

Fall 2012

## Reconstructing History: An Inter-Generational Perspective on Collective Memories and Constructed Identities in Post-Genocide Rwanda

Heather Randall  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/inquiry>



Part of the [African History Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Randall, H. (2012). Reconstructing History: An Inter-Generational Perspective on Collective Memories and Constructed Identities in Post-Genocide Rwanda. *Inquiry: The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal*, 13(1). Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/inquiry/vol13/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Inquiry: The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).

**RECONSTRUCTING HISTORY: AN INTER-GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON  
COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES IN POST-  
GENOCIDE RWANDA**

**By Heather Randall  
Department of Anthropology**

**Faculty Mentor: Dr. JoAnn D'Alisera  
Department of Anthropology**

**Abstract**

*In the 18 years since the Rwandan genocide, which left approximately 1,000,000 people dead in 100 days, much has changed for Rwandans. This paper will examine the history of the genocide, including the international response to the killings and developments in peace and reconciliation. This paper also examines anthropological data from college-age Rwandese, whose names have been fictionalized, and historical information from older generations who lived through the genocide. I argue that the students represent a significant social change in the history of Rwanda. Their experiences contrast sharply with those of their parents, who grew up in a colonial world of identity cards and government-controlled media. While studying in the United States, these students have found ways to integrate their country's history into their daily experiences through involvement in student organizations and community-wide memorial events to promote a better understanding of the history of Rwanda and its current path to peace and reconciliation.*

**Introduction**

Theogene Mugisha<sup>1</sup> grew up in Rwanda and was a young adult by the time his family decided to leave the country after the genocide. Since then, he has traveled around the world with his family, ultimately settling on attending an undergraduate program in the United States. He and many others make up an important segment of the Rwandan Diaspora, as college-age Rwandans integrate the painful history of their country's past into their daily experiences, always encouraging their communities to learn about Rwanda and promoting peace and reconciliation through their involvement in student groups, community activities, and commemorative events for the victims of the genocide. The stories of Theogene and others below illustrate how some Rwandans have found ways to cope with their memories of the genocide and how many people are placing their hopes in the younger generation of Rwandans to rebuild their country after the war of 1994.

During the genocide we were there, and then we left the country. My sister was born around that time. She is the youngest kid. My dad always said she was a sign of a new beginning, a new place. Then we stopped talking about all this stuff. For quite a long time we never spoke about all this Rwandan genocide stuff, all the clans, and tribes, or whatever. We never talked about it until I went back home in 2002, in Kigali, and I also had to wait until the memorial time and I saw it on the news, but I didn't understand it. (T. Mugisha, personal communication, January 21, 2012)

In the spring of 1994, the world witnessed one of the worst systematic, government-sponsored genocides in history. In just 100 days, an estimated 1,000,000 people were killed in the small African nation of Rwanda. Hundreds of thousands more fled to neighboring countries, including Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Tanzania, Burundi, and Uganda in order to escape the genocide. Although much has been written about the genocide since 1994,

---

<sup>1</sup> All names of informants discussed in this paper have been changed to protect their identity.

many researchers have failed to address the larger historical background of this event (Destexhe, 1995; Hatzfeld, 2005, 2007, 2010; Khan, 2000; Mamdani, 2001; Prunier, 1995). The war that broke out after then-Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane crashed on April 6, 1994, is often painted as a long-standing binary "tribal" conflict between two of the primary ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi. However, the history of these ethnic tensions in Rwanda is far more complicated and is largely a result of the Belgian colonization of the country that ended in 1962.

In addition to the historical inaccuracy of many accounts of the Rwandan genocide, most of the literature available on Rwanda focuses only on the brief period leading up to and immediately following the genocide. Few have attempted to understand the differences in perspective and experience between the older and the younger generations of Rwandans. The former remember the genocide well, whereas the latter were very young at the time of the genocide. The younger generations of Rwandans have largely grown up in communities where Hutu and Tutsi distinctions have been eliminated but where memories of the violence are ever-present in memorials, stories, and in non-verbal communication (e.g. silent, sidelong glances) between neighbors.

In an attempt to address the information gap regarding the recent history of Rwanda, I have conducted interviews with three Rwandan students between the ages of 20-22 in order to (a) better understand their relationship to their home country and (b) compare their experiences and perspectives with those of older generations of Rwandans. The students in my sample were between the ages of four and five at the time of the genocide, and although they were too young to fully grasp the situation in Rwanda, they have grown up in a country that has struggled to reconcile its past with its goals for a peaceful, unified, and productive nation.

The first section of this paper includes a brief literature review of Rwandan history and the events leading up to the genocide. The next section outlines the methodology of this research project. The following section focuses on (a) the ways in which the history of the Rwandan genocide are intricately connected to local history and politics and (b) how post-genocide reconstruction has also led to new processes of history-making in Rwanda. The final two sections represent a comparative study of the interview data available from the older generations of Rwandans with the new interview data collected from the younger generation of Rwandans in the United States. I draw on the work of scholars such as Paul Connerton, Maurice Halbwachs, and Pierre Nora to provide a comparative analysis based on the fieldwork that has been conducted in Rwanda (Connerton, 1989, 2011; Halbwachs, 1992; Hatzfeld, 2005, 2007, 2010; Malkki, 1995; Nora, 1989, 1996; Pottier, 2002).

