

# 'Lived' Identities in Rwanda

## Beyond Ethnicity?

**Cori Wielenga**

Research Fellow in the Department of Political Sciences  
at the University of Pretoria, South Africa

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### Abstract

*Identity politics in post-genocide Rwanda has continued to centre around ethnicity, whereas this article argues that the 'lived' identities of Rwandans are far more complex and varied than the identity of ethnicity. The Rwandan government has attempted to transcend ethnicity through laws that prohibit the use of ethnicities and the introduction of a particular kind of citizenship discourse. Critics of the government call for more open and robust discussion of ethnicity in the public sphere, and tend to emphasise the perceived unequal access to resources as a central problem in ethnic identity politics in Rwanda. This article attempts to move beyond both these positions, which place the root cause of and solution to identity politics in Rwanda within an ethnic framework, by exploring the complex network of interrelationships in which people move in their daily lives.*

### Introduction

Although Rwandans speak the same language and share the same culture,<sup>1</sup> deep divisions have developed in the society along so-called 'ethnic' lines. The majority of Rwandans identify themselves as Hutu, and a small minority as Tutsi. Debate has abounded as to how these identity categories developed and what they mean,<sup>2</sup> but what is clear is that they have resulted in a dangerous form of 'othering' that in 1994 resulted in the genocide of Tutsi and moderate Hutu by Hutu extremists. Until today, ethnic 'othering' continues to challenge relations in that country and in the region.

Central to identity politics in Rwanda today is the replacing of ethnic identity with civic identity, and the creation of a united Rwandan identity for the sake of nation building. The top-down approach the Rwandan government has taken has been strongly criticised,<sup>3</sup> and the counter-position is that Rwandan society should be structured in such a way that people can be free to 'live out' their ethnic identity. Both positions, this article argues, give too much importance to ethnicity as the central and discrete identity category by which Rwandans identify themselves, and both result

in different forms of 'othering'. This article instead suggests that more attention be given to the 'lived' identities of Rwandans that exist amidst and beyond this ethnic framework.

Drawing from the work of postcolonial feminists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw,<sup>4</sup> who wrote about 'intersectionality' in the late 1980s and 1990s, and more recent scholars writing about ethnic identities, such as Harri Englund and Richard Jenkins,<sup>5</sup> this article argues that understanding identities as a 'complex network of interrelationships'<sup>6</sup> offers a more accurate reflection of identities as they are emerging in postcolonial, postmodern contexts than discrete identity categories do. Further, drawing from the work of Mahmood Mamdani and Claude Ake,<sup>7</sup> this article explores what these networks of interrelationships might look like, particularly in the intersection of traditionalism and (post)modernism. Both Mamdani and Ake describe the consequences of colonial practices on state formation, and the impact of this on identity conceptions and citizenship in African democracies.

This article will also draw from the fieldwork undertaken for my PhD<sup>8</sup> between 2005 and 2009, which was about reconciliation in Rwanda and consisted of collecting life narratives, interviewing leaders of NGOs and government officials that facilitate reconciliation programmes, and conducting multiple informal interviews with ordinary people. This research has continued after my PhD, with annual trips to Rwanda to undertake follow-up interviews and participate in community-level reconciliation forums.

Through this research, several paradoxes regarding Rwandan society have emerged. The first paradox is that the government uses the correct citizenship discourse for a liberal democracy while being widely criticised for being dictatorial in practice, yet it seems to be the very citizenship discourse that its critics want to see more of that is perhaps undermining its effectiveness. The second paradox is that ordinary Rwandans seem to be resisting the government's 'ethnic denialism', as it is sometimes called, continuing to speak at times in ethnic terms (stereotyping and 'othering'), and yet in daily interaction seem to operate from, with and within identities that lie beyond ethnicity. These paradoxes concerning identity in terms of ethnicity and citizenship will be explored in this article.

Said Adejumobi, in an article on citizenship and conflict in Africa, argues that the way forward with regard to resolving ethnic conflict is for African states to take 'liberal democracy very seriously'. This article, in contradiction to this, argues that a liberal democracy which has citizenship as its cornerstone<sup>9</sup> problematically implies that identities can be reconstructed (to result in a particular kind of citizenship and citizen participation) in the postcolonial context while ignoring identity conceptions that have existed beyond the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial divides, and those that are currently emerging.

