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'Once Upon a Time there was a Wonderful Country': Representations of History in Rwanda

Deborah Mayersen
University of Wollongong

Abstract

In April 1994, genocide erupted in Rwanda with an unprecedented ferocity. Over the course of 100 days, more than 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed. A major contributor to the violence was an intense propaganda campaign that dehumanised and demonised the Tutsi minority prior to and during the genocide. This propaganda presented the Tutsi as foreign and feudal oppressors, who would again oppress the Hutu majority as they had in the past if they were not targeted for extermination. Such dubious representations of history have deep roots in Rwanda, which can be traced to the early colonial period. This article will explore three examples of the way in which history has been represented and misrepresented in Rwanda, spanning from colonial to contemporary periods. It will consider how key stakeholders have sometimes portrayed Rwanda's history in skewed and inaccurate ways, and the profound impact this has had on ethnic divisions within the country. Moreover, it will examine how misrepresentations of Rwanda's history are continuing in the post-genocide period. It is only through interrogating (mis)representations of Rwanda's history that the political agendas that have and continue to shape them can be exposed and challenged.

Introduction

Accounts of genocide do not typically begin with the phrase "Once upon a time there was a wonderful country" (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, 2011, p. 8). Yet this is precisely how the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda's (ICTR) outreach program began its account of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, published in a full colour, graphic novel format. Within a few pages, idyllic images of farmers on rolling green hills are replaced by those of machete-wielding *genocidaires* and mass graves, before the document moves on to explain the transitional justice process. The 'cartoon book', as the document is called, is designed to "convey the events of the genocide at both personal and national levels to children eight years of age and above" (ICTR 2011, p. 6). Yet the manner in which such events are conveyed

is highly selective. The withdrawal of United Nations peacekeepers from Rwanda as the genocide commenced is only obliquely mentioned, and there is no mention of the absence of the international community as the genocide progressed unimpeded. The role of the ICTR is presented as heroic, but there is no discussion of Rwanda-based transitional justice efforts. This document is just one of many examples in which Rwanda's history has been presented in a skewed and selective manner for political purposes. In this article I will explore three critical examples of (mis)representations of Rwanda's history, which span the colonial and postcolonial periods. I demonstrate that these externally imposed, politically motivated representations of Rwanda's history have had a major, deleterious impact on Rwanda in the past. Furthermore, the ICTR 'cartoon book' suggests there is the potential for these historical processes to continue into the future. While representations of history are always subjective to some extent, the experience in Rwanda – perhaps more than that in any other country – highlights the need for great awareness and care in representing the past.

Colonial Representations of Rwanda's History

Astonishingly, colonial representations and mis-representations of Rwanda's history began even before the first European visited the territory. The most deleterious historical misrepresentation, the Hamitic hypothesis, was proposed by explorer John Hanning Speke as an ethnological theory concerning the peoples of the region. For Speke, the Christian bible was the ethnological instrument through which African peoples could be categorised:

We should, when contemplating these [African] sons of Noah, try and carry our mind back to that time when our poor elder brother Ham was cursed by his father, and condemned to be the slave of both Shem and Japheth; for as they were then, so they appear to be now — a strikingly existing proof of the Holy Scriptures (Speke 1863, Introduction).

For Speke and others of his time, the idea that 'negroid' races could have the intelligence and development to organise and rule the complex kingdoms being discovered in central Africa was deeply challenging to contemporary theories of white racial superiority. The Hamitic hypothesis resolved this issue by proposing that the ruling groups encountered were migratory descendants of Noah's son Ham. They were thus not truly 'negro', but the lowest rung on the Caucasian ladder (Mamdani 2001, pp. 82, 84). As descendants of Noah's cursed son

Ham, however, they remained (comfortably) inferior to Europeans (Mamdani 2001, pp. 80-87). Speke thus declared the pastoral and ruling groups throughout the region, collectively known as the Wahuma, were “Christians of the greatest antiquity”, despite acknowledging they “lost their religion, forgot their language” and pursued native customs (Speke 1863, ch. 9).

