

# **Fighting Genocide Ideology in Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Contribution of Education**

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## **Abstract**

*The 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda was a result of an ideology of hatred and divisionism entrenched from the German and Belgium colonial era. The genocide ideology in Rwanda began with the process of ethnic identification and stigmatization of the 'other' who were considered to be the enemy and thus needed to be eliminated. The cumulative process of segregation of the 'other', which became known as the Tutsi, was initiated and supported by poor leadership. These beliefs were disseminated through various means, including addresses public at political rallies, academic instruction, and indoctrination of the general public via radio and television broadcasts and print media. In the aftermath of the genocide, the new Government of Rwanda viewed education as a powerful tool for the prevention of future violence. This study focuses on formal education, and evidences show how, since the reopening of schools in Rwanda after the genocide, education has helped in fighting genocide ideology by incorporating subjects related to genocide in primary and secondary school curricula.*

**Keywords:** Education, Genocide, Genocide ideology

## **Introduction**

The genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi resulted from an ideology of hatred, whereby Rwandans were posited to be different from one another. Specifically, the Tutsi population was segregated, stigmatized and perceived as enemy of the Rwandan Hutu political regime. This ideology of ethnic hatred was continually reinforced and disseminated to the general public through radio and television broadcasts, print media, and public meetings. Importantly, it was taught to youth in schools. Tutsi were sporadically killed, their houses and properties destroyed without any consequences for perpetrators of such crimes, and they were often expelled from school and public positions. These human rights violations finally led to the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsi in Rwanda, in which more than one million Tutsi and moderate Hutus were killed in only one hundred days.

After the genocide, the Rwandan government began to strive to reconstruct the nation and craft social cohesion in order to prevent genocide. Specifically, the government now aims to fight against any forms of genocide ideology, or the propagation of divisive beliefs, as it was a root cause of the genocide. In this vein, education was viewed as a powerful tool that could help to foster unit and reconciliation and combat any kind of divisionism among Rwandans.

### **Definition of Key words**

#### **Education**

Education is known as any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual (Burcu, 2012). In its technical sense, education is viewed as a process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to another, (Burcu, p.89). A World Bank study cited by Hawrylenko views education as a key in preventing conflict and is of utmost importance in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation process (World Bank, 2005, Hawrylenko, 2010)

Education can play a great role in a given society for better or worse, as a means of conflict prevention or encouragement. Kambody (2007) argues that the most effective method in the prevention of future genocide and to foster common citizenship is through education. It is in this insight that in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsi, the Government of Rwanda started engaging in formal and informal public educational campaigns focusing on prevention of genocide and its ideology.

#### **Genocide ideology**

According to Obote (2007), an ideology is an organized collection of ideas. The word ideology was coined by Count Antoine Destutt de Tracy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as science of ideas. The purpose of an ideology is to offer change in society through a normative thought process (Obote, 2007). However, “genocide ideology” refers to a set of organized thoughts and beliefs centered on ethnic identity that drives competition for power and dignity using hatred, conflict and violence in order to attain its objectives.

According to Rutazibwa (1999), the genocide ideology in Rwanda took roots within the colonial era and gained greater significance and power during the MDR- PARMEHUTU regime. This ideology has been characterized to encourage discrimination against Tutsi, leading to their exclusion from key power spheres. The stronghold of discrimination against Tutsi was present in all key sectors of national life, such as the army, education and administration. Under the Kayibanda regime, the national ideology was essentially anti-Tutsi. Hutu were considered to be the only Rwandan people. This ideology was taught in all social spheres (families, schools, surrounding, work places, political parties, and mass media) and resulted in polarization of Hutu against Tutsi.

The MDR-PARMEHUTU ethnic ideology was followed by MRND, a political party of the President Juvenal Habyarimana. His ideology was a philosophy of governance that aimed to create ‘apartheid’ in Rwanda, famously referred to ‘Equilibre Ethnique’ (Ethnic Equilibrium).

Hate propaganda was developed and channeled through various means of communication. It is this ideology of hatred that culminated in the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsi.

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, a similar hateful ideology persists in some parts of Rwanda. Even though there have been considerable efforts to reconcile Rwandans, the problem remains unsolved. Those who either developed or implemented the 1994 genocide continue to disseminate ethnic ideology openly between individuals or among groups. This is highlighted by the proliferation of writings aimed at denying, delegitimizing or trivializing the genocide.