The article begins with a theoretical discussion of identity as existing in the relationships between people rather than within categories, drawing from Crenshaw, Englund and Jenkins. It then examines emerging identities in Rwanda, historically until today, bringing attention to how ethnic identity became so divisive and 'othering', as well as to the myriad of identities other than that of ethnicity that have emerged. This is followed by a discussion of citizenship discourse as 'othering' in the Rwandan context. The conclusion draws together the discussion, reiterating the argument that 'lived' identities in Rwanda seem to move beyond ethnicity or citizenship, and that these identities exist in the relational spaces between identity categories, but also beyond the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial distinctions and beyond the borders of the Rwandan nation-state.

## Complex Networks of Interrelationships

What identity in Rwanda points to – as will be made clear in a discussion of the historical development of ethnic identities in Rwanda – is that ethnicity is not an 'essential' identity category, nor is it a constructed identity category that can simply be 'un-constructed' through government policies and laws. This article is situated within the school of thought that states that although identities are constructed, they are 'socially and historically situated' and have an impact on lived experience.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, identities cannot simply be 'un-constructed'; their existence has come about due to particular complex historical, social and psychological developments, and they matter enough to people to lead to violent conflict.

Within this school of thought, identities have been described as being, amongst other things, constructed, fluid, multiple, relational, hybrid, fragmented and contested. But these aspects of identity need to be explored in far greater depth to understand how they have developed and why some identities evolve while others resist doing so.<sup>11</sup> The issue is not that they have been constructed but, as Alcoff and Mohanry argue, how they were constructed, by whom, and 'what differences different constructions make'.<sup>12</sup>

It is for this reason that attempts by the Rwandan government to 'un-construct' ethnic identities through policies and laws are seen to be unsuccessful. Buckley-Zistel writes: 'Given the devastating impact of discourses equating ethnic with civic identity, which divided people and contributed to the genocide, the policy of the government to use the opposite strategy to bring people back together seems obvious'.<sup>15</sup> Yet her research, and my own, indicates that although Rwandans use citizenship discourse in conversation, 'othering' along ethnic (and other) lines remains.

Several approaches to understanding identities may be helpful in the Rwandan context. In the late 1980s and 1990s, postcolonial feminists writing about race, gender and class found that speaking about these categories independently was not an accurate reflection of the lived experience of the black women they were researching. In 1989, Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' to 'denote the various ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences'.<sup>14</sup> Others, building on this, have explored the intersections of a range of identities (in this volume Hudson problematises gender<sup>15</sup> and victim/perpetrator binaries, and elsewhere scholars have explored intersectionality in terms of ethnic,<sup>16</sup> religious<sup>17</sup> and even national/transnational<sup>18</sup> identity categories) in order to better understand and reflect the ways in which people experience their identities. Jennifer Nash argues that central to the theory of intersectionality is the idea that identity categories can become hierarchical, hegemonic and exclusive.<sup>19</sup> Nash writes,

While liberal critiques of identity politics criticize its failure to transcend difference, Crenshaw argues that the real problem of identity politics is that it elides intra-group difference, a problem that intersectionality purports to solve by exposing differences within the broad categories.

As will be seen in the discussion on the historical development of identities in Rwanda, ethnic identities have been used time and again to essentialise the identities of all Rwandans as being either Hutu or Tutsi, in order to increase the power of one and marginalise the other. But as

emerged in the life narratives that I collected, few could identify themselves as clearly being one or the other; most had complex origins that would not place them firmly in either one or the other ethnic identity. Nevertheless, most of those I interviewed did speak about their ethnic identities in essentialising ways. For example, time and again, those interviewed, when asked about issues of ethnicity, would speak of 'secretive and cunning Tutsi' or 'lazy and incapable Hutu', using variations of similar descriptions. This paradox of acknowledging mixed origins and yet speaking in essentialising terms has created a confusing flux of identity. The government's attempt to resolve this through creating a united national Rwandan identity from the top down has been, arguably, largely resisted.<sup>20</sup> This article suggests that civic identity has the danger to further essentialise personal identity by creating a new category of what it means to be Rwandan that will yet again marginalise, hegemonise and exclude some in order to empower others. The way forward may lie less with rallying for citizenship (whether in the form the Rwandan government presents it, or in the form that its critics imagine it) and more with gaining a better understanding of lived identities in Rwanda through an 'intersectional' lens.