### Literature Review

#### History

The genocide that began in Rwanda in April 1994 has been extensively researched and documented by scholars from many different disciplines, including history, anthropology, journalism, law, human rights, and political science (Destexhe, 1995; Des Forges, 1999; Gourevitch, 1998a, 1998b; Harrow, 2005; Khan, 2000; Malkki, 1995; Mamdani, 2001; Newbury, 1998; Pottier, 2002). However, the interpretations of Rwandan history vary greatly. In their research, some scholars have clung to a simplified version of Hutu and Tutsi identity, largely created by colonial investigators. Pottier (2002) argues that these scholars placed too much emphasis on the *ubuhake* cattle clientship and ignored other aspects of inequality, including the fact that there was little opportunity in terms of social mobility in pre-colonial Rwanda, particularly during King Rwabugiri's reign. Indeed, early anthropological investigations in Rwanda, often alongside colonial endeavors in the Great Lakes region, were largely responsible for exacerbating an already growing awareness of ethnicity in Rwanda (Kagame, 1952). The narrative of a pre-colonial society devoid of any conflict simplifies relationships between Rwandans that has since been more deeply investigated. Scholars such as Gerard Prunier, David Newbury, Johan Pottier, Mahmood Mamdani, and Liisa Malkki have challenged this simplistic representation of Rwandan history, revealing the nuanced relationships between Hutu and Tutsi and more clearly examining the role of the Belgians in what ultimately erupted in 1994. Others,

**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

such as Allison Corey and Sandra Joireman, have examined Rwandan history in light of anthropological research. This complex history plays an important role in the development of the genocide that erupted in full force in April 1994, and continues to influence Rwandan cultural memory and politics, and practices of history-making today.

The cultural memories and histories of Rwandans that surround the ethnic relations in Rwanda point to more complicated stories than are often read in historical texts. Many Rwandans claim that the Twa, the pygmy population that makes up about one percent of the total Rwandan population, migrated from the forests of modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is believed that the Tutsi (about 14% of the population) migrated to Rwanda from Uganda in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, bringing their herds of cattle with them. The Hutu, the majority, on the other hand, are said to have lived in Rwanda much longer than the Tutsi, which therefore gave them a legitimate claim to the land that the Tutsi, as relatively recent immigrants, did not possess. However, the assumptions about the long-standing qualities in the relationships between the ethnicities in Rwanda are often over-simplified and ignore much of the country's history. Historically, ethnicity was closely tied to one's occupation, and although there were rare opportunities for social mobility, Rwandan historian Johan Pottier points out that the Tutsi King Rwabugiri established a hierarchical system of labor in the nineteenth century (Pottier, 2002, p. 11). This means that ethnic and social inequalities existed long before the German and Belgian colonists arrived; although they exacerbated ethnic tensions, these strains had begun to develop long before their arrival at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1885, leaders from the major European powers joined together at the Berlin Conference to discuss the division of the African continent. Germany claimed the land that was then known as Ruanda-Urundi, and gained full control over this area in 1910 after battles with Britain and Belgium. At the end of World War I, however, Germany lost control of all its colonial possessions and Ruanda-Urundi was given to the Belgians, whose style of colonial rule had a dramatic impact on social and political life in Rwanda. When the Belgian colonists arrived in Rwanda, they implemented the use of identity cards for all of the Rwandans in 1935. These cards were to be held in one's possession at all times. The Belgians exacerbated the existing ethnic tensions by arguing that the Tutsi, whose physical features they believed more resembled those of Europeans, were superior to the Hutu and included them in their colonial government. The Hutu, on the other hand, were said to have "rougher" features, including larger noses and stockier builds. The Belgians did not believe them to be as elegant or "European-looking" as the Tutsi and they were excluded from more powerful roles in the government (Mamdani, 2001; Prunier, 1995). As the Tutsi minority began to play an increasingly important role in the colonial government, many became abusive of their power and engaged in oppressive behaviors to their Hutu counterparts. The colonial government encouraged this social inequality and elevated the Tutsi over the Hutu (Mamdani, 2001; Pottier, 2002). These social divisions were beneficial to the Belgian government because they prevented the Rwandans from joining together to form a more powerful opposition force.

In the 1950s, the tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi began to intensify. In 1959, the Belgian government supported a Hutu-led revolution to overthrow Tutsi in Rwanda. The Parti du Mouvement et d'Emancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU), which had originally been created to facilitate the transfer of power from Tutsi to Hutu, directed its anger primarily at Tutsi administrators and led massacres against the Tutsi throughout 1959. The violence continued throughout the 1960s and 70s as thousands of Tutsi were murdered as the Hutu Power movement gained momentum in Rwanda and neighboring Burundi. The Belgians further complicated ethnic relations by leaving the Hutu in power upon their exit from the country; they argued that the Hutu had experienced oppression during the Tutsi rule and offered power over the government in a conciliatory effort to address previous wrongs against the Hutu.

