



# War of the Words

How post-conflict narratives in history textbooks impact peacebuilding efforts

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**GENEVA  
GRADUATE  
INSTITUTE**

2025 N° 56

eCahiers de l'Institut | Graduate Institute ePapers



Graduate Institute Publications

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DOI: 10.4000/13azb

Publisher: Graduate Institute Publications

Place of publication: Geneva

Year of publication: 2025

Publication date: 12 février 2025

Series: eCahiers de l'Institut

Digital ISBN: 978-2-940600-60-1



<https://books.openedition.org>

### Print edition

Provided by Geneva Graduate Institute



## DIGITAL REFERENCE

Peery Viggers, Jessica. *War of the Words*. Graduate Institute Publications, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.4000/13azb>.

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### Cover metadata

#### Credits

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the way societies influence historical memory of conflict within their borders through the formal education system. It posits that the narratives constructed within educational materials have the capacity to affect peacebuilding efforts in both positive and negative ways. Using the case study of Rwanda, it analyses the narratives found in the most recent collection of secondary school history textbooks to identify elements of the narrative that either support peacebuilding efforts or detract from them. This case study shows that the same narrative or set of narratives about a conflict can contain both elements. It posits that as decision makers balance needs for what educational materials should achieve, including requirements that may limit the efficacy of peacebuilding efforts, international advisors should be knowledgeable of and sensitive to these needs in order to identify solutions that minimise negative impacts on reconciliation.

*We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Vahabzadeh Foundation for financially supporting the publication of best works by young researchers of the Graduate Institute, giving a priority to those who have been awarded academic prizes for their master's dissertations.*

## JESSICA PEERY VIGGERS

Jessica Peery Viggers recently completed her studies at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland as part of the Master in International and Development Studies programme under the Conflict, Peace, and Security specialisation. She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, USA where she was a member of the Pi Sigma Alpha National Political Science Honor Society and the Beta Gamma Sigma International Business Honor Society. Her previous research has ranged from the stability of political alliances in non-democratic regimes to the application of international humanitarian law in civilian internment camps to the impact of post-conflict education on peacebuilding.

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# Acknowledgements

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- 1 The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the invaluable insights and mentorship provided by my thesis advisor Professor Maria Neus Torbisco Casals. I am also grateful to Professor Sung Min Rho, whose expertise enriched this research with thoughtful feedback.
- 2 Geneva and the Graduate Institute have been a welcoming, stimulating and engaging environment, which has fostered my personal and academic growth. I feel truly grateful for the experiences I have lived, the knowledge I have acquired, and the acquaintances I have made. I feel grateful for having had the privilege of living between Geneva, Naples, and Tokyo. Three cities that now feel like home to me in equal measure.
- 3 I have often considered having my heart split between different cities as a curse. Always having to choose between my ambition, roots, dreams, bonds, love, career. The constant feeling of not belonging entirely anywhere. The guilt of missing key moments with loved ones. Forced to say goodbye more often than one wishes and never getting used to it.
- 4 It is only thanks to Geneva and Tokyo that I realised that a torn heart is the greatest luck of all. It means having the opportunity to feel at home in so many places. Feeling in the right place wherever one is. Leaving pieces of yourself scattered all over while bringing with you the best that each place has to offer. Having the chance to love more. Appreciate all the fleeting moments because well aware that they will never return. Feel one's heart get bigger with every new acquaintance, every new place visited, every new experience made, every new culture embraced. It means realising that the new does not replace the old. Love is not finite. The world is waiting for you; and home is also waiting for you, whichever this is.
- 5 I feel an endless sense of gratitude towards all the friends I have shared these past two years with. Friends who ended up becoming my roommates, neighbours, travel companions, adventure buddies, and greatest source of fun and stress relief. Most important of all, my family. The grey skies of Geneva would have been unbearable without having each one of you by my side every day.
- 6 Thank you also to all my lifelong friends, with whom I continue to share successes, failures, difficulties, sufferings, joys.
- 7 To my dad, my mom, and my brothers, whose unconditional love and support has never made me feel too far away from home.

8 To justice, peace, and reconciliation.

# List of abbreviations

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- 1 APROSOMA – Association Pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse
- 2 FAR – Forces Rwandaises de Défense
- 3 GNU – Government of National Unity
- 4 MRND – Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement
- 5 PRK – People's Republic of Kampuchea
- 6 RANU – Rwandese Alliance of National Unity
- 7 RPA – Rwandan Patriotic Army
- 8 RPF – Rwandan Patriotic Front
- 9 UN – United Nations
- 10 UNAR – Union Nationale Rwandaise
- 11 UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
- 12 UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

# Introduction

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- 1 Education is a tool. It can be weaponised in ways that lead to violence. In some cases, this may emerge due to the structure of the educational system. As increased economic opportunities often stem from higher educational attainment, these systems may privilege certain groups within a country in a way which furthers socio-economic inequalities between the different groups later down the line. This can be subtle, such as fixing the language of instruction to one spoken by members of the societal elite (Brown, 2011). In some cases, it can be more directly discriminatory, actively preventing members of certain groups from accessing educational resources through policy choices, a warning of potentially violent actions to come (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).
- 2 It may also emerge in the content taught to the youth. An example of this would be the consistent use of heavily nationalist narratives in German education under the Nazi regime, including the introduction of ‘racial sciences’ as a method to influence students ideologically (Gallagher, 2004). Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue that oppressive regimes do not necessarily need active acceptance of heinous acts in order to maintain control, as it is enough for members of society to passively neglect to reject these actions. As such, education plays a vital role in helping legitimise actions against targeted groups so as to, at a minimum, discourage resistance from the broader public. However, the argument goes on to acknowledge that, although education can be used in overtly destructive ways, it can also be powerfully constructive in the peacebuilding process.
- 3 In assessing the state of education in a post-conflict environment, it is often easier for decision makers and evaluators to focus on measurable targets such as literacy rates or enrolment rather than more qualitative work such as curriculum development (L. Davies, 2004). However, given the potential inflammatory power of these curricular elements, it is important to understand them as a way of evaluating peacebuilding efforts. A group’s collective memory can be powerful, in passing on not only the history of a group, but what it fundamentally means to be a member of that group (Bartlett, 1995). States have a capacity unmatched by other actors to influence collective memory of the past, propagating narrative resources such as educational materials (Wertsch, 2008). Where conflict-supporting narratives exist, changing the narratives can be an important part of the reconciliation process (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Sanz, 2012; Taka, 2020), particularly as societies move from an environment of strictly ‘negative peace’ where no direct violence is experienced to one of ‘positive peace’ where the structural



and cultural causes of said violence are no longer present as described by Galtung (1969). History textbooks can perpetuate cycles of retributive violence by peddling narratives clearly delineating victims and oppressors, encouraging hatred for the out-group whilst doing little to discourage acts of revenge (L. Davies, 2004). As such, analysing the narratives present in post-conflict society through the lens of educational material can be a useful way of assessing and understanding the efficacy of the peacebuilding process.

- 4 The present research seeks to contribute to the literature analysing the impact of peacebuilding education by focusing on how narratives surrounding an intra-state armed conflict are presented in history textbooks. Building upon previous research and using analysis gathered from a case study of Rwanda, this research seeks to identify which elements of the narrative are supportive of the peacebuilding process, and which elements are damaging to it. The Rwandan resources provide an example where both constructive and limiting elements can be seen acting simultaneously, making it particularly relevant to this central research question. Importantly, this research does not seek to evaluate whether or not narratives found in Rwanda are the most accurate portrayal of history, nor does it seek to predict whether or not conflict will re-emerge based solely on the narratives present in the literature. The primary goal is not even to provide a definitive answer as to whether or not the educational system as a whole is an effective peacebuilding tool. Rather, by identifying patterns within the narratives being produced and analysing their potential impact, it seeks to provide a resource for those creating future post-conflict educational material to reflect on the narratives being constructed in those contexts.

## Structure of the Paper

- 5 This paper will begin by exploring previous literature dedicated to the central question of how narratives about intra-state armed conflicts are presented, or in some cases deliberately not presented, in the areas that have experienced them. This will be followed by sections introducing the conceptual framework used to identify and evaluate narrative elements, followed by the methodology used, which will provide justification for the use of the Rwanda case study to answer the research question as well as outlining the materials used and why they were chosen. The subsequent section analyses narratives found in the Rwandan case study, utilising information collected from the six textbooks currently in use in Rwandan schools. It begins broadly by providing an overview of the prevalence of the conflict throughout the entire secondary school curriculum as is relevant to present discussion, before analysing the narrative structure and flow of units specifically relating to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi,<sup>1</sup> and only then diving into the specific recurrent narratives found in the texts. Once these elements have been presented, the next section connects these narratives with the broader research question as well as with previous literature written about history education in post-conflict settings to identify factors that aid in and detract from peacebuilding efforts. Ultimately, the research shows that, within the same educational framework, there are elements that do both. The research posits that a greater understanding of how and where these elements play out can help future decision makers approach curriculum design in a way that maximises positive elements and minimises negative elements while still being responsive to the local context.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. This specific terminology is used to reflect how the conflict is discussed within the Rwandan curriculum.