Building on the idea of intersectionality, two other approaches that focus specifically on ethnicity in violent contexts may be helpful, the first offered by Harri Englund and the second by Richard Jenkins. Englund suggests a shift in emphasis from (either individual or group) identity categories to the relations between categories, communities, individuals and groups; that more important than discrete groups is the fluid movement between them. Englund is arguing not simply for the fact that people hold multiple identities but that identity groups are not discrete units, separate from one another. Framing identity in terms of discrete groups, and thus framing the conflict in terms of a conflict between discrete groups, not only exacerbates the conflict dynamic but is also potentially a faulty interpretation of the conflict to begin with.

When the conflict is framed as essentially between Hutu and Tutsi, and the solution is framed as the denial of these ethnic groups, it gives more importance to these groups than they in fact hold. Throughout history and until today, Rwandans have moved between multiple categories of identities, including those related to their location in Rwanda (north or south), what other nationalities they simultaneously hold, whether they are rural or urban, and so on. Englund suggests that none of these discrete identities may hold as much significance as the networks of relationships within which people function on a daily basis.<sup>21</sup> The danger of seeing groups as discrete (that is, units that are separate from one another) is that they can easily be manipulated to foster intolerance, hatred and violence: 'Other groups and communities are unreservedly alien, cut off from the fabric of a moral society or, if not spontaneously keeping their distance, severed by force'.<sup>22</sup> Leaders can then justify suppressing difference (for example, through suppressing minority or disadvantaged groups) in the name of national unity, which is already happening in Rwanda in relation to the ethnic minority, the Twa.

Englund argues that every community is a network of complex relations. Rather than recognising or acknowledging distinct communities of difference, one would acknowledge the relations that unite those groups, and acknowledge these relations not only as something that is inserted between communities after they emerge, but also as intrinsic to the very emergence of the communities. Englund suggests making relationships and connections the starting point of the politics of recognition. But this is difficult in a context where identity politics means having a specific,

discrete identity and where every person is rooted in a particular culture. An alternative to discrete individuals, groups and communities pursuing their own agendas might involve looking at contemporary African ways of being, such as 'cosmopolitan citizenship, multiple post-colonial identities and cosmological ideas about the person and the self'.<sup>23</sup> Along with Englund, this article argues that the complex network of relationships between identities, within a person and between people is intrinsic to the living out of identities in the postcolonial African context. Goff and Dunn contribute to this by asking whether identities need to be 'explicitly exclusionary' and if they cannot also be put to 'peaceful, inclusionary ends'.<sup>24</sup> They suggest that identity could also be viewed in a more ecological way and that inclusion or exclusion is not inherent to identity; it holds the potential for either.

Jenkins speaks of nominal and virtual identities. He suggests a way in which the tension between national identity, personal autonomy and a sense of community can be understood. Nominal identity refers to that which is titled (e.g. Hutu, Tutsi, Rwandan) and virtual identity refers to that which is 'lived'. He argues that these overlap but are not always the same thing. The nominal is less likely to change than the virtual, which remains dynamic. By freezing identity categories in terms of the nominal, the natural processes of emerging virtual identities are hampered and disallowed to grow into something new. He argues that identity is always in flux and emerging. Static identity categories hamper the natural development towards different ways of engaging with one another, which is necessary in societies recovering from violent conflict.<sup>25</sup> A united national identity, or a civic identity, can be seen as an example of a nominal identity category in that it 'freezes' identity at a particular time and place (for example, post-genocide Rwanda), and prescribes what that identity looks like<sup>26</sup> (for example, what it does and does not mean to be a Rwandan) and does not allow for other conceptions of identity to emerge.

## Ethnicity as 'Othering' in Rwanda

At various times in Rwandan history, the fluid movement of identities has been hampered by intervention from internal and external actors, and in most instances the rigidifying of identity has contributed to violent conflict. Prior to colonialism, identity categories in Rwanda were relatively fluid; the idea that 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' referred to different tribes or even ethnic groups has been convincingly disputed.<sup>27</sup> More and more, it is believed that the term 'Tutsi' referred to all of those who were associated with power, while 'Hutu' referred to a 'transethnic identity of subjects'.<sup>28</sup> Although it did not occur often, prosperous Hutu could 'become' Tutsi (*Kwihutura*), or poor Tutsi could 'become' Hutu (*Gucupira*). As various scholars have reiterated, this movement stopped during the reign of one of Rwanda's last active kings in the mid-1800s, Rwabugiri, who solidified identities in order to consolidate the Rwandan kingdom.<sup>29</sup> Until colonialism, one's clan and lineage were more significant identifiers, and these held within them both Hutu and Tutsi.<sup>30</sup>

