

# Body politics and the Rwandan crisis

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**ABSTRACT** *Since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, scholars and policy think-tanks have produced an impressive number of macro-level studies and theories to explain the seemingly inexplicable: how and why did this happen? Yet these studies, most often based on ethnic and/or global level analyses, tend to simplify complex social relations at the local level which likewise contributed to the genocide. This article examines ‘micro-level’ testimonial evidence collected in human rights reports to shed light on one particularly under-theorised realm and approach, that of gender and the politics of the body. I suggest that the 1994 genocide was an extreme attempt not only to purge the ‘Hutu nation’ of the Tutsi, but also to actively engender a vision of the ‘Hutu nation’ in the minds of an otherwise diverse and fragmented local populace. Women’s bodies, gender and sexuality became highly contested terrains for scripting this vision of an imagined nation.*

It is the human body that serves as the ultimate tablet upon which the dictates of the state are inscribed.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, academics and policy think-tanks have produced an impressive number of macro-level studies and theories to explain the seemingly inexplicable: *how and why did this happen?*<sup>2</sup> Up to 800 000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu murdered in just three months. Parallel to this literature, journalists and human rights groups have documented in meticulous detail the specifics of the genocide: who was involved, what was their plan and how this plan was implemented.<sup>3</sup> These literatures are less than theoretical, but they are rich in ‘micro-level’ empirical evidence. It is therefore surprising that a lacuna exists between the macro-level theoretical scholarship and the ‘details of the genocide as a series of acts of violence’.<sup>4</sup>

Still fewer analyses examine the genocide in terms of a gendered, nation-building process,<sup>5</sup> inscribed on the physical body,<sup>6</sup> despite the visceral role of bodies in any narrative of genocide. As a result, certain acts remain under-theorised, such as why Hutu extremists raped and murdered women—persons historically conceptualised as ‘sexed’ and not ‘ethnicised’ in Rwandan nationalist discourses. Together, these gaps point to under-analysed realms of genocidal violence in Rwanda—that of the body and the private sphere (the home, the

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family). Yet in tracing the interconnections between the public and private spheres, we might begin to understand the genocide as a strategic attempt to ‘link or articulate individual bodies with the body politic’.<sup>7</sup>

This article strives to open debate on these gaps in the literature. I suggest that Hutu extremism was inscribed so violently on the bodies of an imagined enemy in order to fuse an ‘imagined’ Hutu nation in the minds of an otherwise regionally and class-divided Hutu populace. Entering the realm of the familiar and personal, and likening it to the national, Hutu extremists sought to smash any ambiguity of local identities and create a unified, national collective identity. The private sphere became a central site of nation building, manifest in the reproductive and sexual control of women’s bodies, and graphic murder of both men and women. By starting here, we might begin to map some linkages between the personal and macro-political in Rwanda.

The article unfolds in three parts. In the first, I draw from and expand upon Mahmood Mamdani’s attempts to problematise and historicise the Rwandan nation state.<sup>8</sup> I map the historical evolution of extremist Hutu nationalist discourses, starting in the colonial period when one’s biological ‘race’ determined citizenship. Mamdani argues that this later idea was institutionalised in the apparatus of the postcolonial state to justify the ‘purging’ and repression of Tutsi. While Hutu extremists rejected the idea that the Tutsi were a superior race, there is evidence today that much of Hutu inferiority was internalised. I therefore explore how extremist Hutu nationalist imagining took place both within and outside formal structures, to operate at the level of the physical body, inscribed in gendered and racial meanings.

Second, using descriptive materials available, I examine the radicalisation of Hutu nationalism at the onset of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invasion of Rwanda in October 1990. The physical body was a site of cementing national imaginings—where women were controlled as sexual and cultural markers of national boundaries, and where dissidents’ murdered bodies relayed to the populace that the single-party Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) state was the only legitimate protector of the Hutu nation. Finally, I analyse the strategy, patterns and types of violent acts employed during the genocide, drawing on the ‘micro-level’ empirical evidence provided in human rights accounts. Here is perhaps the most tragic but rich evidence of how power operates at the personal and political level of the body towards nationalist aspirations. I end the article by problematising the oppositional constructs reproduced by Hutu and Tutsi extremists, and in some academic literatures and media in the postcolonial period, and consider the potential for thinking past these binary oppositions.

### **Historicising Rwandan ‘nations’**

Perhaps in a country that has no seeming unity, that is so bitterly divided, it seems odd to speak of nationalism as a discursive mode driving violent, genocidal acts. Yet Rwandan nationalism is very much alive within competing, contradictory Hutu and Tutsi meta-narratives regarding the origins of the two ‘ethnicities’, and more recently, over the origins and causes of the genocide.

These competing sets of explanatory frameworks are productive fictions, with very real material costs.