# Literature review

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- 1 Post-conflict education has been discussed in a variety of contexts such as Burundi (Gaynor, 2021; Rwantabagu, 2010; Verwimp & Bavel, 2013), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Efendic et al., 2022; Keaveney, 2009; Swimelar, 2013; Torsti, 2007), Cambodia (Dy, 2013, 2015; *In Cambodia's Schools, Breaking a Silence Over the 'Killing Fields'*, 2015; Munyas, 2008), Colombia (Morales, 2021; Pineda & Celis, 2022), Germany (I. Davies, 2000; Krieg, 2015; Meseth & Proske, 2015; Pineda & Celis, 2022), Guatemala (Sieder, 2002), Northern Ireland (Keaveney, 2009; King, 2009; Terra, 2014), and Rwanda (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Davidson, 2018; Dy, 2015; Gasanabo et al., 2016; Henry, 2016; Jessee, 2021; McLean Hilker, 2011; Mutabazi, 2021). Although ensuring access to effective educational programmes within schools in areas with a history of armed conflict has been considered valuable by actors such as the Council of Europe (Keaveney, 2009) and the United Nations (UN) (Guterres, 2023), the process is often easier said than done. Several themes emerge throughout the literature, such as the avoidance of controversial material, disagreements in what should be included and how it should be presented, group-centric narratives highlighting in-group-out-group dynamics, education as a tool for power consolidation, education as a peacebuilding tool, and education beyond the classroom.

## Silence is golden

- 2 A common tendency found in the literature is the intentional avoidance of discussion relating to past conflicts in national history curricula. A variety of reasons were given as to why this content was kept out. In some cases, it was a choice to avoid dealing with the guilt of atrocities. In Germany, many of the teachers tasked with educating the next generation immediately after the cessation of violence had been active participants in the war. Historical memory of the Nazi regime was repressed until the mid-1960s, after a series of high-profile trials made continued repression untenable (I. Davies, 2000).
- 3 In a slightly different vein, history education was seen as dangerous shortly after the conflict in Rwanda, as it could be weaponised to promote ethnic division and undo efforts to create lasting peace and reconciliation (Dy, 2015). As a result, a moratorium was placed on history education from the mid-1990s until 2006 to allow members of the government to determine how they wanted recent history to be depicted relative to the needs of children, as well as giving teachers time to prepare accordingly (Henry, 2016).

This not only included the genocide, but also other historical events that were considered controversial (Gasabo et al., 2016). During this period, numerous attempts were made to determine how to fill the education gap, including commissions, conferences, and seminars, but ultimately it required the cooperation of international experts and Rwandan academics to put together something acceptable a full twelve years after the conflict (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). The Council of Europe recommended a similar moratorium be put in place in Bosnia and Herzegovina to allow space for historians from all communities in the country to produce a common educational approach (Parliamentary Assembly, 2000).

- 4 In Cambodia, although the Khmer Rouge regime ended in 1979, violence did not come to a complete halt until 1991 (*In Cambodia's Schools, Breaking a Silence Over the 'Killing Fields'*, 2015). In the pursuit of reconciliation between all Cambodians, including political actors from the Khmer Rouge faction, any discussion of Khmer Rouge history was removed from the curriculum between 1991 and 2001, with teachers requested not to approach the subject independently either. There was a desire to keep the past in the past (Dy, 2013). The stated purpose of removing the ideologically driven textbooks and lessons from the curriculum was to promote peace, stability, and reconciliation across Cambodia (Dy, 2015). As evidenced by these examples, for a variety of reasons, countries may require additional time to heal and prepare before introducing content about the conflict into their curricula.
- 5 This is not always in the context of a complete absence of historical information, rather decision makers may carefully choose which parts of history they feel comfortable teaching to their students. A common history curriculum was created in 1991 to bridge the gap between Catholic and Protestant schools in Northern Ireland. This curriculum, however, did not require students to study Irish history past 1922. Many Northern Irish teachers have avoided teaching history related to the sectarian divide and have preferred to focus on less controversial topics (King, 2009). History books produced in West Germany between 1945 and 1955 separated the actions of Hitler and the Nazi government from the German people, thus portraying the population as innocent victims of the regime. Furthermore, many lessons ended their historical coverage before the start of the Third Reich period, avoiding the discussion altogether (I. Davies, 2000). Dane Malešević, Minister of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska, banned the inclusion of any information regarding the siege of Sarajevo and the Srebrenica genocide from textbooks used within the Republika Srpska region, including textbooks produced in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muižnieks, 2017). In Cambodia, while some discussion of the Khmer Rouge regime was reintroduced in 2001 for secondary school students, it amounted to a mere two sentences (Dy, 2015). As history teachers were unwilling to deviate from government sanctioned material, this gap remained unfilled. Furthermore, even if students asked questions about political topics independently, teachers were unwilling to risk potential repercussions by responding (Dy, 2013). This limited students' abilities to engage with the content, giving students the ability to remember what happened, but not to understand it (Munyas, 2008).

## Barriers to creating effective post-conflict learning environments

- 6 If education about a conflict is introduced in a country, there are several possible barriers mentioned across the literature. Language of instruction emerges as a common

sticking point in constructing effective post-conflict education in multiethnic states. In 2009, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly called upon signatories to ‘ensure that necessary technologies and opportunities to support both teacher and student interactions within and between states are put in place, including access to written resources and sources in their own language for minority communities’ (Keaveney, 2009, 4). In Guatemala, a state with a large indigenous population, the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples made space for local populations to adapt education to local needs, including language of instruction, however policy discussions at high levels do not always equate to changes in the classroom (Sieder, 2002).

- 7 Though not linguistic in nature, education in Northern Ireland is deeply rooted in religious divides. Parochial schools were the norm prior to the 1921 partition of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Whilst Protestant churches were quick to give control over Protestant schools to the state, Catholic parishes maintained control over their schools, creating a long lasting divide in education between Catholic and Protestant communities (Terra, 2014). This segregation between these communities in Northern Ireland has bred unfamiliarity and distrust with those considered ‘other’ to one’s group (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000), though attempts have been made to introduce narratives relevant to the other community into the curriculum (Keaveney, 2009).
- 8 These linguistic concerns are strong in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the conflict in 1995 split the country into different areas dominated by single ethnic groups (Nystuen, 2005). Though all part of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole, they have the final authority to decide how to implement educational policy in their regions, thus making it challenging to propagate a national curriculum regarding the conflict. This division was initially proposed as a solution to reduce conflict between ethnic groups, but now enforces a system of segregation that limits longer-term reconstruction (Swimelar, 2013). Segregated schools were at first promoted by the international community to increase access to education for minority students returning home post-conflict in a way that was acceptable to parents.<sup>1</sup> These parents were unwilling for their children to be educated in a different language with narratives told from the perspective of a different ethnic group, as these perspectives could portray their own group as an enemy (Swimelar, 2013). A study in 2007 found that, though the intensity of the representation varied, all three major ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina utilised enemy image stereotypes to negatively portray one or more of the other ethnic groups in the country. This was often seen in the way they used past grievances to explain and justify more recent events. Furthermore, these representations often depicted outside groups as being incompatible with the inside group (Torsti, 2007).
- 9 Another barrier is simply the realities of teaching. Teachers may not feel comfortable or well equipped to effectively teach a topic. For Rwandan teachers, teaching history in a way that ‘incites ethnic hatred’ could be met with a criminal liability (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; McLean Hilker, 2011). In Cambodia, during the period following the conflict, teachers were burdened with the task of developing their own strategies and materials, whilst dealing with poverty, unresolved personal trauma, missing family members, and continued incursions by remaining elements of the Khmer Rouge, while only an estimated ten per cent of teachers had any formal qualifications (Dy, 2015). A study in 2008 found that areas formerly under Khmer Rouge control were not likely to teach even the meagre amount included in the official curriculum about the conflict (Munyas, 2008). Mandated quotas dictating how many classroom hours must be spent learning a

certain topic may be incongruent with the needs of the students to properly learn the content, as this can differ from class to class and student to student (Meseth & Proske, 2015). As such, these barriers may not simply be overcome by the introduction of national education policy.