During colonialism, identities were not only further solidified, they were racialised.<sup>31</sup> Through the pervasive reiteration of the Hamitic hypothesis,<sup>32</sup> to be Tutsi increasingly meant to belong to a superior race group. The effects of this racialisation are evident in the 1957 Bahutu Manifesto, written by Hutu intellectuals, which describes the suffering of the 'Hutu race' under Tutsi oppression.

Not only was ethnic identity racialised but, argues Mamdani, the Tutsi came to be equated with the colonial powers and seen as a foreign invading race that needed to be overthrown.<sup>33</sup> The revolution that occurred in 1957 was seen as a fight for independence not only from Belgian colonial power, but also from Tutsi oppression.

Between the revolution and the genocide, Rwanda experienced two lengthy single-party regimes. The first was under Gregoire Kayibanda, from the south, who continued to perpetuate ethnic (and racial) divisionism; and the second was under General Juvénal Habyarimana, who arguably attempted, but failed, to deracialise ethnicity.<sup>34</sup> During the existence of these two republics, hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were forced to go into exile and denied the right to return to their homeland. Due to shifts in the regional political context,<sup>35</sup> second- and third-generation refugees formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which became a military organisation that they used in order to forcefully return to Rwanda. Their return coincided with, or some would argue triggered, the genocide, which was perhaps the culmination of the racialisation of identities. During the genocide, identities were frozen into such rigid, divisive identities that the 'other' became dehumanised.<sup>36</sup>

Significantly, the RPF at this time was ideologically Pan-Africanist and trained its members in African politics, history and philosophy.<sup>37</sup> A former RPF soldier said that '[i]n the RPA [the army of the RPF], Hutu and Tutsi wasn't spoken about. They dealt with segregation with military discipline and strictness. They wanted to show that Rwandans could live without those, and it was forbidden. You couldn't even speak of being Tutsi. They promoted patriotism and unity'.<sup>38</sup> Yet the members of the RPF who entered Rwanda, and who as refugees in neighbouring countries had been more aware of being African first, and then Rwandan, were confronted with a society which at that moment defined itself centrally along ethnic lines.

## Emerging Identities in Rwanda

But identity in Rwanda was never only, and often not centrally, defined along ethnic lines. As significant as ethnic identity was the north-south divide, Aible Twagilimana argues that few researchers give enough attention to the effects of regionalism in Rwanda. He even argues that genocide can be as much attributed to ethnic tension as to the north-south divide.<sup>39</sup> He describes how for centuries power lay in the hands of southerners; the country was first governed by the Tutsi monarchy, which was based in the south, and then later by President Kayibanda, also in the south. He describes how, until the arrival of the colonialists, the north, and especially Gisenyi and Ruhengeri, was independent from the Rwandan monarchy, and was ruled by Hutu chieftains. The desire to place power in the hands of northerners was even more important to Habyarimana and his supporters than that Hutu power be maintained. But very little research to date has considered what role the north-south divide has played in post-genocide Rwanda.

Directly after the genocide, some two million Rwandans fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and contrary to how it is sometimes portrayed, these were not only *genocidaires* but a diversity of people who were afraid, disoriented and swept up by the massive movement away from the horror.<sup>40</sup> This mass of refugees became a humanitarian as well as a security crisis, as amongst

them were *genocidaires* with the intention of continuing the violent conflict. Between 1994 and 1998, these refugees were encouraged to return, and towards the late 1990s, the camps were violently closed down by Rwandan government forces. While this refugee crisis was happening across the border, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans from the diaspora streamed 'back' into Rwanda (some were second- or third-generation Rwandans and had never been in the country before).