Mamdani contends that the main difference between Hutu and Tutsi is first and foremost a political one rooted in the legacies of the colonial state. He makes a compelling argument that, in Rwanda, politics have been racialised, and race politicised. The coloniser, having 'found' a sophisticated kingdom in Rwanda,<sup>9</sup> wherein Tutsi held high-level rank in military and political life, drew on the Hamitic hypothesis to explain socioeconomic relations in the region.<sup>10</sup> Later, the observation that the Tutsi were foreign-born and more like Caucasians than the inferior 'native' Hutu was reinforced by race sciences popular in the day. Instruments were used to measure skull sizes (supposedly measuring intelligence), height and bone structure. On this basis, the Belgian colonialists issued the first 'ethnic' identity cards in Rwanda in 1926, and distinctions based on ethnicity became rigid and static, and located in the body.

Belgian colonialists indirectly ruled Rwanda through the Tutsi, entrusted with the power of the state and the military. The racialisation of politics afforded Tutsi privileges associated with being of a more 'worthy' biological race, such as the ability to escape hard labour paid to the state—a task reserved for Hutu and the minority Twa, the third 'ethnic' group in Rwanda whom the colonialists considered 'wild' and less evolved because of their small physical size and economic life of foraging in the forests.<sup>11</sup> In a word, the colonial period inscribed the body as a site of political identity and belonging to historical nations. These biases were likewise upheld by the hierarchical Catholic church popular in Rwanda during the colonial period.

The mass popular movement towards independence beginning in the late 1950s challenged Tutsi privilege and colonial power. To consolidate the growing Hutu social movement towards 'equality', Hutu intellectuals reproduced colonial histories of the 'alien' Tutsi and 'indigenous' Hutu. They sought retributive policies to ensure Hutu access to the economic, political and social realm, and to check Tutsi access to resources. In essence, the Hutu social movement that culminated in independence in 1961, and was consolidated with elections in 1963, was one that sought to eject both the colonialists and the Tutsi from a native Hutu nation.<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church, in the meantime, had switched 'sides' even before colonialists and was now fully supportive of the Hutu social movement.

The Tutsi elite contested, and has continued to contest, this view of Rwandan relations. It pointed to cultural and historical commonalities between Hutu and Tutsi, and argued that any differences were solely socioeconomic. Colonialists distorted traditional socioeconomic relations between the two groups through race analysis. Thus, the central opposition between Hutu and Tutsi is grounded in a common preoccupation with origins. These oppositional narratives were institutionalised in the postcolonial state, and continued to reproduce 'racialised' and politicised bodies.

Independence for Rwandans was not only a struggle over legitimate claims to the state but also over citizenship, and therefore access to resources. The Hutu social revolution attempted to push out Tutsi from institutionalised positions of privilege. They did so with force, leading to mass exile of Tutsi elite in the 1950s

and 1960s and the repression of ‘moderate’ Hutu opposition parties. Eventually, the one party state—first under the control of Southern and then Northern Hutu—claimed to be the only official protector of the Hutu revolution.

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

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

The Hutu nation was ‘produced’ in social spaces, including in the private sphere and in the location of the female body, most highly valued by the ability to reproduce children. Motherhood is a critical social identity and esteemed status for Rwandan women. At a symbolic level, a woman’s fertility in Rwanda is culturally intertwined with her bodily fluids—her ability to bleed (menstruation), to secrete vaginal fluid, and to produce milk. Taylor, in his work as a medical anthropologist in Rwanda, argues that Rwandan women draw analogies between illness located in their bodies (such as infertility, inability to lactate, and so on) and other domains in their social life such as their husband, in-laws or Hutu and Tutsi in their community and country. Using an example, he retells the story of a patient attempting to pass roadblocks erected to obstruct fleeing Tutsi in 1973, on the way to hospital to deliver a child prematurely. She claimed that her in-laws, sorcerers, had poisoned her. The roadblocks were part of this magic. ‘Her narrative moves from the body, to the household, to the extended family, to the nation in a seamless series of symbolically logical leaps, for all are posed in terms of bodily and social processes whose movements or obstruction are cause for concern.’<sup>13</sup>

While Taylor explores how Rwandan rituals and symbols echo in the nation, he does not explore how politically these socially defined roles attempted to discipline women’s sexuality and behaviour for the good of the nation. Historically, women in Rwanda have on average nine children. Relegated to the domestic sphere, rural Rwandan women are responsible for care and management of the home, children and local agriculture crops.<sup>14</sup> Their interaction with the state or market is regulated and limited by their fathers or husbands. As such, women are the primary biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. This fact was not lost on nationalists.

Women tend to mark the ‘inner’ sanctum of a nation, what is natural and pure, what is to be protected from pollutants exterior to the nation. ‘As bearers of a

country's sacred values and—literally—of its children, women are often constructed as the authentic, inner country whose purity, sexuality, and traditional roles must be secured'.<sup>15</sup> According to Hutu nationalists in the struggle for independence, both the colonialists and Tutsi constituted the 'outer' boundary to the Hutu nation. This marking played out on women's bodies and sexual practices.