Speke never reached Rwanda, but he came close enough to encounter pastoral Tutsi groups. He noted that the Tutsi were “strictly pastoral” and “in the equatorial regions affect to maintain large kingdoms” (Speke 1864, ch. 4). He declared them to be “emigrants ... of the same [Wahuma] stock” (Speke 1864, ch. 4). The evidence for such deduction was slight and Speke himself noted wide gaps in supporting evidence for this theory. Contradictory evidence was overlooked, or explained away. For Speke, the overriding factor was “the one distinguishing mark, the physical appearance of this remarkable race” (Speke 1863, ch. 9). That the Wahuma had no oral history of such an origin, and a remembered history of coming to the area from the east, rather than the north, was disregarded. So too was the (erroneous) Wahuma belief that Africa formerly belonged to the Europeans and had been taken back by their African allies. Curiously, the common traditional account given by the reigning monarchs of “having once been half white and half black, with hair on the white side straight, and on the black side frizzly”, is perceived as supportive of the hypothesis, despite its fantastical nature (Speke 1863, ch. 9). On this slight evidence, Speke’s theory gained widespread acceptance, and would have a dramatic impact on Rwanda for over a century.

Rwanda was ‘allocated’ to Germany as part of German East Africa at the Berlin conference in 1885, although it was not until 1894 that German Count Gustav Adolf von Götzen became the first European recorded as arriving there. Götzen discovered a complex and highly organised kingdom in central Rwanda (with lessening degrees of control at the periphery). The *Mwami*, the Rwandan king, and a small Tutsi elite ruled over a population of largely agricultural Hutu (84 per cent), pastoral Tutsi (15 per cent) and hunter-gatherer Twa (1 per cent) inhabitants. Following the arrival of the German colonial administration in Rwanda, anthropologists and ethnologists interpreted the physical differences between the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa as racial differences, in line with Speke’s theory, and further developed the Hamitic hypothesis. Where, precisely, the Tutsi came from was the source of much conjecture. Southern Ethiopia and ancient Egypt were commonly proposed, although some of the more bizarre theories suggested India,

Tibet, the lost continent of Atlantis and the Garden of Eden (Prunier 1995, pp. 7-8). Of lasting consequence, however, were the three concepts at the heart of the theory: that the Tutsi were a distinct race, that they were racially superior to the Hutu and Twa, and that they were subjugators of foreign origin. Yet the evidence for any of these tenets remained equivocal.

Impact of the Hamitic Hypothesis on Rwanda's Political Development

The impact of this theory of Rwanda's history was profound. During the colonial period, it led to the institutionalisation of Tutsi dominance and Tutsi privilege throughout the colonial administration. Whereas previously Tutsi had dominated indigenous positions of leadership, under Belgian colonial rule such leadership became almost exclusively Tutsi (Mamdani 2001, p. 91). This denied potential Hutu leaders experiences of leadership that might have prepared them for the postcolonial period. The traditional *ubuletwa* form of clientship was massively expanded into a system of *corvée*, or forced labour, that only the Hutu were required to provide. Whereas Hutu were obligated to provide their labour (without recompense) one or more days each week, Tutsi were free to pursue their usual occupations. In 1933-34 an official census was conducted. Every Rwandan was classified as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, and issued with an identity card that listed the bearer's racial identity. This facilitated the implementation of additional racialised policies. The Tutsi elite, for example, were given preferential access to educational opportunities, and almost exclusive access to post-primary education (Atterbury 1970, p. 20; Adeney 1963, p. 8; Bhattacharyya 1967, pp. 58-59). Even at the primary level discrimination was institutionalised, with Tutsi receiving their education in a separate stream in French, while Hutu received instruction in Kiswahili (Mamdani 2001, pp. 89-90). The lack of post-primary education for Hutu meant that many lacked the skills required to hold leadership and public service roles within the government in the postcolonial period. Church authorities, like the government, internalised the tenets of the Hamitic hypothesis. In an interview in 1935, for example, Neuray quoted Vicar Apostolic Monseigneur Léon Classe as commenting: "Evidently, the Watutsi are not ordinary natives. Superior race, race of chiefs, they constituted an area more propitious than the others for the germination of good seeds" (as cited in Bhattacharyya, 1967, p. 54). For some Hutu, however, Christian teachings germinated a desire for genuine equality.