### **Education system in Rwanda pre-genocide**

Before Christian missionaries and colonizers arrived in Rwanda, the country's educational system was largely informal. The village or family elders taught their children moral and social values through stories, dance and other methods. With the arrival of the Roman Catholic missionaries, churches and schools were established throughout the country. The newly arrived Catholic missionaries formed the first school in Rwanda in 1900. German and Belgian colonial governments eventually became more involved in the educational system, assisting in the development and financial funding of a curriculum. Though, the religious institutions remained as operators of the schools (Bridgeland et al., 2009, 5). From 1919 to 1943, the Belgian colonial administration permitted missionaries to continue to establish and operate schools across Rwanda through indirect control (Erny, 2003). By the 1920s, the missionaries used the colonial educational system in the country as "a divisive instrument" and stressed differences between Hutu and Tutsi pupils, putting them into categories in and out of school (Rutayisire et al. 2004). In brief, during the colonial-era, education reflected and intensified the ethnic divisions in Rwanda. After Rwanda gained independence in 1962, the newly established political regime actively engaged in anti-Tutsi propaganda. Fictitious histories of divisionism were drafted, incorporated in the country's educational curriculum and taught to the Rwandan population. Throughout the first Republic (1962-1973), the education system contained regional and ethnic criteria in its academic structure. President Gregoire Kayibanda and his southern Hutu companions dominated the political administration and monopolized the secondary educational system to the detriment of Rwandans from other regions. Government ministers ensured that academic offers were designated to students who originated from their southern region. For example, between 1967 and 1969, the Gikongoro Prefecture dominated the school intake and population, because, the Minister of Education, Anasthase Makuza was from that prefecture. From 1970 to 1973, the favoritism shifted to Gitarama Prefecture, because Jean Népomuscène Munyandekwe and Gaspard Harerimana, both from Gitarama, consecutively occupied the post of the Minister of Education (Rwanda Development Gateway, 2013). By the 1970s, entry into all government assisted schools and tertiary institutions were determined by ethnic and regional quotas. However, the quota system was implemented sporadically. For example, in 1973, in the face of increasing political pressures, the Kayibanda regime used the quota policy as justification to instigate a mass purge of Tutsis from the National University of Rwanda and other public

posts (Prunier, 1995). Erny (2003) states that the government used the 1970-1971 education statistics to justify its actions, which suggested that Tutsis occupied a greater proportion than Hutus in secondary schools (Erny, 2003, 127). In 1973, Juvenal Habyarimana overthrew the First Republic in a military coup-d'état. Under his administration, he introduced the 1978-1979 educational reforms, which established the 'Public Education Law'. This new law stipulated that the transition from primary to secondary education should be guided by the following criteria: examination results, continuous assessment, ethnic, regional and gender quotas (Rutayisire et al, 2004). These criteria appeared to provide a transparent method for determining who would be granted access to secondary and higher level learning institutions. However, the results from the examination were often not published and the criteria from the 'Public Education Law' were only used to operate discrimination against Tutsi students. The ethnic quotas required the education system to reflect the theoretical ethnic composition of the country: 90% for the Hutu, 9% for the Tutsi, and 1% for the Twa population (Cooksey, 1992, 18; Obura, 2003, 43). In 2004, Mugesera published statistics to illustrate the impact of the quota policy on the access of Tutsi secondary leavers to tertiary education. He describes that in 1981 to 1982 in across seven communes in the Butare and Gikongoro provinces, only 44 of the 186 Tutsi students (23%) who successfully passed their exams continued to tertiary education in 1981-1982. In 1982 to 1983, only 28 of 424 students (6.6%) at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) in Butare were Tutsi. Thus, despite the numerous educational reforms throughout the First and Second Republics, which were intended to democratize the access to education, there were still significant inequalities based from ethnicity quota and regional criteria. Consequently, the existing discriminatory policy in the educational system reinforced divisionism and hatred among Rwandans (McLean Hilker, 2010, 6-7).

It is important to note that it was not only the structure of the education system that reinforced divisionism, but also the content. As argued by Kranish, the teaching of the false history of the differences between Hutus and Tutsi, inflamed ethnic hatred and violence that eventually culminated in the 1994 genocide, (Kranish, 2010). Formal education in Combating genocide ideology in post- genocide Rwanda Formal education corresponds to a systematic, organized education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology (Claudio Zaki Dib, 1988).