For instance, while many refer to the high level of 'mixed' marriages before the Rwandan genocide, only 1% of such marriages were unions of Hutu women and Tutsi men. In pre-colonial and early colonial days, when ethnic identities were less static, wealthier Hutu could marry Tutsi women as a means of social advancement. This practice was referred to as *kwihtura*, 'to cease being Hutu, to become Tutsi'.<sup>16</sup> Children would then be considered Tutsi. After independence, this marital practice continued, although children were subsequently considered Hutu, not Tutsi.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Hutu women continued to protect the 'racial purity' of the Hutu nation, and were refused marriages to Tutsi men by their fathers.

Finally, the state, community and family were highly dependent upon women to carry out free labour, and to reproduce the population. Social control was maintained by regulating sexuality, in addition to denial of basic citizenship rights—such as land ownership. To control women's (economic and agricultural surplus), for example, varying modes of discipline operate. Villia Jeffremovas identifies one pervasive mode as 'the language of public morality' regarding women's sexuality.<sup>18</sup> Women could participate in the public sphere, but only so long as they did not challenge or jeopardise their role as mothers. Thus 'virtuous' wives were given room in the public sphere to participate but when their participation threatened men or contradicted concepts of atavistic women, they were often forced out by being labelled 'loose'.<sup>19</sup> Rules of sexuality were reinforced by the Catholic Church, to which the majority of Rwandans subscribed. Family planning and abortion were both illegal.

The construction of the postcolonial Hutu nation dialogically competes with that of the imagined Tutsi nation. As a result, for either radical Hutu or Tutsi, 'no other political reality was more definitive than that of the other'.<sup>20</sup> These imaginings centre on the question of origins and lead to divergent interpretations of who has access to resources and claims to citizenship within the nation. They are scripted on the body and, as will be demonstrated through an analysis of the conflict and genocide, this scripting is a process both violent and gendered. It entered into the most personal realm when Hutu extremists were most threatened by loss of power to both the external other and internal opposition.

### **Radicalization of Hutu nationalism, 1980–94**

Factors leading up to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 are by now well known and documented, if contested. These include the onset of the conflict with the RPF invasion in October 1990, the economic recession and hardship of structural adjustment programmes, mass displacement because of the war and unemployment, the radicalisation of Northern Hutu power politics in response to the perceived threats by the RPF (and as negotiated in the 1993 Arusha Agreements),

pluralisation of opposition parties under the slow process of democratic liberalisation and finally, international failure to intervene effectively to stop the genocide. I recognise that these factors all played critical and coincidental roles, but seek to understand how power operated outside these structural factors, at the level of social relations and roles; that is, at the ‘modal’ level, the level of the body and the personal and in the realm of the private sphere.

The economic downturn had devastating impacts on young boys and men, who comprised at least 30% of the population.<sup>21</sup> This situation was compounded by the mass internal displacement of Rwandans during the conflict—one out of seven fled advancing RPF forces. As a result gender relations among rural youth were disrupted:

Youths faced a situation where many (perhaps most) had no land, no jobs, little education, and no hope for the future. It was increasingly difficult for young men to acquire the wherewithal to get married; hence, the path to social adulthood was blocked since the minimum legal requirement for marriage was that a young man have a house where he and his bride could live.<sup>22</sup>

By 1993 Hutu extremists—largely Northern elite Hutu, disgruntled politicians and military officers—had recruited between 30 000 and 50 000 displaced and unemployed boys and young men to join the Interahamwe, ‘those who work/attack together’, the youth wing of the dominant political party which later formed the basis of the militias that carried out the genocide. Hutu Power warned Hutu men that their land would be confiscated by returning refugees under the Arusha Peace Accords, and urged them to take up arms to protect their indigenous claim to Rwandan land.<sup>23</sup>

While generally Tutsi men were blamed for loss of employment, educated, urban and single women with respectable employment increasingly became the target for gender-specific attacks, particularly in Kigali, where Tutsi women were accused of ‘tricking’ employers into hiring them.<sup>24</sup> Policing a different kind of boundary, codes of morality regarding sexual practices were evoked. Single urban Tutsi women were incarcerated for looking ‘too stylish’ (Western) or having European boyfriends, who were considered to be sexually perverse. The Rwandan Catholic Church, closely aligned with the Hutu president, Habyarimana, helped police women’s bodies by banning contraceptives and becoming increasingly vitriolic on morality and sexual behaviour in this largely Catholic country. By attacking women in this way, extremists reinforced boundaries of the Hutu nation, reproductive and cultural. ‘Because for male nationalists, women serve as the visible markers of national homogeneity, they become subjected to especially vigilant and violent discipline. Hence the intense emotive politics of dress.’<sup>25</sup>

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

Women are seen as the ‘mothers’ of the country’ and therefore their sexuality is heavily monitored and controlled by the state to preserve the ‘purity’ of the nation.