In the late 1950s, as Rwanda moved towards decolonisation, the institutionalisation of Tutsi racial privilege – based on the Hamitic hypothesis – came to have a very different impact on the nation. An emergent Hutu counter-elite challenged the power and privilege of the Tutsi elite, calling for equal rights and full democracy prior to independence. In response, the incumbent Tutsi leaders “set up a characteristically mythical reinterpretation of the ancient socio-political structure of Rwanda” (D’Hertefelt 1960, p. 122). Emphasis on the Hamitic hypothesis was replaced with a focus upon the cooperation between Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, and the essential feature of Rwandan society was recast as “its homogeneity as a people and a nation” (D’Hertefelt 1960, p. 122; Atterbury 1970, p. 58). The precepts of the Hamitic hypothesis had been heavily internalised, however. When political parties were allowed to form, the Charter of the main Tutsi party, Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR), declared: “Ruandais society is composed of individuals of highly unequal value, and it is not equitable to accord the same value to the vulgar thoughts of the ordinary man as to the perspicacious judgment of the capable” (reproduced in Nkundabagenzi 1961, trans. from Bhattacharyya 1967, p. 248). *Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu* (PARMEHUTU), the main Hutu political party, sought to build support through exploiting racial divisions and focussing on the long history of oppressive Tutsi rule (Bhattacharyya 1967, p. 314; Lemarchand 1966, p. 318). Once again, the Hamitic hypothesis was reinterpreted, and according to the Rwanda analyst René Lemarchand, “The Tutsi ... [were] seen as the Hamitic foreigners who imposed their rule on the unsuspecting Bantu populations by cunning and cruelty, using their cows and beautiful women to bait the Hutu into submission” (2003, p. 158). These processes contributed to the growing possibility of “rejection of the Tutsis as fellow nationals” by Hutu (Bhattacharyya 1967, p. 271).

The heavy focus on race in the decolonisation and democratisation processes, caused by the institutionalisation of race-based policies justified by the Hamitic hypothesis, led to repeated outbreaks of racially-motivated violence. While there is a record of Tutsi oppression and some violent clashes between Hutu and Tutsi in the precolonial period, this violence was on a scale never previously experienced. By the time Rwanda achieved independence in July 1962, under the stewardship of the Hutu-led Kayibanda government, approximately one hundred thousand (mostly Tutsi) refugees had fled the country (Webster 1966, p. 84). Eighteen months later, when a small group of these refugees launched the Bugesera invasion, it evoked deep fears of a

return to Tutsi domination: a replay of the Hamitic tale of Tutsi invasion and oppression (United Nations 1964). Retaliatory massacres swept through the country, and approximately 10-14,000 Tutsi were killed in an unprecedented level of racial violence (Segal 1964, p. 15; Lemarchand 1970, p. 225). Perceptions of Rwanda's history had been a crucial contributing factor to the violence.

Postcolonial Representations of Rwanda's History (1962-1994)

In the postcolonial period, representations of Rwanda's history based on the Hamitic hypothesis continued to deeply impact upon the nation. In some respects this is surprising. In the aftermath of World War Two, the fallacy and dangers of theories of racial supremacy had become widely recognised. The concept of Tutsi racial superiority, one of the three pillars of the Hamitic hypothesis, had been roundly rejected in Rwanda during the decolonisation and democratisation processes. Yet it was not until after the 1994 genocide that the complete fallacy of the Hamitic hypothesis would be widely accepted by Rwanda's political leaders. An analysis of presidential speeches and key government documents in the period between independence in 1962, and the rise of extremism in the early 1990s, reveals ongoing presentations of Rwandan history that were deeply influenced by the Hamitic hypothesis, despite high levels of awareness of the potential for ethnic divisions and interethnic violence in the nation. Presidential speeches and policy documents provide a vital insight into perceptions of Rwanda's history during this period. Both Presidents Kayibanda (1962-73) and Habyarimana (1973-94) held tremendous personal sway as leaders, and there is evidence indicating a clear link between presidential speeches and subsequent policy implementation (Verwimp 1999, p. 3). Yet despite Kayibanda serving as a democratically elected leader, and Habyarimana seizing power in a *coup d'état* and instituting single party rule, they each presented a surprisingly consistent narrative of Rwanda's history, which heavily focussed on aspects of the Hamitic hypothesis.