The Rwandans returning to Rwanda from the diaspora are sometimes called 'old-case-load' refugees in the literature, and those that fled to the DRC after 1994 and returned in the late 1990s have been called 'new-case-load' refugees.<sup>41</sup> Although these identity labels are not used by Rwandans, as far as I know the distinction between Rwandans who have 'always' lived in Rwanda, those that returned from the diaspora in 1994 and those that returned in the late 1990s is an example of 'lived' identities in Rwanda today. In my own research and that of others, time and again Rwandans have reiterated that they feel most comfortable with those who come from a 'similar' background.<sup>42</sup> 'Old-case-load' refugees are most likely to be Tutsi from the diaspora, with some suggesting different groups have formed, depending on their country of origin and the language of the country of origin (French, English and/or Swahili).<sup>43</sup> 'New-case-load' refugees are likely to be Hutu, but this is not a given, as several have described how Tutsi also fled to the DRC after 1994 in the confusion that reigned.<sup>44</sup> Those who have always remained in the country have this in common, across ethnic lines, but experience divisions along other lines. This points to the complexity of identities beyond (although also intertwined with) ethnicity.

Of all those I interviewed, none primarily identified themselves along ethnic lines. Although all expressed an awareness of their ethnicity, it did not seem to be their primary identifier. For those who lived in neighbouring countries prior to the genocide, being a Rwandan was significant, particularly as life for refugees became more difficult. Some of those from this background whom I interviewed interestingly argued for an East African identity over a Rwandan one, as I have elaborated on in a previous article:<sup>45</sup>

We still have a lot of problems in the region which are coming from the problem of nationality and citizenship. Oppressing people of other nationalities, like oppressing Rwandans in Tanzania and Uganda, is a failure of African leaders and they don't realize that these identity crises lead to political crises and violence. This is something that needs to be addressed at a regional, policy level. If there had been no reason to leave Uganda I would not have gone to Rwanda. If people had security there would be no need to engage in violence. If there was an East African Community that secured people's futures there would be no need for nationalities.<sup>46</sup>

Amongst those I interviewed, some felt they had been collectively labelled as being part of the group that perpetrated the genocide even though they were too young to have participated. Related to this, new identity labels that are emerging in Rwanda are 'TIGiste' and 'relative of perpetrator'. The term 'TIGiste' is used to describe those who participate in TIG (*Travail d'Interet General*), a Rwandan programme that allows people found guilty of participating in the genocide to serve all or part of their sentence doing community service. As one person I interviewed candidly described it, identified perpetrators may feel 'out of place' in today's Rwanda. Some might argue that in Rwanda

today, being Hutu has become synonymous with being a perpetrator, but this does not seem to consistently be the case throughout the country or in every context.

Since 1994, Rwanda has changed significantly, and these changes have had an impact on the way people interact with and experience one another. Prior to the genocide, Rwanda was a relatively closed country, relatively unknown to the world and separate from it, but after the genocide, the country was flooded with returnees from the diaspora and neighbouring countries and had the world's attention. Further, since 1994, Rwanda has entered into the technological age and the global economy, and has shifted from being a Francophone to an English-speaking country. Information technology, computers and the Internet are being introduced countrywide, development is booming and Rwanda is now an important country to consider in terms of East and Central African relations. Since the genocide, Rwanda has transformed itself from an inefficient postcolonial state into an increasingly developing, 'modern' society.<sup>47</sup>

Amidst all these changes, though, in some ways the Rwanda of today still echoes the colonial and independence periods, reflecting the intersection of the traditional and modern that Mamdani describes more broadly as occurring in the postcolonial state, each shaping and changing the other.<sup>48</sup> A few of these echoes of the past are worth mentioning in that they play a role in the lived identities that are emerging.

The kings (mwamis) who used to rule Rwanda prior to colonialism had semi-divine power and ruled their people with absolute authority. Unlike many other African contexts, the Rwandan kingdom was a surprisingly centralised state, and the mwamis maintained authority through a complex hierarchical network. The two presidents, Kayibanda and Habyarimana, ruled Rwanda in much the same way. Prunier describes their rule as having been 'remote, secretive, authoritarian' and demanding absolute, unquestioning obedience to authority.<sup>49</sup> Along with this was the assumption that ordinary people should not get involved in politics but should instead concentrate their energies on hard work. This resonates strongly with the way in which Rwanda's current president, Kagame, is said to rule.<sup>50</sup>

The complex hierarchical structures of power date back to before colonialism, but have also been shaped by colonialism. Gahamany, in an article that was published shortly before the Rwandan genocide, puts forward an unapologetic defence of the 'commune' system in Rwanda which I would argue illustrates the intersection of already existing networks of authority and colonial forms of authority.<sup>51</sup> Gahamany describes how Rwanda was divided into 11 districts, 22 subdistricts, 145 communes, 1 489 sectors and 8 100 cellules. The commune was the smallest but also most significant administrative unit, and it echoed both the system of 'chiefs on hills' that existed prior to colonialism<sup>52</sup> and the Belgian administrative system. The commune did not only have administrative functions but ensured 'social and cultural development', including involvement in 'agriculture, cattle raising, health, teaching, cooperatives, roads, routing of water supplies etc.'<sup>53</sup> It was the high level of organisation of Rwandan society into communes (sectors and cellules) that the colonial powers employed to control Rwanda, that allowed the genocide to be efficient and that arguably allows a tight centralised control to exist in Rwanda today.