The years that followed were tense times for Rwandans. Gregoire Kayibanda, the leader of the Hutu Power movement, gained control over the country and won the first internationally recognized elections. On July 1, 1962, in the midst of internal and regional turmoil, Rwanda gained its independence. During his rule, Kayibanda was responsible for discriminating against

**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

Tutsi and asserted his authority by leading periodic massacres against the Tutsi throughout the 1960s. The years 1963 and 1969 were particularly brutal, and thousands of Tutsi fled the country or faced death if they stayed in Rwanda (Corey & Joireman, 2004, p. 77).

In 1973, General Juvenal Habyarimana, a member of the extremist Hutu movement, led a coup against Kayibanda, in which the latter was killed. Habyarimana took over Rwanda and increased the divisions between the Rwandan ethnic groups. As a Hutu born in the north, Habyarimana favored those from this region, leaving the Hutu from the south estranged. Habyarimana also required all Rwandans to be members of his political party, the Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour la Developpement (MRND), and in each election during his power (1978, 1983, and 1988), he was the sole candidate for the presidency.

The conflict that eventually ended with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda began in earnest in 1990, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded northern Rwanda from their base in Uganda. The Habyarimana government felt threatened by this invasion and, in an effort to silence political opposition, Hutu extremists in Rwanda massacred Tutsi by the thousands. Habyarimana, however, was losing favor among many of his once-loyal followers. Members of the Hutu Power movement were becoming increasingly frustrated with his negotiations with the RPF throughout the early 1990s. Habyarimana had already agreed to a new constitution that paved the way for power sharing with the Tutsi, and in 1993 he signed the Arusha Peace Accord, an agreement that specifically promised cooperation with the RPF in government activities. As the Arusha proceedings developed, the United Nations Security Council sent in peacekeepers to the region to oversee the meetings and to ensure that an agreement would be reached between the RPF and the Habyarimana government.

In July 1994, the genocide was officially over. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Paul Kagame, entered Rwanda through Uganda and successfully fought the Rwandan army and the *Interahamwe*, a group of young militant Hutu who were largely responsible for the genocide. At last, thousands of Rwandans climbed out of the marshes and greeted their rescuers. The country had started its long path to peace.

The new government officials of Rwanda had an enormous task at hand after the end of the genocide. The country had just emerged from one of the worst systematic killings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hundreds of thousands had been killed, displaced, or had fled to neighboring countries, buildings had been destroyed, and those who remained carried a heavy load of painful memories, physical and emotional scars, and heavy hearts. The two most important players in the new government were President Pasteur Bizimungu and Vice President Paul Kagame. Bizimungu, a Hutu, rose to prominence after the RPF invasion of Rwanda. Kagame, one of the top leaders in the RPF, gained significant support from the remaining Tutsi population and possessed strong leadership skills. Kagame's own history included a troubling past, during which he fled Rwanda with his mother during the attacks in the early 1970s against the Tutsi. As the new leaders of Rwanda settled into their positions of power, these men realized that the scale of the damage that had been done in Rwanda was almost unimaginable. Throughout the development of the new RPF government and the imposition of projects to address infrastructure development and the promotion of peace and reconciliation, Kagame would become the most powerful man in the country.

### **Methodology**

The anthropological data presented below were collected through a series of interviews with three Rwandan students between October 2011 and April 2012. The students were asked about their life in Rwanda, including duration and the age at which they left the country. Students were also asked about their memories of the genocide as well as any discussions with their parents that they may have had regarding the genocide. All students agreed to participate in this research project voluntarily and their personal information has been protected under an agreement of confidentiality. Select portions of interview data are presented below to illustrate the youth perspective on Rwandan history and prospects for peace and reconciliation in the future.

### History Transformed: The RPF and Post-Genocide Reconstruction

Although many in Rwanda view the RPF as an untouchable, morally sound political party that has worked diligently to rebuild the country after the genocide, in recent years many academics and political figures have spoken out against the RPF. As Pottier (2002) describes the history of Rwanda, the RPF has played a key role in redefining the history of this small nation to suit their political goals. While it is true that significant developments have taken place in Rwanda since the genocide, including a growing economy, investment in education and technology, and a slow but progressing peace process, some have argued that the RPF has imposed severe restrictions on free speech, freedom of the press, and free and fair electoral processes. According to his examination of the 2003 presidential elections in Rwanda, in which Kagame emerged with 95% of the vote, Reyntjens (2004) argues that the RPF maintains full control over the electoral process, ensuring that those who support the RPF assume positions of power and allowing other political parties to participate only symbolically to provide an illusion of a multi-party democratic system. As a result, “Rwanda has thus returned to a situation of *de facto* one-party rule” (Reyntjens, 2004, p. 186).

The Peace and Reconciliation process in Rwanda has been wrought with difficult emotions and conflicting perspectives. Since Paul Kagame became president in 2000, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that additional flares of violence do not occur in Rwanda. However, the measures he has taken in the process have raised some concerns regarding a breach of ethics and constitutionality. As former Rwandan parliamentary speaker Joseph Sebarenzi (2009) implies in his memoir, Kagame is a strict leader who will go to any lengths to have his way. As part of his mission to prevent further ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, Kagame has outlawed the use of ethnic labels and strictly prohibits any language or action that could be interpreted as invoking ethnic conflict. Despite any of the law’s good intentions, the consequences have often included a lack of free speech in Rwanda; as a result, many people ‘tread lightly’ when explaining the history of ethnic conflicts in Rwanda. In addition, Kagame has created a government led by the RPF and, although he claims to promote a multi-party system with power-sharing and transparency, his political power has enabled him to reorganize the terms of the presidency and to ensure that only his allies obtain positions of power in the government. Sebarenzi further suggests that those who oppose Kagame’s instructions for the governance of Rwanda are frequently removed from power and often must flee the country to avoid further persecution.