At the heart of this narrative was the tale of Tutsi invasion and oppression. In 1964, for example, a high-level Kayibanda government publication referred to Rwanda's past leadership as: "[a] racist regime, installed by the Tutsi race during its invasion of the country 400 years ago, [which] has since served to oppress the Hutu population under a heavy, cruel and hopeless yoke" (Rwanda 1964, p. 2). In 1982, Habyarimana recalled the Hamitic hypothesis in discussing Rwanda's history in an interview:

You know that Rwanda is inhabited by three ethnicities: the Hutu, who are of Bantu stock who constitute 85%; the Tutsi, who are of the Hamitic race who constitute 14%; and the Batwa, who are pygmoids, 1%. And since the existence of Rwanda, there was a monarchy. It was the Tutsi, the minority, who had power for about four centuries. (Habyarimana 1982, p. 96).

Even more tellingly, when asked about national unity in 1985, he gave the following reply:

I think that it is necessary that I sketch for you some of the history of Rwanda. Rwanda was a monarchy. It was comprised of three ethnic groups that arrived from another country, and who occupied the territory at different times. The first to arrive, the pygmoids, comprise 1% of the population; the second to arrive, the Hutu, of Bantu stock, are farmers, and represent about 85%; and the last to arrive, the Hamitics, the Tutsi, comprise 14% of the population. By the play of history and political forces, the Tutsi, who are rather in the minority, succeeded in dominating the Hutu for four hundred years. And, in 1959, a social revolution took place (Habyarimana 1985, pp. 194-95).

These presentations of Rwanda's history are heavily focussed on ethnicity, to the exclusion of other aspects of pre-colonial and colonial Rwandan society. It is particularly notable that there is simply no mention of colonial rule within these narratives, despite the huge impact of such rule upon Rwanda.

It is difficult to ascertain the motivations of each President in presenting this selective narrative of Rwandan history. Despite the ostensible focus of both Kayibanda and Habyarimana on national unity, and an emphasis on national rather than ethnic identity, these narratives reinforced the Hamitic concept of the Tutsi as foreign subjugators; overlooked the massive impact of colonialism on race relations in Rwanda; and reinforced the salience of ethnic identity. For both Kayibanda and Habyarimana, however, ethnicity had previously been a crucible around which they had garnered political support in periods of crisis. After the Bugesera invasion, for example, the Kayibanda government experienced resurgence in popular support, as well as reaping the benefits of a largely silenced opposition (Lemarchand 1970, p. 227; United Nations 1964). Habyarimana utilised the issue of

ethnicity to (retrospectively) justify toppling the democratic Kayibanda government and instituting single party rule (see for example Habyarimana 1980, p. 238). While neither wished to focus heavily on ethnicity in times of calm, each sought to maintain the capacity to utilise ethnic discourse as a tool with which to garner support in times of need. This may explain each president's willingness to focus on the Hamitic hypothesis in presenting narratives of Rwanda's history.