Centralised rule by a secretive and remote ruler, an ethic of hard work and participation in community activities such as *umuganda*<sup>54</sup> (community service in which all Rwandans are encouraged to participate) characterise Rwanda throughout its history until today. Participation in cultural activities (*Itorero ry' Igihugu*)<sup>55</sup> such as song, dance and drama have been and still are unifying events in a local community and are a way in which civic virtues are passed along to the population.



Although there are these echoes of the past, there are also ways in which the government has attempted to recreate Rwanda. In order to counter the divisive ideologies that allowed genocide to happen, the government has attempted to rewrite history and recreate Rwandan identity. This is the primary work of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), which was established in 1999 with the mandate to foster unity and reconciliation throughout the country. The presiding message of the NURC is, 'There are no Hutu and Tutsi, there are only Rwandans'.<sup>56</sup> Policies and laws have been put in place to help Rwandans move on from ethnic categories to a united Rwandan identity. This is primarily being achieved through citizenship discourse. But citizenship discourse in an African context remains contentious, particularly when being a citizen means the denial of any other form of identity.

## Citizenship as 'Othering' in Rwanda

Rwanda, as has been described by multiple scholars, is clearly leaning towards being an authoritarian state without the kind of political freedoms one would hope for in a state that identifies itself as democratic.<sup>57</sup> Instead of successfully transcending ethnic divisions, the government policy of denying ethnicity seems to have exacerbated the divisions. This is in spite of attempts to introduce a robust citizenship discourse.<sup>58</sup> Several arguments have been put forward for why this may be, such as that the underlying motives of the government are to perpetuate the power of a small minority, that the relationship between citizens and the state is one of fear rather than trust, that there is not enough space for public debate, and that resources are not (perceived to be) distributed equally amongst citizens.<sup>59</sup> All of these make important contributions to understanding what is going on in Rwanda, but they continue to frame the conflict and its solution in terms of discrete identity categories and fail to scrutinise the problems inherent in citizenship discourse in a postcolonial context.

Mamdani contends that authority in the postcolonial African state echoes colonial power structures in that the former 'Native Authority', the authority structure the colonial power used to manage the population, has become the new ruling elite.<sup>60</sup> Ake similarly argues that although independence changed the 'managers of the state' it did not change the 'character of the state' and that the state in Africa today 'tends to be privatised by a ruling elite'.<sup>61</sup> The state is perceived by the rural majority as a hostile force, and local communities fulfil the role that the state in a liberal democracy is assumed to hold: 'It is to the local communities that most people turn for security, emotional support and social welfare', argues Ake.<sup>62</sup> In the case of Rwanda, there seems to be a complex conflation of the local community and the state, where, through the intricate, hierarchical networks mentioned previously, the government operates at every level, down to the 'commune' and the 'cell', in an attempt to facilitate development on the one hand, and alignment to government policy on the other.

Although some studies suggest that local communities are resistant to government involvement, mistrusting the government's intentions,<sup>63</sup> others suggest that Rwandans welcome the significant development that has taken place, often through the government's high level of involvement. Ake suggests that in the African context hierarchical structures are not necessarily

perceived negatively, and 'political domination' does not necessarily hold the connotation of control, coercion and exploitation; instead, '[w]hile there is order, ordination and subordination, they are contextualised in ways that are largely devoid of these connotations'; and instead hierarchy is 'sanctioned in ways which make it positive, liberating and "valuable". It is accepted as a civic virtue in the Aristotelian sense of being equally comfortable, adept and morally uplifting by ruling and being ruled'.<sup>64</sup>