The question of whether or not Kagame has turned Rwanda into a near-dictatorship has also been addressed by Reyntjens (2004). He argues that although the RPF has done much to rebuild the country after the genocide, Kagame’s government has overused its “genocide credit” to gain support from the population and has instead created a system of almost total control in Rwanda. In my interviews with Rwandan students, I asked whether or not the RPF was still using the fact that they ended the genocide as a justification for having power over how people behave, what they say, and where they meet to discuss the genocide and its history. My informant looked at me and laughed. He said, “I don’t think that they need any more reasons right now. They’ve been controlling the country since 1994. How many years is that? 18 years. Yeah. You think Kagame needs any reason to tell him? I don’t think so.” (T. Mugisha, personal communication, March 1, 2012). He went on to say that, although the RPF initially used their “genocide credit” to justify their control of the country, Kagame has since gained so much power and influence over the government that the “genocide credit” is of little importance now. He argued that this is because most people in Rwanda are uneducated, or may have only a primary school education. The majority of the population relies on the radio for their news, and while the government has allowed private radio stations to spring up in the wake of the genocide, the control over freedom of speech is very strict. He added that the radio in Rwanda is still very powerful and that many uneducated Rwandans are likely to believe whatever the government tells them rather than question their authority.

In his analysis on the formation of social memory, Connerton argued that, while the social reconstruction of the past is, in theory, distinct from a historical reconstruction that seeks to document factual claims supported with undeniable evidence, the social and historical

reconstructions are often politically motivated and intricately connected to one another. He further states, “A particularly extreme case of such interaction occurs when a state apparatus is used in a systematic way to deprive its citizens of their memory. All totalitarianisms behave in this way; the mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when their memories are taken away” (1989, p. 14). My informant explained that this is the way in which Kagame has governed Rwanda. In fact, he gave an example to illustrate the level of control possessed by Kagame that sounds as though it could have come from Connerton’s own work. In the story below, my informant explains his opinion about why some people in Rwanda want Kagame to remain in power despite the fact that their civil liberties have been severely limited during his time in power.

Some people still want them to be there. But I think the reason why they don’t want to move is that they’ve [the RPF] done so much stuff that they don’t want to step down. It’s like you can do me wrong once I let you go, but at some time, like if you had a part of my mind somewhere, that would be good enough for me to not see what’s happening, and you’d probably keep it because what you’ve been doing is like too much and I can’t take it anymore. Because you know that the day you give me my mind back, we’re not going to be friends anymore. (T. Mugisha, personal communication, March 1, 2012)

Another student, however, praised Kagame’s work for Rwanda and argued in his favor as president. He claimed that Rwandans and others who oppose Kagame’s rule are “jealous because he’s in power” (D. Uwera, personal communication, January 30, 2012). Although this was an uncommon response in my interviews with Rwandan students in the United States, it is fairly common for Rwandans to praise Kagame when asked about his role as president (Sebarenzi & Mullane, 2009).

### **Findings**

#### **Collective Memories: A Comparative Study of Older and Younger Rwandans**

Most of the anthropological research conducted on post-genocide Rwanda has been done in the realm of documentary film, including interviews with survivors of the genocide in Rwanda to document their stories and to give voice to their experiences during the genocide (Aghion 2002, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Kabera 2004). Those interviewed mostly include middle- to late-middle age individuals, or those who had already started families of their own during the genocide. What has not been thoroughly investigated in the academic literature on Rwanda is the perspective of the younger generation of current adults who were perhaps only four or five years of age during the genocide. While they may not have made the decision to either stay in Rwanda or leave during the war, they have lived with the decisions of their parents and loved ones and have grown up in a country striving to rebuild after such an atrocity. The younger generation in Rwanda also grew up in an entirely different political environment. They know the age of Paul Kagame the President, not Paul Kagame the rebel soldier. Their understandings of the history of the genocide, its causes and political and social circumstances, and their position in this history are largely passed down from their parents, friends, or teachers, in addition to what they hear from the RPF government and the news media. As a result, their understandings of the genocide and their hopes for the future differ from those of the older generations of their parents and grandparents, many of whom have distinct personal recollections of the killings in the spring and summer of 1994.

In order to compare the perspectives of the younger and the older generations of Rwandans, it is important to set up a general framework from which to understand their stories. Perhaps the best way to illustrate these differences in perspective is to place them in a temporal context. The older and the younger generations share a common element of their temporal memories, which is the genocide. However, the ways in which they approach the topic of the genocide are very different. If the genocide as a period of time was placed on a timeline for the older generation of Rwandans as well as on that of the younger generation, it would not only be situated in 1994, but also in a distinct place in relation to the rest of the individual’s life.