The Impact on Rwanda's Political Development

As in the colonial period, the impact of these interpretations of Rwanda's history in the postcolonial period was profound. Both Kayibanda and Habyarimana legitimated a simplistic and dubious interpretation of Rwandan history whereby the Tutsi were seen as non-indigenous oppressors of the Hutu. Continued legitimation of these aspects of the Hamitic hypothesis facilitated perceptions of the Tutsi as an 'outgroup', a group outside the universe of obligation of the dominant group (Fein 1979, p. 9). This is one of the foundational elements of a society at risk of genocide (Fein 1979, p. 9). Additionally, both Presidents contributed to the ongoing politicisation of ethnicity. By presenting a narrative of Rwanda's history that focussed on ethnicity, they legitimated an ongoing focus on ethnic identity. By presenting a narrative that singularly highlighted a history of Tutsi oppression (and ignored the more complex reality of the massive impact of colonialism on intergroup relations in Rwanda and on Rwanda's development more broadly), they legitimated at least some level of ongoing ethnic division. Such politicisation of ethnicity, however, has also been clearly identified as a risk factor that can increase the risk of genocide (Mayersen 2010).

Perceptions of the Tutsi minority as 'outsiders' or 'foreign subjugators' were undoubtedly a contributing factor to the unwillingness of both the Kayibanda and Habyarimana governments to address the refugee problem. At the time of independence, approximately 100,000 Rwandan (mostly Tutsi) refugees were scattered in neighbouring countries; by 1964 the figure had risen to 336,000 (Webster 1966, p. 84; Sayinzoga 1982, p. 51). Refugees who wished to return to Rwanda were often far from welcome. President Kayibanda, for example, even when promoting national unity, skilfully excluded refugees in his speech on the occasion of the New Year in 1963: "We want fraternal understanding based on justice between the different social groups, races and ideologies which are on Rwandan soil" (Kayibanda 1963, p. 25). After the massacres following the Bugesera invasion, however, the Kayibanda government sought assistance from the United Nations to

address the refugee issue (Rwanda 1964, pp. 29-30). There was no effective response to this request. Under Habyarimana, the refugee issue continued to simmer as the regime refused to allow a right of return. In 1980, for example, Habyarimana responded to an interview question on the issue: "Each square metre [of Rwanda] is occupied, we have the highest density in Africa on increasingly diminished arable lands, we therefore cannot bring back all these refugees so that they [can] settle in Rwanda" (Habyarimana 1980, p. 223). (While Rwanda did face ecological pressures, they did not stop Habyarimana encouraging large families and discouraging family planning during this period, however.) In 1983, he responded to a similar question by remarking "he who is Rwandan is one who has a Rwandan identity card", again refusing to recognise the complexities of the issue (Habyarimana 1983, p. 24). In frustration at their continued ostracisation, it was second generation Tutsi refugees in Uganda that formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), invading Rwanda and triggering civil war in 1990. The RPF invasion was a crucial component in the cascade of events that led to the 1994 genocide, yet it might easily have been averted had genuine attempts been made to deal with the refugee issue.

Ultimately, the representations of history in Rwanda associated with the Hamitic hypothesis were a significant contributing factor to the 1994 genocide. This can be evidenced through the propaganda that became virulent in the country as extremist forces gained power in the early 1990s. The RPF and Tutsi were pitted as foreign and feudal oppressors, seeking to 'return' Rwanda to a state of Tutsi dominance and Hutu oppression (Des Forges 1999, p. 73). According to Lemarchand:

What emerges from [extremist propaganda] is an image of the Tutsi as both alien and clever – not unlike the image of the Jews in Nazi propaganda. His alienness disqualifies him as a member of the national community; his cleverness turns him into a permanent threat to the unsuspecting Hutu. Nothing short of physical liquidation can properly deal with such danger (1995, p. 62).

In November 1992 Hutu extremist Léon Mugesera (who had close ties with Habyarimana) gave a speech in Gisenyi where he concluded that: "the fatal error we made in 1959 was to let them [the Tutsi] leave the country. Their home is Ethiopia, and we are going to find them a shortcut, namely the Nyabarongo River. I must insist on this point. We must act forcefully! Get rid of them!" (as cited in Twagilimana, 2003, p.

106). Indeed, when the genocide did take place, tens of thousands of Rwandans' dead bodies were dumped in the Nyaborongo river (Hintjens 1999, p. 255). The role of the Hamitic hypothesis in contributing to the propaganda that sought to justify the genocide is clear.