Governments that are attempting to unite a country against a former colonial ruler often use women to represent the 'true' and 'authentic' nation, untouched by imperial powers, and therefore their sexuality is controlled in order to secure national 'purity'. In these cases, no form of 'deviant' sexuality for women is tolerated.<sup>26</sup>

Hutu women were called upon to protect the home, and the home became a central site of contestation over the nation. As the national anthem indicates, the nation was feminine, and its citizens male: 'My Rwanda, land that gave me birth ... Brothers all, sons of this Rwanda ours, Come, rise up all of you, Let us Cherish her'.<sup>27</sup> The economic crisis and internal regional challenges to the power of the Northern elite,<sup>28</sup> led by the *Akazu*, spurred on anti-Tutsi discourse as a means of diverting attention from class and geographic tensions in the country. Hutu were required to unite to protect the nation from foreign invaders, and internal enemies: male Hutu dissidents and their female Tutsi conspirators.

The *Hutu Power Ten Commandments*, widely distributed before the genocide, spoke primarily to Hutu men to protect the boundaries of home and nation. Central to its protection was regulation of men's sexual practices, and the casting of Tutsi women as sexual predators. 'Tutsi sold their wives and daughters to the Hutu authorities. Tutsis tried to marry their wives to Hutu elite in order to have spies in the inner circle'. And '3. Hutus must know that the Tutsi wife wherever she may be is serving the Tutsi ethnic group. In consequence, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor: a) Acquires a Tutsi wife; b) Acquires a Tutsi concubine; c) Acquires a Tutsi secretary protégé'.<sup>29</sup> Not only is the Tutsi demonised here, but so too is the Hutu man who betrays his nation.

Hate literature also played on moral codes of sexual conduct. The extremist magazine *Kangura* (Wake Up!) ridiculed UN peacekeepers, perceived to be sympathetic to the RPF, for their gullibility to Tutsi women. For example, General Dallaire was depicted with two Tutsi women and the caption, 'Tutsi women, the reason why whites took the side of the FPR' and peacekeepers were portrayed as engaging in sexually taboo acts with Tutsi women.<sup>30</sup> Agathe Uwilingiyimana, vice president of the transitional government, was shown in bed with a senior political figure, suggesting that she slept her way to the top. In this instance, Hutu male insecurity, is revealed: 'Uwiringiyimana threatened the regime as an anti-ethnicist, a southerner, and as a highly educated and articulate person, but the fact that she was also a woman potentiated all these factors'.<sup>31</sup>

With the onset of the conflict, the state had named and identified local Tutsi as the enemy of the Hutu nation, drawing on racial stereotypes that Tutsi were intelligent and tricky, thus they would innately betray the Hutu. Tens of thousands of men, mainly Tutsi, were rounded up and placed in prisons, suspected of treason.<sup>32</sup> Extensive lists of opposition and Tutsi were fastidiously drawn up. Others were massacred in Northern Rwanda—perhaps to prepare Hutu militias for the planned genocide to come. Repeatedly, the biological difference of the Tutsi was referred to, despite the ambiguity of Hutu–Tutsi physical differences.

The inner and outer sanctum sharply separated those who 'belonged' to the nation from those who threatened it. Here, Hutu opposition and dissenters were almost constructed as far more insidious than the local Tutsi. Simon Bikindi—

Rwanda's most popular pop singer, composed a song that would play repetitiously throughout the genocide: 'I hate these Hutu, these de-Hutuized Hutus, who have renounced their identity'. In other words, Hutu who did not ascribe in an absolute sense to Hutu Power were enemies of the nation, and worthy targets of hate and violence.

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

### **The Genocide, April–July 1994**

In contrast to the totalizing claims of proponents of the Hutu or Tutsi nation, the Rwandan people enter the national imagination incomplete. They intermarry. They live side by side. They are friends and lovers. Both are poor. Both are professionals. They are both subjects of a postcolonial, centralised state.

Knowing this, and witnessing both endo- and exogenous challenges to their power, the *Akazu* and Hutu militants had become extremely vulnerable indeed by late 1993. The successive murders of the first Hutu Burundian Prime Minister Melchior Ndadaye in 1993<sup>33</sup> and then President Habyarimana in 1994 provided the catalyst to, and perceived rationale for, unfolding the genocidal plan and finally uniting the country around a single Hutu national identity. To do so, Hutu extremists battled it out in the territory of the domestic space (the home, the church) and personal relations (wives, husbands, children, neighbours, parishioners, patients, and so on). Therefore, the genocide was not only political as Mamdani suggests, but it was also intensely personal. It required the spilling of blood by every 'pure' Hutu. As Mamdani himself writes of a Hutu man reluctant to participate in the killings, 'after killing [his Tutsi] wife, he became a convert'.<sup>34</sup>

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

At these roadblocks, male Hutu were obliged to prove their loyalty to the nation. Ethnicity cards were used to identify Tutsi for massacre. When such cards were 'lost', judgements were often made by one's physical attributes.<sup>35</sup> Reports document that after years of intermarriage, many Hutu were killed for their Tutsi features and conversely, some Tutsi were spared because they didn't *look* Tutsi.<sup>36</sup>



Roadblocks ensured the systematic regulation of people fleeing, including ordinary Hutu seeking to escape the bloodshed. Yet they also became areas where ‘rites of passage’ of Hutu into the imagined Hutu nation took place. Local men were forced to ‘man’ the roadblocks and kill to prove their loyalty. Other Hutu fleeing the violence were forced to first kill Tutsi before they were allowed to pass through. Taylor argues that this macabre act was a means of passing guilt from executioners to the populace as a whole. To re-imagine the nation, the limits and foundations of the old order—including moral codes—were violently transgressed.