**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

In his work *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1992) argues that social memory is perpetuated through the older generation of a group (p. 48). He claims, “Old people are ordinarily not content to wait passively for memories to revive. They attempt to make them more precise, ask other old people, go through old papers, old letters; above all, they tell what they remember, when they do not try to write it down” (1992, p. 48). This perspective is affirmed in the case of the Rwandan genocide, where the older generation has worked hard to preserve the memories of their experience and, at times, share them with others. However, the nature of their memories is so traumatic that they cannot be treated simply as days gone by that are continually recollected.

In his study of individual and social memory of traumatic events, Connerton (2011) distinguishes different types of memory based on their emotional and psychological impact. He argues that survivors of traumatic events such as a genocide frequently feel compelled to document their experiences, either out of a feeling of indebtedness to those who were lost or out of a continual fear of annihilation if their stories are not preserved (Connerton, 2011, p. 22). Although there are comparatively few memoirs written by survivors of the genocide, many have chosen to tell their stories and allow them to be documented, ensuring that their stories are accessible to other generations of Rwandans with the hopes that a similar experience can be avoided in the future. As shown below, the power of social memory in Rwanda is very strong, and the history of the genocide is continually upheld by the older generation of survivors.

In the words of one elderly man who survived the genocide, “In the Rwandan mind, 1994 simply means ‘the genocide’” (Kabera, 2004). Although this may be true for Rwandans of all ages, the way the genocide is understood in a temporal framework is very different. For older Rwandans who were adults during the genocide, the genocide represents a distinct break in time, an ending point. When they recount their experiences, they clearly separate their stories into “pre-genocide” experiences and “post-genocide” experiences. For many of these adults who have children, their hopes for the future rest with their children as opposed to their own expectations for a better life in the years to come.

As a result, many Rwandans who survived the genocide consider the genocide to be an ending point rather than a pivotal point for a new beginning. In the film *Keepers of Memory* (2004), Kabera interviews several older Rwandans who have devoted their lives to keeping the memory of the genocide alive. They work to maintain the memorials and the sites where thousands of people were killed. Others devote their energy to exhuming the graves that are continually discovered by survivors. The generation of older Rwandans has dedicated itself to the maintenance of what Nora (1989, 1996) calls *lieux de memoire*, these sites of memory through which their experiences are affirmed, preserved, and validated. Through their stories and their scars, these older Rwandese become the genocide embodied. Many express feelings of hopelessness for the future and feel that the only way they can persevere is by sharing their stories with others.

To be sure, the challenges faced by the older generation in Rwanda are very different than those faced by the younger Rwandans. The older generation must live with the painful memories of losing loved ones, of running from neighbors who had turned on them and who massacred them by the thousands. The older generation must also confront the killers themselves, whether in the Gaçaça meetings, on the streets, or in their memories. In contrast, the younger generation of Rwandans sees the genocide as a starting point in their lives. Whether they were children or not yet born at the time of the genocide, the genocide represents an early period in their lives. If they were alive at the time of the genocide, they were so young that they often do not remember many of the details of the event if they remember anything at all. They have instead heard stories through their parents or grandparents, friends, teachers, or local news.

Jean Hatzfeld is one of the leading anthropologists who studies post-genocide Rwanda through interviews with both survivors and génocidaires. In his first book, *Life Laid Bare*, he examines stories from survivors of the genocide. His next book, *Machete Season*, includes interviews from génocidaires in an effort to provide the reader with their perspective. Most recently, in 2009, Hatzfeld released *The Antelope’s Strategy: Living in Rwanda After the*



**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

*Genocide*. A journalist by trade, Hatzfeld left his work at the *Liberation* newspaper in France to document the history and the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide beginning in 1994. He conducted numerous interviews with Rwandans during his research and has provided excellent material for a comparative study of younger and older generations of Rwandans.

In *Life Laid Bare*, a compilation of his interviews with genocide survivors, Hatzfeld introduces Edith Uwanyiligira, a woman who was a 27 year-old newlywed during the genocide. Edith was a schoolteacher at the time of her interview with Hatzfeld, and she described how she had lost both her parents and her new husband in the genocide. Like many Rwandans, she is a devout Christian and turned to God to help her with her loss. She describes her religion as giving her confidence to face the killers and to learn to forgive those who killed her family. Edith also describes her life in relation to the genocide, with this experience superseding all else and forever defining the way she lives. In her interview with Hatzfeld, she describes the way that relationships among Rwandans have changed since the genocide and how many survivors have given up on the future:

Many poor souls have withered after surviving the ordeals of the war. They say, "The Hutus tried many times to kill me, and now nothing else can ever happen to me." They think, "I'm a widow, I'm an orphan, I have no more home, no more work, no transportation, my health is gone, I'm alone facing too many problems and I don't ever want to look at the world around me again." People withdraw inside themselves, dragging their personal pain off into a corner as if they were each the sole survivor, without caring that this pain is the same for everyone. (Hatzfeld, 2007, p. 172)

Edith also describes her memories of the genocide as forever being a part of her experience. Although she expresses a readiness to forgive those who wronged her, her memories will never subside. She describes her memories of the genocide as though they follow her, constantly reminding her of her past and prohibiting her from fully living for the future.