## Group-centric narratives in post-conflict education

- 10 Elites in particular groups post-conflict may oppose efforts to seek reconciliation between parties of the conflict as it may be perceived as erasing what they consider to be legitimate grievances and could benefit a rival group over their own. This is seen in each of the different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For Bosniaks, giving up control over the curriculum taught to their children could erase the historical memory of suffering faced specifically by their ethnic group, particularly for those living in Serb-dominated Srebrenica. Many Bosnian Serbs refuse to recognise any wrongdoing on the part of their ethnic group and have maintained a narrative about the conflict that emphasised their innocence (Muižnieks, 2017; Swimelar, 2013).
- 11 Likewise, education about World War II in East Germany focused almost exclusively on the victimhood of political prisoners and Communist resistance to the ruling regime. Other targeted groups were only briefly mentioned, with no mention of Jewish victims of violence until the 1960s and little recognition until the 1980s (I. Davies, 2000). Concepts such as a national past take on different meanings in Northern Ireland, where each community fosters their own historical narrative about the region's past through the lens of demographic affiliation. In practice, Protestant communities frame Northern Ireland as part of British history that resisted armed paramilitary groups supported by their neighbours to the South, whereas Catholic communities are more likely to frame the history of Northern Ireland as one of British colonialism and discrimination. Importantly, as Terra (2014) points out, neither of these narratives are false yet they are unable to coexist.

## Education as a tool for power consolidation

- 12 The way the history of a conflict is taught can be shaped by the political goals of those in power. The Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government used graphic depictions of violence during the previous regime at all levels of education to instil fear and hatred for the still active Khmer Rouge. This was powerful propaganda that also justified the presence of the Vietnamese in the country (Dy, 2013). The regime's textbooks were able to use narratives surrounding the Khmer Rouge as an effective scapegoat for all that was wrong in society (Dy, 2015). Children living in Khmer Rouge controlled territories after the official end of the Khmer Rouge regime had not had the same educational exposure to negative aspects of the regime. Armed with a set of educational materials sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge, instruction focused on the unjust invasion of Cambodia by a foreign enemy, the Vietnamese, over any suffering experienced during the years preceding (Munyas, 2008).
- 13 Similarly, the conflict in Rwanda was not terminated through two sides coming together and deciding to end the conflict through either a peace agreement or a ceasefire, but through a one-sided military victory by the predominantly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). This offered the victor the opportunity to dictate educational policy without needing to appease their rivals (Henry, 2016), though

international stakeholders such as United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Education Development Center have been involved in the curriculum development and revision process (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Gasanabo et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Henry (2016) argues that the historical education about the 1994 conflict in Rwanda perpetuates a one-sided narrative putting the totality of guilt upon the Hutu ethnic group. This, she argues, is dangerous as it threatens long lasting peacebuilding efforts. McLean Hilker (2011) touches on this sentiment as well, emphasising how the silence surrounding suffering that did not occur within the established narrative framework has left many Rwandans with feelings of injustice that are not conducive to long-term reconciliation. Mutabazi (2021) concludes that the current state of history education in Rwanda has not provided students with the skills and tools necessary to overcome past divisions within society.

## Post-conflict education as an effective peacebuilding tool

- 14 The aforementioned attempts by countries to either bury the past or reframe it in a way that supports political goals show how challenging crafting peace-supporting education can be. Despite this, education can still be a powerful tool to pursue post-conflict reconciliation. Holocaust education was a large component of West German post-conflict nation building and democratisation. It is not limited to the history curriculum, but is also found in religion, ethics, and literature classes (Krieg, 2015). Although different German Länder have some level of autonomy over what is included in their curriculum, education about the Holocaust remains relatively consistent throughout the country (I. Davies, 2000). Rwanda followed suit in 2016 by introducing elements of genocide studies into a greater number of school subjects. These lessons focus not only on the history of Rwanda, but also on other conflicts such as the Holocaust to understand the factors that lead to genocide in order to prevent future violence (Gasanabo et al., 2016). In contrast to the arguments made by Henry (2016) and Mutabazi (2021), this leads Gasanabo et al. (2016) to perceive the current state of post-conflict education in Rwanda as a positive step towards creating unified communities resilient against the resurgence of violence. Pineda and Celis (2022) argue that the success of peacebuilding education in Colombia is influenced by the country's educational traditions. For example, they cite the long-standing inclusion of the humanities in all levels and types of education in Colombia as being conducive to peacebuilding efforts.

## Alternative avenues for post-conflict education

- 15 History does not sit still. It does not remain buried in a textbook only to be accessed when someone chooses; it is being taught every day by the media, families, and communities at large. When the content found in textbooks aligns with the narratives being circulated by other elements in society, all of these elements can reinforce each other (Gasanabo et al., 2016; Torsti, 2007). However, this is not always the case. A study conducted by Dieter Boßmann in 1977 highlighted a disconnect between the narratives that German adolescents recounted about Adolf Hitler and the scholarly research being conducted at the time (Boßmann, 1977). This showed the limits of formal education in



guiding historical memory when other sources of information such as family and media contradict what students learn in school (Meseth & Proske, 2015). This is also reflected in the Rwandan experience, where children received different, biased retellings of the conflict depending on the experience of their family and community (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). Students may emerge from education with two separate versions of history: an official version they learned in school and an unofficial version they learned privately. They are more likely to believe the latter (McLean Hilker, 2011).

- 16 Similarly, in 2008, Munyas found that students in Cambodia also often receive information about the conflict from members of their own family. These retellings weave together elements of unresolved trauma, oppression, violence, victimisation, and loss that go on to form a narrative about the conflict in the next generation (Munyas, 2008). These family members relayed personal stories of misery and suffering, ones that often relied on the absolute evil of the 'others' in the story, but rarely answered deeper questions as to the potential causes of the conflict. This, however, was not necessarily the same for the descendants of Khmer Rouge members. Those from the lower ranks in the regime may be more open to talking about their experiences as they perceive themselves as also being victimised, but members who may have committed crimes themselves are more likely to want to erase the past (Munyas, 2008). As such, children not only had asymmetric access to information, but received different education about the conflict depending on their relatives' roles.
- 17 Memorial sites also play an important role in shaping historical narrative. They can certainly be useful for bolstering historical education, although importantly, students require skills to be able to interpret them. Davies (2000) mentions how these sites are not simply an objective mirror on the past, but are rather a purposeful attempt to reconstruct historical memory in the broader context of the new regime's post-conflict goals. He utilises the example of the Buchenwald concentration camp, a site altered by Americans following its liberation and interpreted differently before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Germany is not the only country that has utilised memorial sites. According to Jessee (2021), much effort to educate the population about the conflict in Rwanda occurs outside of the classroom, centred around memorials and museums. Many Rwandans, however, avoid going to genocide memorials, which impacts their efficacy as a form of genocide education. The narratives outlined at these sites are clear and pervasive, but focus on a single perspective.
- 18 Furthermore, though genocide memorials may be abundant and accessible, Munyas (2008) argues that without a clear understanding as to why the conflict occurred, these memorials are frightening and upsetting rather than educational for children. Formal history classes differ from memorial sites and museums as, rather than providing a one-time learning experience with little opportunity for follow up, education about a conflict may be included in classroom assessments determining the grade a student receives for their work (Krieg, 2015). One solution found in Germany is to utilise visits to local memorial sites as a tool to teach about the Holocaust in combination with regular classwork. Many German teachers found these visits more useful than textbook work alone (I. Davies, 2000).

## Methods for improving post-conflict education

- 19 Faced with the aforementioned challenges in creating effective post-conflict education, several authors have proposed methods of improvement. For Wantabagu (2010), the



solution does not rely strictly on the realm of history education. Rather, he argued divergence from indigenous models of education had eroded cultural values in Burundian students by focusing too strongly on cognitive abilities and not strongly enough on ethics. As such, he argued for moral education programmes based on traditional Burundian values to be included in schools to assist in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. According to Dy (2015), Cambodian national politics have had a greater impact on determining the content included about the conflict and how it was portrayed than any educational theories. Therefore, if international actors were to look at educational theory alone in determining guidance for countries emerging from violent intra-state conflict, their solutions may not fit the contexts they would like to implement them in. Finally, one solution offered by Munyas (2008) is to not force agreement between all sides in a coalition government for a single narrative about the conflict, but to present different narratives equally for the next generations to engage with critically. McLean Hilker (2011) argues this multiperspectivity is vital for the peacebuilding process, and countries such as Rwanda that stick to a single narrative are limiting their ability to reconcile differences. This aligns with a report written by Keaveney (2009) for the Council of Europe acknowledging the possibility for multiple valid, evidence-based perspectives regarding past conflict to emerge, and requires access to both primary and secondary sources as well as giving students the opportunity to interact with the content.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. These refer to schools where multiple ethnic groups receive education in the same building, but do not inhabit the same classes or necessarily use the same teaching materials.