For instance, Tutsi corpses were often left unburied and exposed to the sun, a deep cultural insult. Horrified neighbours who attempted to cover corpses were sometimes murdered themselves for this act. Many accounts of the genocide tell with horror of dogs eating the corpses of the dead—again, a symbolically powerful message to the living. Women and men were encouraged to loot the possessions of the dead, including picking through the clothing of the dead. Bodies were dumped into latrines, an obvious message that the Tutsi and Hutu traitors were excrement.

The bodies of the naked and dead reveal the psychosis of Fanon’s envious ‘native’ and internalised inferiority.<sup>37</sup> As Taylor concludes, colonialism ‘is in the hearts and minds of every ethnic extremist, every Tutsi and Hutu and Twa, who imagines him or herself superior or who feels the need through the force of arms to overcome an imagined inferiority’.<sup>38</sup> The imaging of a Hutu nation *was* evoked and deepened with each act of violence. Fanon refers to the colonisation of the mind and internalisation of inferiority that persists long after colonial powers have physically left. Acts throughout the genocide expose this internalisation of Hutu inferiority, and internal struggle against it.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the violent acts of those 100 days of horror cannot be explained in relation to colonial legacies and elite manipulation of racist national ideas alone. Documentation also points to a gendered pattern to the violence.<sup>40</sup> Tutsi men and boys, including male infants, were among the first to be killed, along with Hutu opponents. The rationale was that men were most likely to be aligned with the RPF. Tutsi boys, even newborn babies, represented the future enemy. As Desforges brusquely wrote: ‘This explanation, voiced uniformly throughout the country, carried the idea of “self-defence” to its logically absurd and genocidal end’.<sup>41</sup>

Women and girls were ‘spared’ until the final stages of the genocide, initially on the grounds that they posed no threat. ‘Sex has no ethnicity’, one killer told a Tutsi woman in Gikongoro.<sup>42</sup> But by mid-May, after most men and boys had been killed, national organisers of the genocide argued that it was necessary to kill women and girls too, based on the idea that Tutsi women reproduced the alien other. As Mamdani writes, ‘killings came to be referred to as *umuganda* (communal work), chopping up men as “bush clearing” and slaughtering women and children as “pulling out the roots of the bad weeds”’.<sup>43</sup>

Before death, it is estimated that most women were raped. Higher-level officials often ordered rape.<sup>44</sup> Women were raped individually and in collective gang rapes. This act may have been a form of ‘initiation’ of Hutu men to the nation, but it was also arguably an insidious means of extending humiliation

to the entire family related to the woman, and ensuring that reproduction was terminated. In Rwanda, as elsewhere, rape carries an enormous social stigma, and women are often rejected by their families after rape. Rapes were intended to prolong suffering, and destroy the root of the Tutsi family: 'rape sets in motion continuous suffering and extreme humiliation that affects not just the individual victim but everyone around them'.<sup>45</sup> In repeated accounts and testimonies, women expressed shock at this transgression of motherhood: 'try to imagine a mother raped by young boys'.<sup>46</sup>

Stigmatised and stripped of the opportunity for motherhood, many survivors described their life as 'a living death'.<sup>47</sup> For too many, infection with HIV following rape will in fact lead to a slow death. Hutu extremists reportedly intentionally forced carriers of HIV to rape. In this way, HIV becomes a form of 'biological warfare' to annihilate 'the procreators' and ensure 'the killing continues and endures' past generations.<sup>48</sup>

While rape was both a political strategic tool to torture, demoralise and humiliate the 'enemy', it also reflected a complex set of gender relations engendered in the identity of some Hutu men, both privileged and poor.<sup>49</sup> Tutsi woman was constructed as more beautiful than the Hutu woman in colonial discourse. She was thus something to be coveted and desired. Like Fanon's native reaching for the 'settler's wife', Tutsi wives were a symbol of status, of 'having arrived'. Intermarriages between Hutu men and Tutsi women then, and the sexual taboos around sexual relations between the two, played out powerfully during the conflict and genocide, for they were a central site of smashing ambiguity toward the idea of a racially pure Hutu nation.

