF propaganda. Later, its mandate expanded to include convincing Hutu civilians to resist the genocide ideology promoted by the Hutu extremist radio station, RTLM (Des Forges 1999: 68).

³¹ A selection of RTLM transcripts, including commentaries by Bemeriki, are available online in English, French, and Kinyarwanda via the Montreal Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies Web site (http://migs.concordia.ca/links/RwandanRadioTrascripts_RTLM.htm), as well as the Rwanda File Web site (<http://www.rwandafile.com/rtlm/list3.html>).

³² In actual fact, Agathe Habyarimana was at the time living in a state of self-enforced house arrest in Paris, and in significant danger of being extradited to Rwanda to face charges of inciting

genocide (Duval Smith 2007). In 2010, she was arrested by French police executing a Rwanda-issued arrest warrant and released on bail to await trial in France (BBC 2010, 2011).

³³ Valerie Bemeriki was sentenced to life in prison in 2009 (BBC 2009). I have been unable to interview her again, but it would be interesting to see how her sentence has shaped her opinion of the RPF.

³⁴ See, for example, Dara Kay Cohen's (2007, 2013) work on female perpetrators in Sierra Leone or Swati Parashar's (2009, 2011) publications on female militants in Kashmir and Sri Lanka. There is now a large enough body of literature on female combatants, *génocidaires*, and related perpetrators to begin building fruitful comparative studies on the subject.

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