Representations of the Rwandan genocide

In the period subsequent to the Rwanda genocide, the fallacy of the Hamitic hypothesis has been widely recognised. So too has the role of Belgian colonial rule in imposing this interpretation of Rwanda's history on the nation, and in implementing policies that institutionalised its dangerous precepts. In the post-genocide period in Rwanda there has been deep reflection on the nation's history, rejection of previously accepted narratives and a recognition of the dangers of externally-imposed narratives. Yet while many points of discontinuity can be charted in representations of Rwanda's history in the pre- and post-genocide periods, in the final section of this article I highlight a disturbing example of continuity. In this case, I analyse an official publication of the ICTR, *100 Days in the Land of the Thousand Hills*, which presents a selective account of the genocide in Rwanda. Moreover, as an ICTR publication, *100 Days* has the potential to have a wide impact, and be interpreted as an impartial account of the genocide. *100 Days in the Land of the Thousand Hills* is an English language graphic novel¹ published in 2011 by the external relations office of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, based in Arusha, Tanzania. Designed to "facilitate the understanding of young people in the region" about the genocide, its target audience is children eight years and above (ICTR 2011, pp. 4, 6). The graphic novel recounts the events leading up to, during, and following the Rwandan genocide in 46 A4 full colour pages. It moves between two interrelated narratives, presenting events that occurred at a national level interspersed with the stories of two Rwandan children – one Hutu and one Tutsi – as they experience and ultimately survive the genocide. Events are represented not just through the text, but with the aid of the accompanying illustrations, which sometimes tell a story of their own.

From the first reading, it is clear that *100 Days* has made a genuine attempt to present a relatively detailed account of the events of the genocide. The reader develops a strong sense of the propaganda of the period, and the chaos and confusion during the genocide. We witness

¹ The term graphic novel is typically employed to describe both fiction and non-fiction books that adopt this format.

the flight of the two leading protagonists and their families, their attempts to reach safe havens, and then feel the closing net of the perpetrators as these seemingly safe locations are overrun by *genocidaires*. The reader is drawn into the desperate struggle of Kagabo, Françoise and their families as the narrative presents the genocide from the perspective of its victims. There is no happy ending; while both the children survive the genocide through an extraordinary turn of events, they are both orphaned in the process. The personal narrative creates empathy for those targeted in the genocide, contributing to the document's goal of promoting genocide prevention through educating youth (ICTR 2011, p. 4).

For all that it does convey, however, *100 days* is also notable for its selectivity. The most egregious omission is the absence of any reference to the inaction of the United Nations and international community as the genocide took place. The role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) is presented in a manner which minimises reference to its withdrawal. At the outbreak of the genocide, *100 days* recounts, UNAMIR attempted to protect the Rwandan Prime Minister. "The UN troops encounter many roadblocks", the reader is told, "and have to plead to be allowed to continue" (ICTR 2011, p. 16). But this seeming bravery is in vain, as soldiers from the Presidential Guard disarm the UN soldiers at the Prime Minister's compound, killing the ten Belgian soldiers. Shortly thereafter, another cell depicts "A detachment of Belgian UN troops" stationed outside the *Ecole Technique Officielle*, a secondary school where many took refuge in the initial days of the genocide (ICTR 2011, p. 19). A close-up presents a violent argument between a militia soldier and a UN soldier, as the UN soldier pleads on behalf of the refugees. Next, however, we see only retreating vehicles as a caption informs: "Immediately after the departure of the Belgians, *interahamwe* militiamen enter the school" (ICTR 2011, p. 20). While earlier references to UNAMIR identify the soldiers as 'UN troops' and 'Belgian UN troops', in this cell it is 'the Belgians' who depart. The UN signage on the vehicles, large and obvious in earlier cells, is now small and indistinct. There is no explanation provided for the withdrawal, and the narrative quickly moves to new events. The silence surrounding the reason for the UN withdrawal, and around the absence of the international community during the genocide, is in stark contrast to the detailed presentation of other aspects of the genocide.