'Stereotypes...portrayed Tutsi women as being arrogant and looking down on Hutu men whom they considered ugly and inferior'. Rape was used to remind Tutsi women of their proper place, in subservience to Hutu men. Propaganda continued to feed the idea that Tutsi women thought themselves beautiful and better than Hutu men. Before, during and after rape, militias repeatedly referred to the arrogance of Tutsi women. Recounting the words of her rapist, one survivor said that: 'If there were peace, you would never accept me', and another recalled his words of 'You Tutsi think you are too good for us'.<sup>50</sup>

The complexity of male hierarchical relations in Rwanda was manifest perversely in this strategy of mass rape. Men in the lowest ranks were often forcibly compelled to rape Tutsi women. Women who were gang raped were often 'given' to men 'unwashed and dressed in rags', or to the Twa, considered biologically inferior. In the context of Rwandan social relations, rape by men perceived to be of an inferior race 'was intended as a humiliation' to Tutsi women, but also reflected a belittling of men by men.

Women were often raped in public places,<sup>51</sup> or made to march naked through public places. Rape victims were mutilated, often with spikes inserted into their vagina, at times fully impaling the victim and causing death. Such gender-based forms of torture, including rape, inscribed 'Hutu-ness' and reaffirmed Tutsi difference: 'Rape in warfare does not simply constitute attacks on already formed nations and women/men...[The] productive power of rape is that it forms and reinforces national and gendered identity. While wartime rapes on one level serve to destroy the nation, at another level, they simultaneously inscribe the nation

they aim to erase'.<sup>52</sup> This productive power of rape and violence is revealed in the testimonies of many rural Rwandans, who stated that before the genocide, they did not even *know* that they were either Hutu or Tutsi. The genocide aimed to erase this ambiguity.

A puzzle of the genocide was the number of Hutu militiamen who had wives or mistresses that were Tutsi, and protected them throughout the genocide. By May, all mixed marriages were decreed to produce 'Tutsi children', regardless of Hutu fathers and therefore Hutu men were called upon to kill their wives and children. In some cases they did so to protect their own lives. Yet Hutu militia continued to 'take' Tutsi 'wives'<sup>53</sup> up until and past this point. Documentation also points to a fascination with the female Tutsi body, and reveals that, biologically, many believed Tutsi were 'different'. Thus, remarks about the 'taste' of Tutsi and acts to 'see the inside' of Tutsi are recorded.

There are numerous accounts of Hutu men offering 'protection' to Tutsi women in exchange for 'marriage', or rape. At times this was with viciousness, 'You Tutsi women, you have no respect for Hutu men. So now, choose between death and marriage to a Hutu *Interahamwe*'.<sup>54</sup> In other instances, it was a sadistic sense of peer pressure to enforce norms of heterosexuality and masculinity, 'the old woman continued to pester her son to take me. She kept saying that I was the only Tutsi woman with a man without being turned into a wife. The old lady, her friends, his age-mates who had already abducted Tutsi women, began to taunt him publicly about being impotent'.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, there were also instances where men 'took wives' but were seemingly sincere in their desire to protect them. After the law was passed that each Hutu man must kill his Tutsi 'wives', many men expressed regret that they 'had no choice' but to hand 'their' women over to be killed. The selectivity and ambivalence of Hutu men towards Tutsi women riddle the seemingly clear ethnic 'othering' that on the surface characterised the genocide. Yet they reveal the politics of desire. Transgressions of sexual and national boundaries are power-laden realms. Through such transgressions—that is, when a Hutu man covets a Tutsi woman—'bodies come to matter' and it is at the intersection of power and desire that these bodies are 'raced, gendered and sexualized'.<sup>56</sup> In the private sphere, male internalisation of Tutsi beauty and unavailability fed a desire to possess and control Tutsi women. Double-edged, the same beauty of Tutsi women posed a threat to the Hutu nation.

By the end of a three-month period, 800 000 Rwandans were dead and an estimated 250 000 to 500 000 had been raped. Their bodies clogged the rivers flowing north—they had been symbolically dumped into major rivers to send Tutsi 'Hamites' back to where they were thought to have originated, Ethiopia. Tens of thousands lay where they were slain, at roadblocks, in their homes and in places of supposed refugee, sending visceral images to the public and opposition. Bodies filled the nation. And as bodies filled the nation, so too did Hutu extremists attempt to inscribe the nation on the body.

The RPF's final offensive forced Hutu militias to flee and they in turn forced up to two million Hutu to flee with them, their bodies to act as a human shield against anticipated retaliation. In this unprecedented movement of people, Hutu extremists sought to deprive the RPF of a nation; 'Even if the RPF has won a

military victory, it will not have the power. It has only bullets, we have the population.<sup>57</sup> By July 1994 the genocide had come to an end. The perilous task of reuniting the nation under RPF leadership had only just begun. The legacy of re-inscribing a new national vision continues to be marked on the body, a subject for further study.<sup>58</sup>

### **Concluding remarks**

There is a temptation, in writing about genocide, to tell a story of good and evil.<sup>59</sup>

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

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

But as Nelson reminds us, bodies are not absolute, nor singular. Rather, they are 'produced in complex and often contradictory ways',<sup>60</sup> and often act in complex and contradictory ways. Power relations are constantly negotiated, shifting and changing, through everyday acts of (often bodily) resistance. There were many instances in Rwanda when a person would kill one person, but save another. Where some killed enthusiastically, and others did so with reluctance and sadness, casting ambiguity on the claim that all Hutu hated and feared all Tutsi to the point of murder. Some refused to kill members of their family, but would kill strangers. Some saved the lives of strangers at great risk to their own lives. Some communities formed local defence forces to fight back attackers, or carved out 'interahamwe-free' zones. Neighbours hid neighbours and strangers looked the other way upon seeing a Tutsi person hiding in the bush. Others killed out of greed and hope for economic rewards.