# Conceptual framework

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- 1 This research relies on the study of narratives disseminated about a particular conflict, in this case the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, to gain insight into how education is used to support the peacebuilding process within that context. In this study, the term narrative refers to an account of an event used to help recipients make sense of what has occurred (László, 2008). According to Wertsch (2008), cognitive processes occur to help people understand external stimuli and have a tendency to make schemas to allow subjects to make sense in the easiest and quickest way possible. This has an impact in shaping the way groups view their past. As narratives are used to provide justification for violence, the continued prevalence of these conflict-supporting narratives in a society threatens the longevity of peace (Federman, 2016). On the other hand, according to Edlmann (2017) space given to encounter different ways individuals and communities remember a conflict can support sustainable peacebuilding efforts by changing both the way people think and interact with each other over time.
- 2 In order to assess the impact of post-conflict education as it pertains to Rwandan peacebuilding efforts, textbooks are used to ascertain the dominant narrative being taught in Rwanda relating to the 1994 Genocide. At the intra-societal level, formal institutions such as schools are often used as a way of disseminating the desired conflict-supporting narratives of the leading faction, with school textbooks acting as a tool to achieve these goals (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Grever & Vlies, 2017). Textbooks can be manipulative and may portray certain groups in overtly negative ways, promoting ethnic intolerance through negative stereotypes (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). In crafting textbooks, the authors not only make choices as to how to portray the events included, but at a more fundamental level they decide what is important enough to pass on to the next generation of students (Grever & Vlies, 2017). As such, the examination of nationally produced textbooks offers the researchers the ability to analyse the extent to which narratives being shared are conflict-supporting or peace-supporting and would therefore be useful in answering the central research question.
- 3 Previous researchers have provided a number of tools useful in conducting this work. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) write that positive peacebuilding educational initiatives must both 'deconstruct structures of violence' and 'construct structures of peace' (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000, vii). Although his work focuses on structural planning frameworks rather than educational materials, the way Sanz (2012) conceptualises how different

actors in narratives fit into character archetypes is useful in understanding how similar elements play out in the narratives found in textbooks. This is also reflected in Federman's (2016) work, along with how narrative interventions can be used to promote peacebuilding by tackling problematic dynamics and latent conflicts that are not addressed by traditional peacebuilding tactics. Finally, research done by Bar-Tal et al. (2014) provides vital insight into the use of conflict-supporting and peacebuilding narratives that establishes a framework for examining narratives found in the content analysed.

# Research methodology

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- 1 This research uses the case study of Rwanda to gain insight into different narrative elements found in post-conflict history education. It was chosen as the case-study country for several reasons. Rwanda experienced a moratorium on covering sensitive topics to allow local experts to determine the best way to depict recent history with help from the international community (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Gasanabo et al., 2016; Henry, 2016), in line with recommendations made for a similar conflict by the Council of Europe (Parliamentary Assembly, 2000). As the ultimate goal of this research is to provide resources for actors aiding in the construction of post-conflict educational material, this context is valuable since it parallels potential situations they may find themselves in. The time period is also relevant, as it has been thirty years since the conflict ended and eighteen years since the history of the conflict was first introduced into the official curriculum (Henry, 2016). This places one full generation between the conflict and now; current students would have no living memory of the conflict but their parents or caregivers likely would, and there has been a decent amount of time for narratives to evolve since they were initially introduced in 2006.
- 2 The educational materials used are the six textbooks provided by the Rwandan Basic Education Board for use in secondary schools (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020e, 2020d, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k). As a secondary resource, the accompanying teacher's guides (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a, 2020b, 2020f, 2020g, 2020h, 2022) are used to assist the researcher in understanding the content being presented and the associated goals. These are the most recent textbooks available, representing the most up-to-date narratives being disseminated to students in their formal secondary education. Furthermore, a comparison to the previous textbooks initially published in 2017 (Aime, 2017; Myres et al., 2018) and new ones published in 2020 found minor differences in content, with many sections copied word for word into the new version. Thus, there seems to be some level of consistency in the narrative over the past several years. These textbooks are provided and distributed by the Rwandan government to the over 700,000 secondary school students studying in Rwanda as of 2023, based on a ratio of four students for every textbook for lower secondary school.<sup>1</sup> Although secondary school enrolment is still low in comparison to primary school enrolment, it grew by nearly 200,000 pupils between 2017 and 2023 (Ministry of Education, 2024). Moreover, although student numbers are lower for secondary school than primary

school, the complexity grows with each level, allowing for deeper analysis of the narrative being portrayed.

- 3 One limitation of this research is that these textbooks are not the only resources used to help educate students about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Students are encouraged within the textbook themselves to use online resources to complete tasks (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h, 2020c, 2020e, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k). Teachers are encouraged to take students on field trips to local genocide memorial sites or the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre at Gisozi (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b, 2020a, 2020g, 2022). As such, it is possible that students are introduced to other narrative elements within an educational setting from these additional resources. Future research could include interviews with educators within Rwanda to discern how these resources are used in practice and the impact this has on students' understanding of the conflict.
- 4 The case study analysis section is broken down into three parts. The first part measures the frequency of the term 'genocide' in the textbooks to showcase the space given to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and how its memorialisation influences understanding of other narratives. The second section focuses specifically on the units explicitly teaching about the conflict or events leading up to the conflict and analyses the flow of when content is introduced. Of the 155,889 students reported to have started lower secondary school in 2017, only 54,960 completed the final year of upper secondary school in 2023 with the largest drop-off between Senior Three and Senior Four as students move from lower secondary to upper secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2024). With this information in mind, it is possible to ascertain which parts of the narrative reach the widest audience and which parts are still inaccessible to many students. Finally, the section dives into the details of the narratives being taught, highlighting common themes to determine if these themes are conflict-supporting or peacebuilding. Once the case study is analysed, the next section connects the narratives ascertained to the broader research question, identifying areas that strengthen and limit peacebuilding and connecting them with what has been seen in previous studies.

## Limitations of this study and direction for future research

- 5 The present study is limited in scope to investigate the narratives surrounding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi currently in use in Rwandan history, and to reflect on how effective these narratives are at promoting sustainable, long-term peace. As previously mentioned, it does not seek to make any broad claims on the efficacy of history education in reducing the risk of conflict in Rwanda, though the present research may be useful in future research aimed at achieving that goal. For example, the textbooks used for the research are secondary school textbooks and are therefore only accessible to students who are able to attend secondary school. Whilst the number of enrolled students is increasing yearly, there is still a large portion of the population that does not make it to the end of secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2024).
- 6 Furthermore, these textbooks are produced in English, reflective of a 2008 policy shifting the language of instruction from the fourth year of primary school onwards (Trudell, 2016). Freedom House, a non-governmental organisation, has raised concerns that this shift in language policy may privilege urban, particularly Tutsi, elites with higher levels of English proficiency to the detriment of those from primarily

Kinyarwanda and French speaking communities (Freedom House, 2024).<sup>2</sup> The present study does not provide any insight into demographic discrepancies that could pose challenges to peacebuilding, though further research on classroom demographics and the impacts of the language policy shift, such as research done by Pearson (2016) and Ntwabwoba and Sikubwabo (2024), could provide direction to determine how the content may affect certain portions of society differently than others.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Statistics were not provided for upper secondary school.
2. McLean Hilker (2011) further specifies that this policy may be advantageous specifically to those coming from Tutsi returnee families that had been in Uganda rather than Tutsi families that had either remained in Rwanda or had returned from francophone countries.

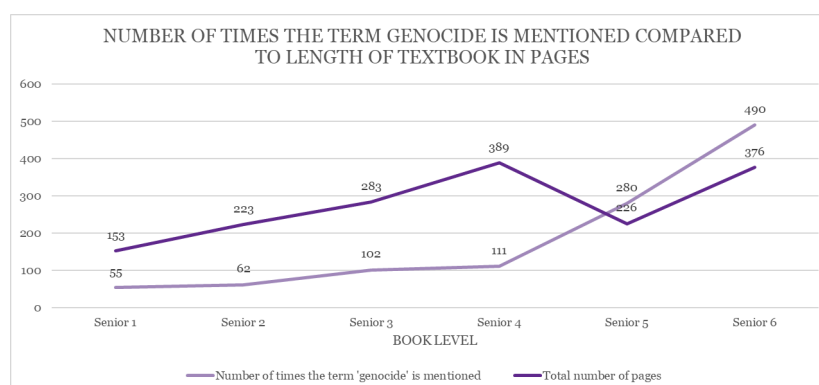
# Case study analysis: How narratives surrounding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi are presented in history textbooks

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## Prevalence of genocide in Rwandan secondary school history textbooks

- <sup>1</sup> The concept of genocide, particularly either in reference to or recalling memories of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, is covered heavily in the Rwandan secondary school history curriculum. Over the course of six years, using the currently available textbooks, students encounter the term ‘genocide’ roughly 1,100 times (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020e, 2020d, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k). Students in upper secondary school encounter it much more frequently than students in lower secondary school, even when accounting for textbook length. Whilst teacher’s guides for Senior One and Senior Two recommend ‘it is better not to treat such subject during national mourning period for example, during April and July so that learners will not be traumatised’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 6, 2020e, 5), such recommendations are not made for other levels.