There is no representation of Rwanda in the post-genocide period. Time in *100 days* is compressed; disjointed; sometimes out of sequence,

and the post-genocide period disappears in this structure. From 17 July 1994 (when the RPF consolidates control over all Rwanda, bringing the genocide to an end), the text immediately jumps to the ICTR. There is no discussion of Rwanda's attempts to rebuild as a nation, no mention of transitional justice processes in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide. Rather, on the final two-page spread of the narrative a group of school children are visiting the ICTR (ICTR 2011, pp. 52-53). There, they learn that the tribunal has jailed many of the leading perpetrators for their role in the genocide. In this way, it is the ICTR that provides closure in the post-genocide period. The final sentence of the narrative informs the reader, "There can be no peace without some form of justice for the victims of the genocide in Rwanda" (ICTR 2011, p. 53). Yet the voices of Rwandans in this process are as unheard as that of the school children carefully instructed "to be silent at all times" in the court room (ICTR 2011, p. 52).

These narrative choices potentially facilitate a much more positive view of the role of the UN and international community during and after the genocide than might otherwise be justified. The culpability of the UN in abandoning refugees at the *Ecole Technique Officielle*, who were subsequently massacred, is not addressed. The Security Council decision to withdraw UNAMIR, even as the genocide progressed, has been recognised by the UN itself as an institutional failure, of profound consequence for the progression of the genocide, yet there is only an oblique reference to these events (UN 1999, p. 3). In the aftermath of the genocide, the ICTR is painted in a wholly positive light, as the vehicle through which Rwandans might obtain a measure of justice, closure and 'peace'. Yet the very substantial indigenous endeavours towards these ends are not mentioned. To the reader, this implies that it is only the ICTR that can provide these positive benefits.

The Impact of *100 Days*

It is difficult to assess the impact of *100 days*. Published in 2011, it currently appears to be available only in English. English is an official language in Rwanda, however it is estimated that only four per cent of the population speak it (Steflja 2012). This severely curbs the document's ability to reach Rwandan children and youth. Other countries in the region, including Tanzania where the ICTR is located, have somewhat higher English literacy levels, although language remains a barrier. Nevertheless, this is a document with the potential to have a large impact on how the genocide is understood in the region. The document offers access to a free, seemingly independent source of

information about the events of the genocide in Rwanda, from a source with a high degree of credibility. It is likely to be interpreted as providing an authentic statement on Rwanda's past. Yet just like the Hamitic hypothesis, it is an externally imposed interpretation of Rwanda's history. Moreover, the manner in which the role of the international community is represented – and not represented – suggests that political factors have influenced the content of *100 Days*. According to the introductory remarks in the document, it is designed to contribute to genocide prevention efforts (ICTR 2011, p. 4). From an international perspective, however, one of the most important lessons that can be learned from the genocide concerns the role of the international community. The failure of the UN and of international political will to intervene in the genocide has been well documented. By omitting this from the narrative, *100 Days* may gloss over international culpability during the genocide, but it does so at the cost of learning one of the most important lessons from this terrible event.

Conclusion

Rwanda has been subject to externally imposed, partial representations of its history since the earliest days of European influence there. The endeavours to understand, interpret and represent Rwanda's past, as I have analysed in this article, were not undertaken with overtly malign intent, but were influenced by a range of political motivations. For Speke and other colonial ethnologists, evidence of Rwanda's history was interpreted to align with pre-existing theories that upheld contemporary notions of the superiority of white civilisations. In the postcolonial period, opportunities to move beyond the discredited Hamitic hypothesis and embrace a unified national identity in Rwanda gave way to representations of Rwandan history that continued to be motivated by factors other than increasing knowledge about the past. The impact of these representations was ultimately catastrophic. In the post-genocide period, the Rwandan government has made extensive (although not always uncontroversial) efforts to memorialise the genocide, to learn lessons for future genocide prevention and to promote national reconciliation. While the ICTR has undoubtedly contributed to these processes, *100 Days* demonstrates the ongoing politicisation of Rwanda's history. The potential negative impact of such politically motivated representations is very real. This article highlights the need for greater cognisance of the potential power of historical narratives, in Rwanda and more broadly.

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