The variety of reasons why some killed and others saved collectively fly in the face of extremist attempts to create two categories of Rwandans: the killers and the killed, the innocent and guilty. To counter the tendency to erase complexity and ambiguity in the genocide, I have suggested we might begin with the everyday acts of violence and work towards more macro-level theories of the

genocide and beyond. This might involve going outside obvious structures of power—the international political economy or the institutions of the state—to ask how power operates at a social level, producing nationalist identities and obedient bodies. This article suggests a connection between the private and public realms, an interconnection that requires closer analysis and study in genocide narratives. Linking nationalist discourses as contested in the realm of the private, and violently inscribed on the body, is one possible means of thinking through the genocide, and potentially beyond it.

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

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> C Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, p 18.
- <sup>2</sup> On international explanations, see M Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: the United Nations and Rwanda*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002; B Jones, *Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001; A Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001; and P Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, CT: West Hartford, Kumarian Press, 1998. On regional and national explanations, see M Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001; G Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; and D Newbury, ‘Understanding genocide’, *African Studies Review*, 41 (1), 1998, pp 73–97.
- <sup>3</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch (HRW) & A DesForges, *Leave No One to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, HRW 1999, at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/>; HRW, *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Genocide and its Aftermath*, HRW, 1996, at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Rwanda.htm>; and African Rights (AR) Omaar Rakiya & Alex de Waal, *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance*, London: Africa Rights, 1995.
- <sup>4</sup> P Uvin, ‘Reading the Rwandan Genocide’, *International Studies Review*, 3 (3), Fall 2001, p 98.
- <sup>5</sup> The one exception I am aware of is Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, to whom I owe a debt for the rich empirical evidence he provides in his anthropological study. Adam Jones (2002) contributes an important empirical study of the genocide, breaking down acts of violence on the basis of male and female sex. However, his article lacks a sustained historical analysis, often taking ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ out of the ethnic and class contexts and reiterating the discursive separation of men and women, privileging men while failing to provide a sustained analysis of masculinities. A Jones, ‘Gender and genocide in Rwanda’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4 (1), 2002, pp 65–94.
- <sup>6</sup> After reading Diane Nelson’s *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quintessential Guatemala*, I began to think about the 1994 genocide and nation building in post-1994 Rwanda from the perspec-

- tive of body politics. Nelson's text is a compelling exploration of binary discourses on nationalism in post-conflict Guatemala that centre on the body. She likens the nation to a body as a metaphor but, given the mass displacement, torture, rape and murder, the material body too is viewed as a *site of inscribing a vision of national unity on an otherwise ambiguous body politic*. D Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p 6.
  - <sup>8</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*.
  - <sup>9</sup> Rwanda was first under German colonisation in the 1890s and then Belgian in 1918.
  - <sup>10</sup> In the Old Testament of the Bible, Ham, son of Noah, was outcast after looking upon his father drunk and naked. As punishment, his children would be born slaves to their uncles, having black skin.
  - <sup>11</sup> Both Hutu and Tutsi held this view before colonialism: the Twa were greatly mistreated and subject to racial discrimination. They were also considered 'untouchable' and 'impure'—like diseases to the body of the kingdom.
  - <sup>12</sup> According to this view, the Tutsi had arrived from Ethiopia, conquered the Hutu and cast them into servitude long before the colonialists had arrived. Here the Hutu nation is imagined and claimed for the 'native', as the Hutu Manifesto calls for a 'double liberation of Hutu from both 'Hamites' and 'Bazungu' (whites) colonization'. Quoted in Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p 116. The Manifesto positioned the Hutu elite as the protector of this nation.
  - <sup>13</sup> Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, p 119.
  - <sup>14</sup> Over 90% of the Rwandan population live in rural areas, and are dependent on subsistence agriculture.
  - <sup>15</sup> M Domosh & J Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers make Sense of the World*, New York: Guilford Press, 2001, p 164.
  - <sup>16</sup> Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, pp 167–168.
  - <sup>17</sup> Presumably, colonial constructions of beauty continued into this era. Marriage to Tutsi women is still considered a status symbol, affirming Hutu masculinity and the practice was accepted socially. Even hard-line Hutu were known to have Tutsi mistresses.
  - <sup>18</sup> V Jeffremovas, 'Acts of human kindness: Tutsi, Hutu and the genocide', *Issue: Journal of Opinion*, XXIII (3), 1995, pp 28–31.
  - <sup>19</sup> In contrast, sexual deviance would be encouraged among Hutu men leading up to and during the genocide as a way of reaffirming masculinity, superiority and control over the seeds of the imagined alien threat.
  - <sup>20</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p 76.
  - <sup>21</sup> At the onset of the Rwandan genocide, 60% of the population were under the age of 20. Presumably 30% were male, and 30% were female.
  - <sup>22</sup> C Newbury & D Newbury, 'A Catholic mass in Kigali: contested views of the genocide and ethnicity in Rwanda', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 33 (2&3), 1999, p 302.
  - <sup>23</sup> Some of those Hutu who participated in the genocide did so because they believed they were being threatened by an external 'other', reproducing the logic of the colonial state.
  - <sup>24</sup> See Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, pp 161–163.
  - <sup>25</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p 365.
  - <sup>26</sup> Domosh & Seager, *Putting Women in Place*, p 172.
  - <sup>27</sup> Rwandan National Anthem, 1962.
  - <sup>28</sup> A central network among the Northern elite was the *Akazu* or little house, referring to the economic clique surrounding Habyarimana's wife, Agathe.
  - <sup>29</sup> Kangura, No 6, quoted in Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*.
  - <sup>30</sup> Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, pp 172–173
  - <sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p 164.
  - <sup>32</sup> The assumption is that as men, they posed the greatest threat to the state, given that men are primarily political and public sphere actors.
  - <sup>33</sup> The first democratically elected Hutu President in Burundi, Ndadaye was murdered by extremist element of the Tutsi military. Under Tutsi authoritarian control, the Hutu majority has been subjected to violent oppression since independence. Sharing the same language and other attributes of Rwandans, Hutu extremists sometimes referred to Burundi as their accursed 'Siamese Brother', again in reference to the metaphor of the nation as a body.
  - <sup>34</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p 4.
  - <sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, p 131.
  - <sup>36</sup> HRW & DesForges, *Leave No-one to Tell the Story*; and AR & Rakiya, *Death, Despair, Defiance*.
  - <sup>37</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967.
  - <sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror*, p 95.