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against Tutsi, the educational system changed radically. The same educational system which had been used as a tool in perpetuating hatred and divisionism was transformed into a tool to promote reconciliation among Rwandan youth. In 1995, the Ministry of Education stated that a new direction for Rwandan education would be implemented during the April 1995 Conference on Policy and Planning of Education in Rwanda (Bamusananire et al., 2006). The new policy declared that Rwanda would produce citizens free from ethnic regional, national and religious prejudices and who are committed to human rights and the society. In this regard, the role of the education sector was to contribute to national reconciliation by creating a culture of peace, emphasizing positive, non-violent national values

and promoting the universal values of justice, tolerance, respect for others, solidarity and democracy (Bamusananire et al., 2006). Additionally, discrimination was eliminated from access to higher levels of education and replaced with student competency in exams, grade point averages and their desire to learn. Teaching peace, reconciliation, tolerance, justice, democracy, patriotism, solidarity and national unity became class subjects of great importance in the primary and secondary schools. Subjects related to genocide were also incorporated into Rwandan primary and secondary curriculum.

Importantly, the formal education in post-genocide Rwanda now incorporates genocide-related subjects in primary and secondary education curricula. For instance, in the primary schools, the pupils of Primary 6 (P6) learn about the genocide in their civic education classes. Students receive even greater exposure to information about the genocide in secondary school, where they learn about issues such as “the differences between genocide from ordinary massacres and others related crimes; the causes and consequences of the genocide against the Tutsis; other genocides such as the Herero genocide, the Armenians genocide and the Holocaust,” (Bamusananire et al. 2006). The National University of Rwanda even boasts a Masters program in Genocide Studies and Prevention. In order to prevent a future genocide, it is crucial for the Rwandan youth understand the events that lead to and during 1994 genocide, the affects and how to combat genocide ideology. Understanding the important historical events enables the public, especially the young generation, to participate the fighting against future human right violations.

### ***The teaching about genocide in Rwandans schools as a way of prevention***

After the genocide, the National Curriculum Development Centre, from within the Ministry of Education, outlined a new curriculum for primary and secondary schools in order to teach national unity and a concept known as ‘Rwandanness’. The new Government of Rwanda recognized that history should be taught objectively and that teachers should refrain from using racial propaganda, (Kranish, 2010). Emphasis was placed on peace and unity in secondary schools to ensure that students learn to coexist free from discrimination and exclusion. One of the goals of the new curriculum was to build unity and encourage reconciliation by promoting peace and tolerance, which in turn prevents the recurrence of future violence. Genocide prevention is a part of the social studies curriculum. From primary four to six, pupils learn about civil education and related concepts such as freedom, peace, reconciliation, tolerance, justice, democracy, patriotism, solidarity and national unity. In addition to learning about their own genocide, pupils learn the similarities and differences between the Rwandan genocide and other genocides such as those of the Hereros, Armenians and the Jews during the Holocaust, (Ministry of Education, 2008). In secondary schools, education on genocide prevention is part of the Political Education Curriculum, class courses and in the history programs of ordinary and advanced levels of study, (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Furthermore, in Secondary school, throughout the module of General Paper, students learn themes largely devoted to the history of discrimination and the genocide in Rwanda. This unit tackles discrimination cases in Africa, in America and in Europe, notably the apartheid in South

Africa, racial segregation in USA and discrimination against Tziganes in Central and Western Europe. They also learn about topics such as historical records and discrimination against Gypsies in Europe, case studies of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the genocide of Herero, the reasons of the revolt of the Herero, the genocide of the Armenians, and the Holocaust (National Curriculum Development Center, 2008) Lessons related to genocide in secondary schools aim to help students understand current known cases of racial discrimination in the world and their disastrous consequences, and to subsequently to encourage practices of reconciliation. Acquiring knowledge on the issue of genocide helps students to stand firmly against any kind of divisionism that leads to genocide. The following quotes illustrate the thinking of the interviewees:

*"As you know, it's difficult to prevent something you do not have a lot of information about. First, you have to understand it, to know how and why the genocide happened in order to take measures against acts that can lead to genocide."*

Another student emphasized how learning about genocide has positively influenced him and helped him join his secondary school's Anti-Genocide Club. He stated:

*"Before learning lessons about genocide in the classroom, I used to be indifferent from members of Anti-Genocide clubs, but since I learned how genocide happened and some acts that violate human right, I found it necessary to join them in order to fight against any other discriminations acts that can lead to genocide."*

From these testimonies, it is clear that teachings about genocide help students to understand Rwanda's past and give them courage to stand against any kind of manipulation that may persuade them to partake in discriminatory acts.

Teachers in secondary schools also emphasized the role that genocide education plays in the prevention of genocide and its ideology. Responding to a question on how teaching about genocide can prevent it, one of the teachers mentioned:

*"Students are aware about the danger of divisionism, discrimination and hate speeches that led to genocide. In teaching this, it becomes a way of prevention. When students are taught about peace, tolerance, unit and reconciliation, it reinforces their cohesion and when they are no longer divided, Genocide is prevented."*

In learning about genocide, each student thus becomes aware of the causes of genocide and understands the importance of promoting human rights and dignity.