**Figure 1: Graph representing the number of times the term genocide is mentioned in the six official Rwandan secondary education textbooks**

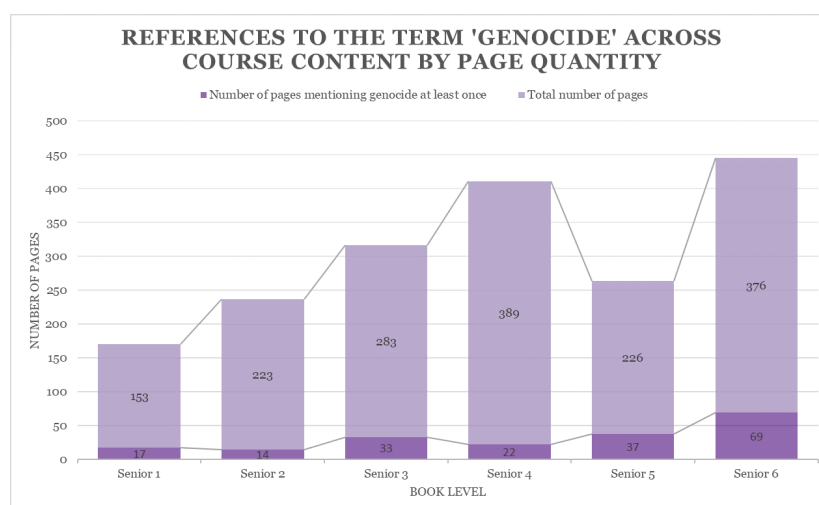


Source : author.

- 2 This term is primarily used in units specifically covering the genocide, which will be subsequently covered in more depth. However, there is not a single textbook where it is mentioned exclusively in those units alone. In some cases, it is used as a way of situating specific content in time. For example, the term 'post-genocide transition period' is used in the Senior Six unit 'The Role of Democracy, Unity and Reconciliation in the Transformation of Rwandan Society' in reference to the period between the cessation of violence in 1994 and the adoption of the new constitution in 2003 (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k). It is used in a similar way in the Senior Five unit 'International and National Judicial Systems and Instruments' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j) and the Senior Four unit 'Role of Gacaca and Abunzi in conflict solving' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i).
- 3 It is also used as an example students are familiar with to support broader understanding of other target content. In the Senior One unit 'Forms, Causes, and Consequences of Conflict and Violence' it is used to highlight the potential impacts of conflicts on individuals (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c). When discussing the concept of patriotism in the Senior Two unit on 'Interdependence and Unity in Diversity', the textbook directly states: 'The patriots of Rwanda are mostly those who fought against the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and its ideologies'(Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 198). The Senior Five unit 'International and National Judicial Systems and Instruments' uses references to genocide to emphasise the necessity of holding perpetrators of crimes responsible for their actions, as the lack of justice in previous regimes is one of the cited reasons for the outbreak of violence in 1994 (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j).
- 4 Overall, genocide is referenced in some form at least once in six units in the Senior One textbook, four units in Senior Two, six units in Senior Three, four units in Senior Four, five units in Senior Five, and six units in Senior Six. Out of 1650 total pages of content across all six levels, the word 'genocide' appears on 192 pages. It is not limited to one unit covering a specific time period, but weaved in through various levels of the history curriculum, showcasing its broader impact on how students interact with historical content.



**Figure 2: Graph representing the number of pages containing the word 'genocide' in each of the six textbooks used in Rwandan secondary schools**



Source : author.

## Structure and flow of narratives surrounding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi

- 5 Each of the six textbooks has a unit focused specifically on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Each year builds upon content covered in the previous years, adding layers of sophistication and difficulty to the topic. This content is covered over multiple class periods at each level. For example, students in Senior Six spend 20 lessons learning covering the 1990-1994 Liberation War<sup>1</sup> and 22 lessons covering genocide prevention (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h).
- 6 Students' first exposure appears in the Senior One unit titled 'Genocide and Its Features'. This unit introduces several definitions of genocide, starting with simply 'genocide is the killing of innocent people based on their tribe, political position, race or religion with the intention of completely wiping them out' and 'an attempt to wipe out an entire people based on tribe, religion, ethnic or race' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b, 63) before including definitions from Raphael Lemkin and the official definition from Article II of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. While the category 'tribe' is not included in the Lemkin or UN definitions, its inclusion in the previous definitions reflects how the Rwandan Basic Education Board categorises parties in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b) and is repeated when defining the term genocide in subsequent textbooks (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020j). After an interlude to describe some of the features present in the 1994 Genocide with actions that occurred during the conflict and actors responsible, the textbook moves to describe other violations of international humanitarian law and calls upon students to distinguish between the different crimes (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b).
- 7 The following year, students revisit the genocide in detail in the unit 'Causes and Course of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi'. The textbook describes six different factors that led to the violence, namely 'division ideology', 'bad leadership during the 1st and the 2nd Republics', 'the culture of impunity', 'the role of local media', 'no respect of human rights', and 'greed for power by members of the Akazu' (Rwanda

Basic Education Board, 2020e, pp. 54–56). These categories are not independent of each other as most of the categories tie back either in part or in whole to leadership decisions made during the previous two regimes. This is continued in the next section concerning preparations made for the genocide, covering these two time periods in their entirety from 1959 to 1994. It then discusses the course of events during the genocide, the actors responsible, and finally the role of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in the cessation of violence.

- 8 The first unit of the Senior Three book entitled 'Independent Rwanda' focuses on the First and Second Republics and the Liberation War from 1990 to 1994. As the previous level introduced these regimes as causal agents in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, student expectations were set from the very beginning and most of the discussion follows these expectations. Themes such as the previously mentioned 'division ideology' are discussed in far more detail than the few sentences provided in the previous textbook, building and expanding on prior knowledge. Students are also introduced to a limited array of positive aspects of the regimes, without letting the positive aspects overshadow the negative ones. The textbook then follows the course of the Liberation War from the perspective of the RPF, starting with the declaration of war on 1 October 1990 and ending with the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) on 19 July 1994 (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d). In its conclusion, it covers the effects of the war, primarily focusing on negative aspects while highlighting longer-term positive aspects resulting from the RPF victory.
- 9 The next unit in the textbook, entitled 'Consequences of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi' follows a similar theme. It begins by encouraging students to recall the responsible actors introduced in the previous level before listing the impacts of the genocide both during and after the conflict. These impacts, presented in short bullet-pointed paragraphs, feed into the next section on challenges faced in rebuilding the country in the following years. For instance, an increase in HIV/AIDS cases is presented as an impact of sexual assault committed during the genocide, connecting to challenges faced in the health sector (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d). Having presented these challenges, the chapter moves to introduce the achievements of the GNU in addressing them.
- 10 Similarly to the structure of the Senior Three textbook, Senior Four begins with a unit entitled 'History of colonial and post-colonial Rwanda'. It focuses first on reforms made under Belgian colonial rule after control was taken from the Germans and then on the transition to an independent state under the First Republic. It pays special attention to what is referred to as 'the 1959 crisis', an event characterised by anti-Tutsi violence and discrimination prompting some to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. This event plays heavily into narratives surrounding the 1994 Genocide and will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section.
- 11 The second unit of the textbook, entitled 'History of genocide', starts in a similar way to the chapter in the Senior One textbook by reviewing the definition found in Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It covers three cases of genocide in the 20th century, namely the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the 1907 Genocide against the Herero in Namibia, and the Holocaust in Germany and occupied territories. The inclusion of the latter two conflicts serve mainly to enhance student understanding of the former. Students are presented with similarities between all three cases, but also aspects portrayed as unique to the

genocide in Rwanda. Finally, the unit again discusses government actions taken to rebuild the nation post-conflict.