This points to a seeming contradiction: Do communities experience being ruled in a politically dominant way as liberating and 'valuable', or are communities resistant to the involvement of government in their daily affairs? Perhaps Ekeh's work from the mid-1970s offers a way forward. Ekeh argues that after colonialism, two public realms developed, namely the 'primordial public' which is moral and operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm, and the 'civic public' which is 'historically associated with the colonial administration, and is amoral'.<sup>65</sup> The latter includes civil structures such as the military, civil service, police and so on. According to Ekeh, the distinction between the primordial and civic publics led to a distinctly different conceptualisation of citizenship in Africa. In the primordial public, individuals have duties and responsibilities to their community which may take a material form, and in return receive immaterial benefits in the form of 'identity or psychological security'.<sup>66</sup> Ekeh describes in some detail the 'psychic turbulence' many Africans experience as they try to reconcile moving between their rural homes and origins and the demands of urban, modern living with the necessity for a psychological place of belonging and rest. But where people 'bend over backwards to benefit and sustain their primordial public', they simply seek to gain from the civic public, having 'no moral urge to give back to the civic public in return for its benefits'. Although Ekeh's terms and his emphasis on the binary between the primordial and civic publics may be a little dated, and the 'amorality' of the civic public may be less in evidence now than it was then (particularly in Rwanda, where there is an attempt to bring the so-called 'primordial' into the civic), this discussion nevertheless points to distinctly different motivations for participation in the public realm.

This brings us to the conflict in civic virtues that exists in a typical liberal democracy and in an African state, with specific reference to Rwanda. A list of civic virtues often includes the desire to participate in political processes, promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; law-abidingness; loyalty; the capacity to discern and respect the rights of others; and willingness to participate in public debate, amongst others.<sup>67</sup> But how do these virtues translate to what is needed in a country like Rwanda? What does citizen participation mean in Rwanda? As Ake writes,

The African who is slated for democracy is typically a rural dweller who lives in a society that is predominantly communal. She is a subsistence farmer, absorbed in toiling to eke out a precarious existence. She has virtually no access to safe drinking water, health services and sanitary facilities and she is illiterate or only marginally literate. What does democratization mean in this setting and to this person?<sup>68</sup>

Various scholars suggest that the way forward for Rwanda is open dialogue between the government and its citizens.<sup>69</sup> This conclusion makes sense, considering that one of the fundamental civic virtues of a liberal democracy is that 'the decisions of a government in a democracy should be

made publicly, through free and open discussion'.<sup>70</sup> Kymlicka and Norman discuss how there has been a shift from 'vote-centric' democracy to 'talk-centric' democracy: the process of deliberation and opinion formation that precedes voting has become more important than the voting process itself.

In line with this talk-centric approach, Buckley-Zistel suggests that reconciliation in Rwanda would require a discourse for 'discussing (often perceived) inequalities' and that 'bringing these issues into the open might allow for clarifying eventual misperceptions or addressing policies to contribute to more equity'.<sup>71</sup> She writes that, 'With a sense of equality being the primary basis for a collective identity, the "fraternity amongst equals" and the acceptance of the slogan "we are all Rwandan", the opening up of the public, political space is essential'.<sup>72</sup> Yet there has been no careful scrutiny of the idea of public discourse or citizenship participation in Rwanda being distinctly different from what it is in a Western liberal democracy.

Goldmann argues, with reference to Sierra Leone,

In order for nation building to be successful it seems that traditional structures like the larger family or the tribe have to be superseded not as social institutions as such, but as the focal point of the identity of the individual. In other words, for a nation to arise in Sierra Leone, society has to be modernized. Modernization here means the emergence of an impersonal government, of a society pursuing economic growth and allowing for social mobility, and a cultural system allowing for identification by all members of society, even in a non-homogeneous society.<sup>73</sup>

This is the difficult transitional phase Rwanda seems to be in: In order to build and modernise the nation state, it is argued that a particular kind of identity, namely citizenship, needs to be prioritised at the expense of all other identities. The citizenship discourse in Rwanda carefully echoes citizenship discourse prevalent in liberal democracies. In reality, though, as many scholars have noted, the government does not practise the kind of liberal democracy it preaches.<sup>74</sup> But by-and-large, scholars have continued to analyse the paradoxes in Rwanda through this 'liberal democratic' lens, and have offered solutions that again reflect a liberal democratic understanding of identity, primarily through citizenship, instead of through the lens of the lived experience of ordinary Rwandans. Perhaps an exploration of Ekeh's 'primordial public' and how it interacts with the 'civic public' in the case of Rwanda would reveal some important insights into alternative ways of participation in the public realm.