At university level, the course related to genocide is being taught even though it has not been yet expanded at all universities and higher learning institutions. From 2009, a specific program for Genocide Studies and Prevention at Master's level is now offered at the National University of Rwanda through the Center for Conflict Management (CCM). Most students who have graduated from this program are now serving in different institutions in the Rwandan society. The purpose

of this Master's program is to equip Rwandans and others students from abroad with a knowledge that will assist them in preventing genocide ideology.

In sum, students from all levels of education, whether the primary, secondary or university level, stress that education about genocide is an important tool in preventing genocide. Unfortunately, not all students benefit from these courses. In most institutions the courses related to genocide are reserved to only a very small number of students.

### **Challenges in teaching about genocide in Rwandans schools**

Teaching about genocide is a complex subject that requires qualified persons and appropriate teaching materials. In fact, the teaching of genocide history demands of educators a high level of sensitivity and a keen awareness of the complexity of the subject matter. Teachers who are not experienced and qualified don't feel comfortable while teaching the issue of genocide. The following statement illustrates this:

*"It is very difficult to teach a subject like genocide, which has got some tragic and traumatizing events that can affect students psychologically. So, we pay attention while teaching it".*

In the same perspective, another teacher declared:

*"As teachers, we face the challenges of informing students about the magnitude of historic atrocity: of understanding particular genocidal events and telling to students horrific atrocities committed during that genocide: We are afraid they can retraumatize them. It is not easy: teaching it is like a vocation and requires a skillful teacher"*

The shortage of qualified personal remains a big challenge in delivering courses related to genocide. In the aftermath of the genocide perpetrated against Tutsi in Rwanda, the number of teachers who are capable of lecturing on the history of genocide and other human rights violations appropriately and professionally is still very small. In addition, genocide teachers are not well trained to deal with the issues of genocide and most of them don't know how to teach a subject which is not related to their academic background.

Similarly, other institutions where this research has been carried face the same fate. Generally, genocide is taught in the institutions that have human science-oriented options such as History. So, teachers of history are the ones who teach genocide. In that regard, one history teacher said:

*"Although we had studied some courses related to genocide in History, we did not go further and deepen our knowledge in genocide. So, we cannot dare say that we are qualified in teaching genocide. Genocide teaching requires qualified and specialized personnel who actually are able to scrutinize it in all its aspects"*

The lack of availability of appropriate teaching materials and methods also stand as a challenge to teaching about genocide in Rwandans schools. As we know, a teacher cannot deliver a course in vacuum. A lesson, to be well conducted, requires teaching material to be available so as to

make his lesson lively and meaningful. In time of writing this short paper, the author realized that there is no standardized curriculum on genocide in Rwanda. Each teacher manages in his own way to generate content. Some genocide related books are available in Rwanda, but not in a centralized location. Furthermore, it is questionable as to how relevant the available resources are. For example, one teacher declared:

*“The content is actually a bit poor as it deals only with causes, consequences and some cases of genocide, but does go deeper and analyze the subject. It is a two or three-page chapter which is also taught at the end of the year or even not or superficially taught when lecturers are rushing with time to end up the module or the program.”*. And another teacher to add: *“Some teaching textbooks are poor and descriptive rather than informative”*

As mentioned above, the lack of appropriate teaching materials undermine the quality of teaching about genocide in secondary schools and refrains teachers to deliver their lessons with confidence.

### **Conclusion**

Prior to genocide, education was been a channel through which hatred ideology leading to genocide was conveyed. However, after the genocide, the education system changed radically. The same education that had been used as a tool to perpetrate hatred and genocide is now used as a tool to reconcile Rwandans and to combat genocide and its ideology.

The results of this study show how the education in post-genocide Rwanda has and continues to contribute to national reconciliation by creating a culture of peace and promoting the universal values of justice, tolerance, respect for others, solidarity and democracy. Emphasizes is placed on peace and unity in the primary and secondary school curricula to ensure that students learn to coexist free from discrimination and exclusion. The goal is to build unity and encourage reconciliation by promoting peace and tolerance, which in turn prevents the recurrence of future violence. Furthermore, through the teaching about genocide in Rwandans schools, students become aware on how and why the genocide happened in Rwanda, which in turns helps them to combat divisionism and discrimination, the main cause of the genocide perpetrated against Tutsi.

As we have found in this study, the lack of qualified teachers and appropriate teaching materials are the major challenges in delivering courses about genocide, the Government of Rwanda should make more efforts to train teachers in the domain of genocide studies and provide enough materials in Rwandan schools.

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