- 12 The textbook for Senior Five begins with a chapter entitled 'First and Second Republics of Rwanda', which expands upon material presented in the previous textbooks. It approaches the topics chronologically and thematically, first assessing the structure, policies, impacts, and downfall of the First Republic before repeating the process for the Second Republic. The second unit, entitled 'Genocide Denial and Ideology in Rwanda and Abroad', focuses less on events during the conflict and more on its reception in the aftermath of the conflict. It defines the terms 'genocide ideology' and 'genocide denial', outlines three forms of genocide denial—literal, interpretative, and implicatory—and explains how each form has been used with regard to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. It assigns a time period to each type of genocide denial to explain the progression of denial over the years and lists examples of people, primarily from abroad, whom the authors have determined are guilty of genocide denial. It ends by discussing how genocide denial can be fought at the regional and national levels.
- 13 Similarly to students in Senior Four and Senior Five, students in their final year of secondary school study two units covering content relevant to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The first unit, entitled 'Post-Colonial Rwanda', discusses the time period exclusively in relation to the Liberation War. It begins by explaining how bad governance and discrimination, primarily ethnic in origin but also with regional elements, led to the outbreak of war in 1990. Following this, the chapter covers the timeline of the war before discussing both the impacts of the Liberation War at large and the genocide specifically. Finally, the chapter once again discusses the achievements of the government in the post-war period from 1994-2003.
- 14 The final unit Rwandan secondary students study focusing on genocide is titled 'Genocide Prevention'. This unit does not focus on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi exclusively but rather relies on what students have learned over the past five years to support discussion of how to prevent future genocide. It introduces different factors and practices that make genocide more likely in a country, using previously covered content to help contextualise the concepts for the students. For example, it brings up the ethnic identity cards previously covered in units focusing on the First and Second Republics when explaining social categorisation, making the point that the categorisation itself may not be intended as a precursor to genocide but rather creates an environment where in-group-out-group antagonism thrives (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k). It then transitions to discuss how to prevent genocide at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Finally, it presents challenges faced in preventing genocide as well as solutions that can be enacted at the national, regional, and international level.

## **Recurring narrative themes regarding the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi**

### **Diminished value of ethnic labels**

- 15 One recurring theme found across all textbooks revolves around the 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' identities. The teaching material does not frame the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as one based in ethnicity but rather one based in tribalism (Rwanda Basic Education

Board, 2020b) as the distinction between these identities is taught to be tribal in nature. Starting in Senior Two, students learn that these identities were social categories in traditional Rwandan society turned into ethnicities by the colonial administration and codified with identity cards in 1935. This classification is explained as such:

To ascertain where one belonged, those who owned ten cows or more were classified as being Tutsi. Those with less cows were classified as Hutu while Batwa were considered those Rwandan who survived on pottery activities. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 34)

- 16 The Senior Three and Senior Four textbooks expand on the notion that these ethnic identities were artificially created as part of the colonial ‘divide and rule’ strategy. It explains that these categories were more fluid in the pre-colonial period and could change depending on a person’s wealth. The colonial government, however, used it to create a rigid social structure that situated administrative duties exclusively in the hands of Tutsi from the best families at the expense of the Hutu and less privileged Tutsi families (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020f). The narrative continues, teaching that as the relationship between King Mutara III Rudahigwa and the Belgian Colonial Administration worsened, the Belgians retaliated against the Tutsi elite by supporting Hutu leadership instead.
- 17 This narrative is not limited to discussions of the colonial government but is repeated throughout the curriculum when teaching about the First and Second Republics. For example, Senior Three students are taught ‘Grégoire Kayibanda forced his way into political prominence and he was more than willing to use “ethnic identities” to access power and sow divisions to maintain his rule’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2). The latter part of the statement, focusing on the maintenance of power through manmade societal divisions, is parallel to how the strategy of the Belgian government is described. As the unit moves from the First Republic to the Second Republic, students learn how ‘ethnic’ and regional divisions were institutionalised through a quota system, which allocated spots in education and jobs in the national government based on ethnicity and regional origin, mainly favoured candidates from the ruling party’s own ethnic and regional groups, in this case Hutus from the North of the country. Students are led to understand this as a method of further consolidating power by the ruling elite. The Senior Five textbook teaches students how the previous regimes used education and political speech to further indoctrinate ordinary Rwandans into regarding genocide ideology as truth (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j).
- 18 The current regime, however, is taught as the antithesis of this. Instead of a regime based in division, it is one based in unity. When students are later asked to ‘discuss how to understand oneself in reference to Rwanda and East Africa’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 226), the suggested answer from the teacher’s guide states:

Today, the government of Rwanda is promoting the concept of ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ (I am Rwandan). The ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ campaign aims at strengthening unity among Rwandans and combating divisionism that has been emphasised from the colonial period and reinforced during the First and Second Republics. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2022, 207)
- 19 The reversal of policies portrayed as sowing artificial disunity amongst the population in favour of a new Rwanda where tribal identities are deemphasised in favour of a unified national identity separates Rwanda today from the bad governance of the past in the eyes of the students. In fact, the Senior One textbook has an entire unit devoted to showing students how they can construct individual identities separate from their national identity, with options such as name, gender, age, province, nationality if they

have a non-Rwandan parent, religion, clan, family, physical characteristics, but does not mention ethnic or tribal heritage as a valid differentiating feature for identity formation. Furthermore, the textbook emphasises that none of these individual differences can be overshadowed by the unity found in being Rwandan (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c).

## Origins of the conflict

- 20 Despite teaching students that ethnic differences amongst Rwandans are false, the violence against members of the population based on these perceived differences is shown as being anything but. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi is taught not as an isolated incident of violence situated in a single moment in time, but as the final step in a progression of violence beginning in 1959. Though mentioned very briefly in Senior One, the Senior Two textbook is where this narrative begins to take shape. Students learn that, after a group of young Tutsis allegedly attacked a prominent member of the Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU) political party in Gitarama, members of the PARMEHUTU and Association Pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse (APROSOMA) parties retaliated violently against the Tutsi and members of the pro-monarchy Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) party (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e). This event is revisited in Senior Four, where the authors suggest that the violence may have been intentional, stating 'some called it a "planned revolution" instigated by the colonial rule through members of PARMEHUTU and APROSOMA' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i, 13). Regardless of the origins, this is seen at the start of a refugee crisis that would ultimately lead to the outbreak of civil war in 1990.
- 21 Senior Five details the 'Inyenzi' attacks from 1961 to 1967 conducted by young Rwandans rejecting exile with the goal to 'fight the Belgians and the new PARMEHUTU leaders as well as to take back their right to citizenship' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 6). The text explains how the term 'Inyenzi' is a dehumanising term meaning 'cockroach' which spread in use from just referring to the people involved in these incursions to including the entire Tutsi population. The attacks were ultimately unsuccessful in achieving their goals, moreover the textbook emphasises how Tutsis would be targeted in retaliation after each attack, leading to an additional 200,000 asylum-seekers beyond Rwanda's borders in addition to the estimated 20,000 killed. This discussion is also where the text first establishes the genocidal intent of the government by stating 'President Kayibanda warned the Inyenzi that: "If they try to conquer Kigali by fighting, it would be the total and quick end of the Tutsi"' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 7), thus further connecting the violence in the 1960s with the 1994 Genocide.
- 22 The Senior Three textbook refers to the period between the first refugees fleeing in 1959 to the advent of the Liberation War in 1990 as 'the long exile' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 19), where Rwandan refugees who had fled the country in response to violent outbreaks were subject to poor living conditions and denied repatriation. Snubbed by their home government, the desperate refugees were required to form their own groups to improve their situation, such as Rwandese Alliance of National Unity (RANU) and RPF-Inkotanyi. This long exile reappears in Senior Six as the first cause of the Liberation War. According to that textbook:
- Although the Government of Rwanda had since 1964 requested that refugees be settled in their countries of asylum, it did almost nothing to help them. On the contrary, its policy consisted of making life for refugees very difficult in those

countries. The Rwandan embassies watched refugees closely in their countries of asylum. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k, 4)

- 23 It goes on to exhibit in more detail how RANU and RPF-Inkotanyi gave hope to Rwandans in exile to fight the injustice and ethnic division being propagated by the existing regime, which could only be achieved through RPF military action.