Adejumobi argues that many African countries still follow patterns of state governance that were established during colonialism in which rights, privileges and entitlements were institutionally divided along ethnic lines, creating a sense of inequality.<sup>75</sup> He argues that the issue at stake is not whether multiple groups exist, but whether the state, through citizenship, can create a sense of equality. When all citizens believe they have equal access to their rights, he argues, there would be less need to assert other identities in the public space. But considering Ekeh's two public realms, the question remains whether the need for equal rights or equal access will be met through an emphasis on citizenship participation within the framework presented by a liberal democracy.

This article builds on the foundations developed by Adejumobi concerning citizenship in Africa, but differs from him on the conclusions he draws. As mentioned in the introduction, where

Adejumobi argues that the way forward is for African states to take 'liberal democracy very seriously', I would argue that it is the concept of citizenship implied by liberal democracy that creates an 'identity crisis' in African states. A liberal democratic understanding of citizenship in the African context assumes identities can be reconstructed (to result in a particular kind of citizenship and citizen participation) in the postcolonial context, ignoring identity conceptions existing beyond the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial divides, and those that are currently emerging.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that it is not necessarily citizenship discourse (or egalitarian citizenship) that will facilitate a transcendence of identity divisions, but rather, as the postcolonial feminists and scholars such as Englund describe, moving beyond discrete identity categories altogether. The Rwandan government has relatively effectively implemented civic education throughout the country, but even if this were the kind of civic education that critics of the government would describe as legitimate and meaningful, it would most likely fail to address the needs of local communities.

As Ake postulates, what most African communities are seeking are economic and social rights rather than abstract political rights, and these needs are most effectively met in the 'networks of interrelationships' that already exist. This article recommends that alongside critiquing government policy, it would be worthwhile to examine what local communities are already doing in order to function effectively, and what is already taking place in the Rwandan context that allows contending 'discrete identity categories' (such as Hutu, Tutsi, TIGistes, and survivors of genocide) to co-exist interdependently, regardless of government policies. This might bring to light some surprising and significant ways in which Rwandans are participating in their own progress, which in turn might lead to more helpful policies for governments through which to enhance what communities are already doing.

Time and again, scholars have commented on the fact that ethnic identity in Rwanda becomes important when it is related to access to power and resources.<sup>76</sup> As Ingalaere argues, '[i]nstead of focusing on the adjustment of ethnicities, it would, therefore, be more productive to focus on the social context and political systems in which they thrive'.<sup>77</sup> Where Ingalaere may assume this to mean developing more robust liberal democratic processes, this article suggests the shift in focus should be away from systems that insist on discrete identity categories towards understanding what is happening in the complex network of interrelationships. Although when talking about ethnicity Rwandans speak in 'othering' terms, in daily interactions, interdependence, as difficult and painful as this sometimes is (particularly between perpetrators and survivors who live alongside one another), seems central to the functioning of local communities.

Elsewhere in this volume, Hudson,<sup>78</sup> in her discussion of gendercide, concludes that the answer does not lie in a 'beyond', but rather 'within the binary order itself'. She asks the question, 'What happens to gender and all the other overlapping identities at the point where they intersect?' This is an important question in the context of Rwanda, where there are a multitude of ways in which people experience their lived identities. This includes ethnic identity, but not necessarily centrally situated. What happens at the point where all these overlapping identities intersect?

This article suggests that current identity concepts are built on complex networks of interrelationships rather than loyalty to a nation state, and that these networks predate colonialism. This was what colonialists arriving in Rwanda in the early twentieth century misunderstood when they glanced over the very complex networks that crucially held Rwandan society in balance, and replaced these networks with a simple divide-and-rule system. And this is what continues to be misunderstood in Rwanda today when identity politics is understood in terms of either citizenship discourse or ethnicities. The government's actions are problematic in its simply wanting to create a united Rwandan identity, but a critique of this is similarly problematic when it considers Rwandan identity as being fundamentally about one ethnic group that is being favoured over another. In the broader African context, Ake describes how people participate 'not because they are individuals whose interests need to be asserted, but because they are part of an interconnected whole. Participation rests not on the assumption of individuality but on the social nature of human beings'.<sup>79</sup> Identity in this context is not about the assertion of discrete identities, but rather about understanding the complex networks of interrelationships.

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