In my memory, the genocide was yesterday, or rather, last year, and it will always be just last year, because I can detect no change that will allow time to return to its proper place...Understand this: the genocide will not fade from our minds. Time will hold on to the memories, it will never spare more than a tiny place for the solace of the soul. (Hatzfeld, 2007, p. 173)

The youthful generation in Rwanda today represents a "new beginning" for Rwanda. It is in them that the older generation places their hopes. When my informants talked about their lives, they placed an emphasis on the future rather than the past. While this may seem intuitive for any group of young adults, it is particularly important in this case. In interviews with older generations of Rwandans, conducted by Jean Hatzfeld and a number of film documentarians, the informants project a feeling of hopelessness and despair. They often focus on the past rather than the future since, for them, their lives essentially ended when the genocide ended. Indeed, many of those interviewed were surprised to have come out alive. When they talk about the future, they emphasize the role of their children and grandchildren in rebuilding the country. Sylvie Umubyeyi, another woman interviewed by Hatzfeld, is a social worker who works with children and who has children of her own. As a survivor and a parent, she expands on this intergenerational difference in perspective. When describing her experiences and her hopes for the future, she describes a sense of deep loss and views the genocide as a distinct ending point in her life. Her hopes for the future lie outside of her own experience, since she feels she is unable to regain her full potential after the genocide.

I have hope for the future, because things are on the move in the hills, people are timidly drawing closer to one another. One day, perhaps, the families of those who killed and those who were killed will live together again and help one another out as before. But for us, it is too late, because from now on there will always be a sense of loss. We had stepped forward into life, we were cut, and we retreated. It is too heartbreaking, for human beings, to find themselves fallen behind where they once were in life. (Hatzfeld, 2007, p. 233)

**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

When she talks about her children, though, Sylvie is careful to not share too many details about the genocide before the children are old enough to understand and to not foster a renewed hate amongst themselves. She says whether the children grew up during the genocide or if they were born after it was over, their potential for positive change in Rwanda is much greater than that of their parents.

The problems of Tutsi children who survived the slaughter evolve over time. Their memories, too heavy to bear, grow lighter nevertheless, because they change as children grow up... My tiniest children, I treat them differently, because the moment for talking hasn't arrived yet. If I were to tell them about the dangers I escaped, my words might infect them with a sorrow, a hatred, a frustration that little children cannot handle. I would risk the eruption of feelings that would be alienating. It's important to accept this, because if children have not lived through the killings, they should not suffer the same damage as their parents. Even if life has come to a halt for someone, it continues for that person's children. (Hatzfeld, 2007, p. 220-222)

These excerpts from Hatzfeld's interviews show that the older generation of Rwandans, who were adults at the time of the genocide, tend to have a very dark outlook on life and are often resigned to the belief that their lives are essentially over. Many lost most of their family during the genocide and some have physical wounds of their own that serve as a constant reminder of their experiences. Their lives are defined by the genocide. For the younger generation, however, the genocide is still a very important part of their experience, whether they were alive at the time or not, but they are also able to look to the future for a better life in Rwanda. The younger generation is not tied to the ethnic divisions between Hutu and Tutsi, and they often have a positive outlook on life as they look for ways that Rwanda can continue to promote peace, equality, and prosperity in the future.

Anthropologist Lyndsay McLean Hilker recounts her fieldwork in 2004-2005 in Rwanda, where she interviewed 46 individuals between 11-35 years of age. She shows that there is a multiplicity of narratives regarding Rwandan history and that these narratives differ depending on the age of the informant. Her research revealed similar results to my own, demonstrating that the youth in Rwanda tend to emphasize their hopes for peace in the future as well as their frustration with the Kagame government, their lack of free speech, and the appropriation of Rwandan history for the RPF's political goals.

An important point that Hilker makes in her work is the fact that, after the genocide, the teaching of Rwandan history was put on an open-ended hold. Whereas some of her older informants, who would have been teenagers at the time of the genocide, remembered history courses being taught in school, the youngest could not recall a single history lesson (Hilker, 2011, p. 319). This, Hilker claims, is because the RPF government has instead imposed its own version of Rwandan history through the media and the *ingando* camps, in which the mostly Hutu participants are instructed on how to behave and how to care for Tutsi who continue to suffer from the genocide. In support of this decision, the government has claimed that the history once taught in Rwandan schools "propagated negative stereotypes of Tutsi as foreign enemies and Hutu as the victims of Tutsi injustice" (Hilker, 2011, p. 317; Rutembesa, 2002, p. 83). My informants affirmed this, saying that they learned their history primarily through the news media and their parents and friends. One informant in particular said he could not recall a single Rwandan history book.