## Heroism of the RPF

- 24 In establishing the origins of the conflict, students are introduced to the ultimate hero of the narrative - the RPF. This is not done in a way that is meant to be subtle, the last section shows how the RPF is introduced as the solution to decades of injustice. Students are taught unambiguously that the RPF was 'the only force to have politically and militarily opposed the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k, 18). This theme is repeated through all levels, with the exception of Senior One which does not mention the RPF by name. A section from Senior Two summarises the narrative surrounding the RPF's role succinctly:

It should be emphasised that the role of RPF forces in stopping the Genocide is of major importance. From the onset of the 1990 Liberation War, RPF forces worked to liberate the country from the hands of dictator Juvenal Habyarimana and his clique among the Akazu. When the mass killings started from 7th April 1994 (though it had taken place sporadically since 1959) to July 1994, RPF forces doubled their mission. They fought to liberate the country at the same time stopping genocide and saving victims. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 60)

- 25 One of the attitudes students are meant to take away from this unit is an appreciation of the RPF for their heroic role, something teachers themselves are encouraged to research in more depth to support (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a).
- 26 Senior Three students are introduced to more details of the Liberation War of 1990-1994, the name of which contributes to the narrative of the RPF as liberators, which is expanded upon in Senior Six. Senior Three teachers are encouraged to bring in pictures of commanders in the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA), Major General Fred Gisa Rwigema recommended specifically (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2022). The course of events follows the advancements of RPF military successes, with opposition acting as a barrier towards peace by reneging on the Arusha Peace Agreement and targeting civilians. Interestingly, when military setbacks are discussed, the text slips into the passive voice, such as 'the first attack was in Umutara, but was not successful because of the death of Major General Fred Gisa Rwigema' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 23) and 'the RPF first launched an attack in Umutara at the beginning of October, 1990; but this attack was not successful because of the death of Late Major General Fred Rwigema on October 2, 1990' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k, 9). This allows them to discuss the failures without giving credit to opposition forces. As such, these setbacks are not seen as victories for the opposition, but temporary deviations from the RPF's success.
- 27 Furthermore, the Senior Six book teaches that within Rwanda, people either supported the RPF because they represented liberation from the oppression they had been facing, opposed the RPF out of fear of retaliation from the Habyarimana regime, or had been mobilised by Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND)<sup>2</sup> narratives that portrayed the Tutsi as their enemy. At the end of the unit, students are asked to put themselves in the RPF's shoes by listing justifications for the initial RPF attack, explaining why certain causes of the war are important to them personally,



identifying how they would address major consequences of the war, and listing challenges and achievements of the post-conflict government.

## Villains

- 28 While the hero of the story is unambiguously clear, there is no single villain appearing in the narrative. More broadly, the textbooks state the genocide was carried out by 'extremist' Hutu. This terminology appears in every textbook apart from Senior Six. For example, in Senior One students learn that the genocide 'involved rape, abduction and torture of the innocent Tutsi by the Hutu extremists' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 65). In reference to the Arusha Peace Agreement set to end the Liberation War in 1993, the Senior 3 textbook teaches 'the Hutu extremists, who felt left out of the process and threatened by the results, were not satisfied and started to organise a genocide against the Tutsi and killing of moderate Hutu' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 29).
- 29 This last statement primarily implicates members of the national government, which serves as the main actor in the conflict. Beginning in Senior One, students are explicitly taught '[t]he government initiated, executed and coordinated the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 66). This sentiment is repeated in Senior Two, Senior Four, Senior Five, and Senior Six. The genocide is portrayed as a premeditated political act, planned long in advance by the ruling regime (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i). The Senior Six textbook describes the Habyarimana regime as outwardly deceitful, tricking the public into believing their own attacks on political opposition was actually 'an attempt by the rebels to attack the capital whereas it was a false attack meant to allow a presidential move to justify a massive cleansing operation against the Tutsi and other opponents of the regime' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 18). The government is also said to have spread propaganda to encourage other Hutus to join in the violence, which many were reportedly receptive to (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c).
- 30 Although the government may have been the primary villain in the narrative, they are far from the only one. Beyond the central government, the Senior Two textbook also list paramilitary groups such as the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi, Republican forces, civil servants, the military, businessmen, teachers, entrepreneurs, and ordinary citizens who contributed to the conflict in roles ranging from passive observer to accomplice to active participants. However, the text makes it clear that simply belonging to one of these groups does not necessarily imply complicity. It states:  
One could assert that among all these categories, there were a few numbers that were reluctant to act as they were expected. Some accepted to die instead of killing their brothers, sisters, neighbours and friends while others used all means to save those who were being killed by providing them refuge or helping them escape the danger before RPF forces arrived. Some testimonies of genocide survivors proved this fact. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, p. 59)
- 31 Nevertheless, accountability could be found at all levels and not being directly involved in the violence is not enough to absolve a person of guilt. Furthermore, the media is mentioned as playing a major role in spreading genocidal messages such as portraying the genocide as necessary to avoid the massacres of Hutus by the Tutsi and mobilising more people to join in the violence (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e).
- 32 Guilty parties are not just identified inside the country, but outside as well. In reviewing the relevant actors, the Senior Six textbook states 'the main actors were: the

interim government local administration, security forces, militia, the media, civil society organisations (churches included), the population and the international community' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 58). The Senior One and Senior Four textbooks both emphasise the inaction of the international community in stopping the genocide when they had the knowledge and ability to do so. As such, in the Senior Six unit on genocide prevention, the textbook celebrates the introduction of the Responsibility to Protect at the UN level and advocates for greater accountability at the international level to prevent future genocides.

- 33 Beyond the blanket guilt for the international community as a whole, certain countries bear more blame than others. As previously mentioned, Belgium carries the blame for instituting the initial policies that transformed the Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa identities from being more flexible based on social categorisation to being rigid ethnic identifiers (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020i). As Rwanda transitioned to an independent state, Belgium supported the PARMEHUTU as they took power. According to the Senior Four textbook, the Belgian colonial government felt animosity towards the Rwandan King Mutara III Rudahigwa, who the textbook asserts was a good symbol of unity for all Rwandans, and the Tutsi elite. As a result, they supported the Hutu leadership in order to keep power out of the hands of the monarchy (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i). The Senior Two textbook states: 'In such a state of affairs, the colonial power had successfully created a *Hutu-Tutsi* conflict which had never been there before' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 45). The Senior Three, Senior Five, and Senior Six textbooks tie Belgium directly to violence against Tutsis by stating that the colonists assisted the PARMEHUTU in massacring primarily Tutsi members of the UNAR (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020j, 2020k). They are implicated again later in the textbook for supporting the Habyarimana government alongside France and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) during the Liberation War (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k).
- 34 Beyond their involvement in supporting the Habyarimana regime, France is mentioned multiple times as a guilty party. Opération Turquoise, a French humanitarian zone in Western Rwanda set up during the genocide, is blamed for doing little to help Tutsi being targeted in the region while allowing those actively involved in the genocide to escape justice (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h). This is said to have contributed to security problems faced by the post-conflict government as former members of the Forces Rwandaises de Défense (FAR) and Interahamwe remained armed in the Turquoise Zone and received support from Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i). Moreover, France is featured heavily in the Senior Five discussion of genocide denial. At one point, French politicians are called out directly: 'To hide the role of their government in genocide in Rwanda, French authorities namely Francois Mitterrand (defunct), Alain Juppé, Hubert Védrine, Bernard Debré and Dominique de Villepin glorify the good image of France ("Operation Turquoise") during the genocide.' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 50)

## Victims

- 35 Unsurprisingly, the textbooks identify the primary victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi and the events leading up to it as the Rwandan Tutsi population. In Senior One, students are taught that 'the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was organised specifically to clear the Tutsi' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 66) and in Senior Two they are



taught that ‘the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was the mass killing of innocent Tutsi’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 54). As previously mentioned, the genocide is portrayed as the final act of decades of persecution and violence. During this time period, the Senior Four textbook mentions how the Tutsi were consistently treated as scapegoats for the nation’s political problems, using similar language later when discussing Naziism and the regime of Adolf Hitler (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d). When discussing the 1981 quota system for schools and government positions that granted preferential access to Hutu children from the North to the great expense of the Tutsi and those from the South, the Senior Five textbook states ‘this culminated into the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020, 28).

- 36 Notably, this last statement does not focus exclusively on the Tutsi but mentions how Hutu from the South were discriminated against as well. In Senior One, students learn how perpetrators of the genocide targeted Hutu politicians who opposed the violence (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c). Senior Two students learn that ‘the enemy to be eliminated was any Tutsi within the country. Enemies also included moderate Hutu who were seen as sympathisers’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 57). The theme of moderate Hutu being targeted for opposing the genocide reappears in Senior Three and Senior Six (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k). Some of these Hutus, such as Agatha Uwilingiyimana and the Inyange students, are mentioned specifically in the Senior Two section on patriotism (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e). However, these victims are not to be overstated, especially at the expense of Tutsi victims. The Senior Five textbook teaches how the overemphasis of Hutu deaths in comparison to Tutsi deaths, particularly those that occurred at the hands of the RPA, is a form of genocide denial (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j).