- <sup>39</sup> Burundian refugees participated in great numbers in the genocide in the South of the country. Most had fled in 1988 after the massacre of Hutu by the Tutsi-dominated paramilitary, and again in 1993 after the murder of Ndadaye. They are reported to have been the most vicious of torturers, cutting Achilles heels and inflicting extreme and cruel, slow deaths. This might provide some evidence for the claim that the greater the internalisation of inferiority and resentment of the Tutsi, the more callous the violence.
- <sup>40</sup> See also Erin K Baines, 'Les femmes aux mille bras: women building peace in Rwanda', in D Mazurana & J Parpart (eds), *Gender and Peacekeeping*, forthcoming.
- <sup>41</sup> HRW & Desforges, *Leave No-one to Tell the Story*, 1999, p 297.
- <sup>42</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p 296.
- <sup>43</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, p 194.
- <sup>44</sup> See P Landesman, 'A woman's work', *New York Magazine*, 15 September 2002.
- <sup>45</sup> R J Liften, quoted in *ibid*, np.
- <sup>46</sup> See R Coomaraswamy, 'A question of honour: women, ethnicity and armed conflict', lecture delivered at the Third Minority Rights Lecture, 25 May 1999, Geneva Switzerland.
- <sup>47</sup> Report of Elenor Richtler-Lyonette, in a mission report commissioned by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 1995.
- <sup>48</sup> C Strozier, quoted in Landesman, 'A woman's work', np.
- <sup>49</sup> The total number of women raped is unknown, although estimates vary between 250 000 and 500 000.
- <sup>50</sup> See HRW, *Shattered Lives*, pp 24, 18, 39–65. See also AR & Rakiya, *Death, Despair, Defiance*, pp 410, 439.
- <sup>51</sup> Although rape in 'private' spaces was equally symbolic of the invasion of the personal realm, thought to be outside politics.
- <sup>52</sup> L Hansen, 'Gender, nation, rape: Bosnia and the construction of security', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3 (1), 2001, p 60.
- <sup>53</sup> The terms 'wife' and 'marriage' are used in Rwandan testimonies in reference to situations of forced marriage, rape and sexual slavery.
- <sup>54</sup> Quoted in AR & Rakiya, *Death, Despair, Defiance*, p 415.
- <sup>55</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p 416.
- <sup>56</sup> Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*, p 220.
- <sup>57</sup> Hutu Army Chief of Staff, quoted in I Martin, 'Hard choices after genocide: human rights and political failures in Rwanda', in Jonathan Moore (ed), *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*. MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, p 159.
- <sup>58</sup> For a preliminary consideration, see E Baines, *Vulnerable Bodies: Gender, the UN and the Global Refugee Crisis*, London: Ashgate, ch 5, forthcoming.
- <sup>59</sup> René LeMarchand, 'Hate crimes: race and retribution in Rwanda', *Transition*, 9 (1&2), 2000, pp114–132. Also at <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/transition/v009/9.1lemarchand.html>.
- <sup>60</sup> Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*, p 209.

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