In addition to their hopes for Rwanda's future, the younger generation of Rwandans has also sought to understand the roots of the genocide in order to avoid repeating history. The stories told by my young Rwandan informants about their country's history are highly politicized and, in some cases, differ from those told by the scholars discussed above. One informant told me that he disagreed with Prunier's (1995) explanation of the development of ethnic divisions in Rwanda between the Hutu and the Tutsi. He said that while Prunier emphasizes the *uburetwa* system of forced labor, the tensions that developed between the two ethnic groups were more due to the physical environment of Rwanda and the ease with which jealousy and envy can develop

among friends and neighbors. He explained that although Rwanda is a small country in terms of square mileage, the numerous hills in Rwanda create a sense of vastness not seen in two-dimensional cartographic representations. He described the role of the hills like this:

If you could take our country and flatten it out, it would be way bigger. You can actually see everything, you know? If there's a fire somewhere, you'd be able to see it. Let's say I live in this hill, you live on this one, if you are cooking, I'll see that you are cooking. If you're eating or if you usually cook every day and there's supposed to be smoke at your place, I'll be able to see it, you know? It's not a flat place where... you won't be able to see anything. I should be able to see your cows, what you're doing, how you're doing. You know? That's how people are. There's a lot of potential for envying each other. And not even just the guy who's in front of you. Let's say there's a hill here, and here, and here and here. (Draws a map). You can see even between the hills. And it's not that far, you could actually walk there. If he doesn't cook, you can see it. You understand the idea of cooking, what I'm trying to say here? (T. Mugisha, personal communication, March 1, 2012)

Theogene argued that this jealousy, more than the *uburetwa* system of forced labor so often attributed to be a major cause of inequality in Rwanda, was the primary reason that Rwandans felt jealousy towards one another. He said that this was one of the main reasons for explaining the extremely high number of dead during the genocide. He went on to explain how this feeling of jealousy was passed down through generations, even though those who ultimately did the killing may not have been directly wronged by those they killed:

And also how people talk. People also know each other and they may have had all these small troubles together or whatever, and you know, your dad, maybe, well, let's use that example I gave you earlier. If you and I lived together on the same hill and my dad used to tell me, "Oh, you know those people? They hurt us." And he only has enough time to tell me that because maybe he can see you eating something that he doesn't have or he can feel the pain every time he sees you. And then he tells the youngest son. The youngest son may remember and then tell it to the next guy. So if there were intermarriage in 1900 or so, then by 1994 there would have been maybe four different generations. He (the oldest) started saying, "Oh, those guys hurt me." So this guy (the youngest), he can only remember these things...and he doesn't really try to understand it. All he knows is that those guys hurt him. And there's that envy, there's all that kind of stuff. And that day when they say on the radio, "that guy is a cockroach," you go to the churches and they also say it, and he's never been to school mostly, or if he has been to school he's only been to primary or whatever... and all he has done is listen to people and do what they say. So when it comes time to go and kill somebody, that's what he does. (T. Mugisha, personal communication, March 1, 2012)

This story reinforces Connerton's (1989) claim that "For an individual's consciousness of time is to a large degree an awareness of society's continuity, or more exactly of the image of that continuity which the society creates" (p. 12). My informant emphasized that many Rwandans are uneducated and rely largely on what others tell them for their sources of knowledge. The radio plays a major role in this, and at the time of the genocide, Radio RTLM was broadcasting hateful messages about Tutsi to incite anger in the killers and to justify their actions. As illustrated in the story above, if an individual has been told throughout generations that another family was responsible for hurting his own, that would be all he needed for resentment to grow. The power of social memory in this case is extremely strong, and falls in line with Connerton's analysis of its growth, especially in communities as closely interwoven as those of Rwanda.

In terms of their hopes for the future of Rwanda, the younger generation tends to have a more positive outlook than the older generation. The students I worked with all said that they wanted to eventually return to Rwanda to help rebuild the country. However, many wanted to

complete their higher education elsewhere, since the university programs in Rwanda are not yet as technologically advanced as those in North America or Europe. When they discussed their hopes for Rwanda's future, they, too, emphasized the role of the youth in rebuilding the country. One informant explained to me that the younger people are more likely to embrace a single identity over the old names for the ethnic groups, thereby creating an atmosphere conducive to peace and reconciliation in Rwanda.

There have been a lot of efforts to reconcile. We are now one nation, but there's still the older generation and it's so hard to change their minds or get rid of their propaganda. I think the youth are playing a really big part in moving the country forward. They're all united. They don't care about the different tribes anymore. They believe they're one people and it's their responsibility to develop one nation, and I think they're doing a good job. (F. Umutoni, personal communication, January 23, 2012)

In a documentary film by Anne Aghion (2004), children of primary school age reiterate this perspective that the youth will be able to change the course of Rwandan history. One student comments that although their parents' generation is more likely to express prejudice and hate towards others, the children can learn to live together in peace. He says, "It happens that adults get angry. Your parents say to you: 'If I see you again with so and so, you'll leave my house.' I think, let the parents hate each other if they wish, but let us children be friends."

### **Discussion and Implications**

Although Rwandans still have a long way to go in the peace and reconciliation process after the genocide, the power of social memory in Rwanda is incredibly strong. While the older generation of Rwandans keeps the memory of the genocide alive and maintains the invaluable *lieux de memoire* throughout the country, the younger generation has great hopes for the future of their country. They have discarded the identity cards along with the divisions that they brought with them. Free from the traumatic memories of surviving the genocide, the students I interviewed have demonstrated that the younger generation can have a positive impact on their country to promote peace, reconciliation, and unity in post-genocide Rwanda. Many great changes have already taken place in Rwanda, such as the institution of the International Criminal Tribunal, the Gacaça trials, and the development of opportunities for survivors and former génocidaires to speak with one another and, at times, to reconcile.

This comparative study of the perspectives of older and younger generations of Rwandans demonstrates that the complex history of the Rwandan genocide is an excellent example for a case study on the power of social memory. Stories that were passed down for generations erupted in the genocide of 1994 and the cultural memories of survivors about the history of Rwanda continue to play an important role in the path to peace and development. This paper also shows that, as Connerton (1989) states, "To construct a barrier between the new beginning and the old tyranny is to recollect the old tyranny" (p. 10). In the case of the Rwandan genocide, the "old tyranny" in which people were subjected was the requisite attachment to ethnic identity and the jealousy and distrust that this attachment created between families and neighbors. Although the younger generation of Rwandans has devoted itself to espousing a Rwandan identity rather than the former Hutu and Tutsi identities, they must nevertheless recognize the events of the past and find a way to integrate the collective memories of their elders in order to create a barrier that keeps them from drowning in the sorrow of the painful memories possessed by the older generation.

The students I interviewed have also acknowledged that their path will not be simple and the future that lies ahead of them will be challenging, both socially and politically. They must face a community that is afraid to speak their mind for fear of imprisonment or exile. They must challenge the Kagame government for their right to speak freely and to promote free and fair elections and history that is told by the Rwandan people rather than the RPF. Some are even fearful that Kagame will become a dictator, refusing to give up his post when the election of 2017 approaches. The young generation of Rwandans must also address the intergenerational differences in perspective on the history of their country to promote peace and cooperation with

**ANTHROPOLOGY: Heather Randall**

all sectors of society. They claim that while the memory of the genocide must be preserved and memorialized, Rwandans must not dwell on the past but instead look to the future for positive change. The barrier between the old and the young, therefore, must be a fluid one, easily penetrable in order to promote a cooperative effort that both honors those who died and presses forward for additional improvements in education, infrastructure, trust, and reconciliation in Rwanda. The new beginning for many Rwandans is in a continual state of development as the youth are able to frame their goals for the future within the context of a complex, conflicting, and often contested history.

## References

- Aghion, A. (Producer & Director). (2002). *Gaçaça, living together again in Rwanda?* [Motion picture]. Rwanda: Dominant 7, Gaçaça Productions, and Planète.
- Aghion, A., & Bocahut, L. (Producers), & Aghion, A. (Director). (2004). *In Rwanda we say... The family that does not speak dies* [Motion picture]. Rwanda: Dominant 7, Gaçaça Productions, and Planète.
- Aghion, A. (Producer & Director). (2009a). *My neighbor my killer* [Motion picture]. Rwanda: Dominant 7, Gaçaça Productions, and Planète.
- Aghion, A. (Producer & Director). (2009b). *Notebooks of memory* [Motion picture]. Rwanda: Dominant 7, Gaçaça Productions, and Planète.
- Connerton, P. (1989). *How societies remember*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Connerton, P. (2001). *The spirit of mourning: History, memory, and the body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corey, A., & Joireman, S. F. (2004). Retributive justice: The Gaçaça courts in Rwanda. *African Affairs*, 103(410), 73-89.
- Des Forges, A. L. (1999). *Leave none to tell the story: Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch.
- Destexhe, A. (1995). *Rwanda and genocide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Gourevitch, P. (1998a, May 11). The genocide fax. *The New Yorker*, 42-46.
- Gourevitch, P. (1998b). *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harrow, K. W. (2005). "Ancient tribal warfare": Foundational fantasies of ethnicity and history. *Research in African Literatures*, 32(2), 34-45.
- Hatzfeld, J. (2005). *Machete season: The killers in Rwanda speak*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Hatzfeld, J. (2007). *Life laid bare: The survivors in Rwanda speak*. New York: Other Press.
- Hatzfeld, J. (2010). *The antelope's strategy: Living in Rwanda after the genocide*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Hilker, L. M. (2011). Young Rwandans' narratives of the past (and present). In S. Straus and L. Waldorf, (Eds.), *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence*. (pp. 316-330). Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Kabera, E. (Producer & Director). (2004). *Keepers of memory* [Motion picture]. Rwanda: Choices, Inc., Link Media Production.
- Kagame, A. (1952). *Le code des institutions politiques de Rwanda précolonial*. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge.
- Khan, S. M. (2000). *The shallow graves of Rwanda*. New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers.
- Malkki, L. H. (1995). *Purity and exile: Violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mamdani, M. (2001). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Newbury, D. (1998). Understanding genocide. *African Studies Review*, 41(1), 73-97.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire. *Representations* 26, 7-24.
- Nora, P. (1996). *Realms of memory: The construction of the French past*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pottier, J. (2002). *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, survival, and disinformation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prunier, G. (1995). *The Rwanda crisis: History of a genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reyntjens, F. (2004). Rwanda, ten years on: From genocide to dictatorship. *African Affairs* 103(411), 177-210.

- Rutembesa, F. (2002). Le discours sur le peuplement comme instrument de manipulation identitaire. In F. Rutembesa et al., (Eds.), *Peuplement du Rwanda: Enjeux et perspectives* (pp. 73-102). Butare: Editions de l'Université Nationale du Rwanda.
- Sebarenzi, J., & Mullane, L. A. (2009). *God sleeps in Rwanda: A journey of transformation*. New York: Atria Books.