## Gravity of the genocide

- 37 Over the course of six years, students are presented the statistic of one million Tutsi Rwandans killed over the course of the hundred-day genocide 13 times (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020d, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k). This statistic is seen as important, as the Senior Five textbook warns that minimising the gravity of the genocide is an example of genocide denial (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j). Students learn that the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was ‘the fastest and cruellest genocide ever recorded in history of humanity’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 54, 2020d, 33). Students in Senior Four learn that, whilst other genocides have utilises torture, the extreme forms of violence in 1994 set the conflict apart from other genocides (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i). Students are introduced to these cruel acts in their first year of secondary school: ‘It involved rape, abduction and torture of the innocent Tutsi by the Hutu extremists. It involved pounding babies in mortars, and confining and starving victims to death. It also involved burying victims alive, maiming and shooting them to death’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 65).
- 38 In Senior Two, students learn more about the mechanisms of the genocide, how those in power drafted lists with names of targets, set up civilian militias to carry out the genocide more effectively, and set up patrols to ward off escapes and prevent people from hiding. The textbook expands its description of the cruelty, explaining: ‘The main tools used during the genocide against the Tutsi were machetes, grenades and bullets. Other forms of torture and killings included burning people alive, throwing people into

pit latrines while still alive and forcing family members to kill each other' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 58).

- 39 While the number of genocide related deaths is emphasised, it is not presented as the only negative impact of the conflict. The Senior Three and Senior Six textbooks discuss the immediate impacts in depth, outlining intercommunal mistrust, security concerns, widespread displacement, a devastated economy, high levels of malnutrition and infectious disease, increased prevalence of HIV and AIDs as a result of conflict-related sexual violence, an incapacitated educational system, and an ill-equipped justice system. Adding insult to injury, many skilled professionals such as teachers and healthcare workers had been targeted and killed during the conflict (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k). The Senior Four textbook notes that 'although this genocide affected mainly the Tutsi, all Rwandans were generally affected. Many people became refugees and were displaced while others were apprehended and became prisoners' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i, 35).
- 40 This shows the impact of the genocide on the entire country, and the challenges that the new government faced in rebuilding. The textbooks emphasise how the GNU that was established in 1994 addressed these challenges to usher in a new era in Rwandan history. For example, according to the Senior Three textbook, the 'GNU fought and eliminated all constraints to national unity such as ethnicity, regionalism, and discrimination' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 43). They allegedly established rule of law and free and transparent elections where no individuals are privileged over others, as was the case in the previous regime. The language used is very black and white and uses terminology such as 'good' and 'evil' to draw clear distinctions between the old government and the new. This theme is continued in Senior Six in greater detail, celebrating the achievements of the GNU before teaching students how to recognise and prevent future conflicts (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k).

## Genocide denial

- 41 The theme of genocide denial is primarily found in the Senior Five textbook, however it is important enough to the narrative to warrant an entire section dedicated to it. According to the textbook, denial constituted the final stage of any genocide, with the organisers of the genocide planning in advance how to justify their actions to be able to get away with their crimes (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j). The Senior Six chapter summarises the concept as follows:
- They try to justify the killings, and to blame the victims, claiming that their own behaviours brought about the killings. In Rwanda, killers alleged that Tutsi were helping rebels of RPF, and they used this to justify the mass killing of innocent Tutsi. The denial of genocide is not only the destruction of the truth about the genocide by negating or minimising it, it is also a potential cause of its repetition. (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k, 50)
- 42 Students are taught to be on the lookout for genocide ideology and genocide denial. It could be found in schools, political speeches, social, political, or economic movements, the press, academia, people specialising in international law, international justice systems, foreign politicians, etc. It can even be found in one's own family. As the textbook teaches, parents are not immune to the impacts of indoctrination under the previous regimes. They may have 'retold their past memories reflecting the genocide ideology to their children. As being not mature enough to assess the given information, children embrace the ideology' (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j, 48).

- 43 What the textbook considers to be genocide denial goes beyond merely dismissing its existence, though literal denial is discussed with a particular focus on how it was used immediately after the genocide. For example, French soldiers justifying the rescue of expatriate communities while Tutsi were killed in plain view simply because they were only ordered to save non-Rwandans is presented as a form of banal denial. The textbook also presents the categories of interpretive genocide denial, by which facts relating to the genocide are acknowledged but interpreted in such a way that justifies actions as a response to legitimate threats, and implicatory genocide denial, which shifts the blame for actions from one group to another. Using the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as an example, claiming the deaths associated with the genocide were nothing more than an extension of the ongoing civil war without constituting a genocide or a double genocide are examples of the former, whereas claims that members of the RPF were actually instigators of the conflict constitute the latter (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j).

## The 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi could have been prevented

- 44 As mentioned in the section discussing the villains of the narrative, the international community was implicated in the crime of genocide for their failure to stop it from occurring. This theme is introduced as early as Senior One, where students are presented with an isolated Rwanda, actively being emptied of peacekeeping support when the genocide was imminent. It discusses warning signs being ignored by the UN Security Council which could have acted early to pre-empt the violence (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c). This theme reappears in Senior Four, as the textbook teaches:
- 45 ‘The international community did not intervene to stop the genocide in Rwanda. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was stopped by Rwandans themselves. It came to an end when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) defeated the genocidal forces in July 1994’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020i, 25).
- 46 The failure of the international community to act, established in previous textbooks, is the prologue for the Senior Six textbook unit on genocide prevention. The textbook teaches that genocide prevention is not merely the job for those at the international level, as the international community has failed time and again since the Genocide Convention was adopted in 1948, even when warning signs have been present. The textbook introduces eight stages to genocide, namely classification, symbolisation, dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, extermination and denial, with explanations providing more detail and connecting warning signs with content about the genocide that students have already been taught, such as the preparation of lists and planned denial (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k). This lends credence to the repeated assertion that warning signs were visible but ignored.
- 47 Students are given activities to apply their knowledge, including one assignment where they are instructed to ‘research on the situation that prevails in Africa. Describe a case that you think may lead to genocide. Afterwards, point out strategies that you think can be used to prevent any possible acts of genocide’ (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h, 53). Students are taught about the different roles of the international community and regional bodies such as the African Union in the prevention of genocide, before explaining the role played at the national level to prevent the recurrence of genocide. In this, Rwanda is portrayed as the hallmark example of a society. This is achieved partially through education keeping the historical memory

and lessons learned alive, and partially by bringing perpetrators to justice through legal mechanisms (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k).

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## FOOTNOTES

1. This term refers to the civil war that occurred in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994. As this is the terminology the textbook uses to refer to this conflict, it is the one that will be used when discussing the textbook's narrative.
2. This is the political party associated with the Habyarimana regime. It is commonly referred to in the textbooks simply by its acronym.

## How the narratives presented both support and detract from peacebuilding

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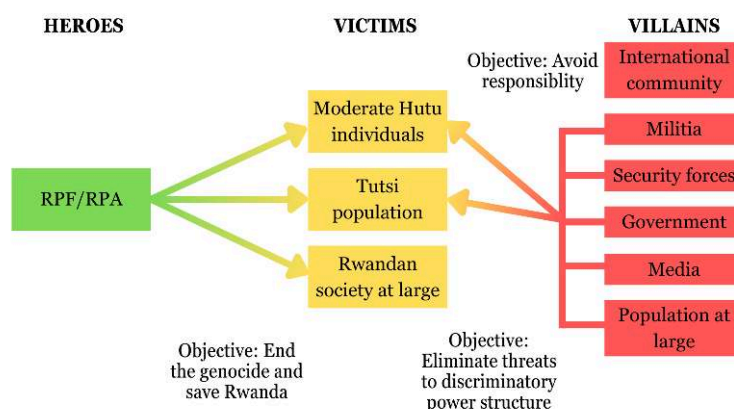
- 1 The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi plays an extremely important role in secondary school history education, as evidenced by its repeated mention across levels and topics. Long gone are the days where discussion of the conflict was taboo in education (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Henry, 2016). These efforts help keep the genocide at the forefront of society's collective memory, fundamental to what it means to be Rwandan post-1994. This is partially evidenced by the sheer number of times the term 'genocide' is mentioned, remaining fresh and present in students' minds even when the topic does not specifically cover the summer of 1994. 12 per cent of pages across all six levels contain a reference to genocide, the highest proportion found in Senior Six at 18 per cent, with each level containing at least one chapter entirely devoted to genocide studies. As such, students are given ample exposure not only to the events of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, but also to themes relating to genocide overall and the gravity associated with it. As an example, in Senior Six students are meant to spend 42 class periods studying the Liberation War and genocide prevention (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h). Each class period lasts 40 minutes and upper secondary students are allocated seven class periods every week devoted to studying history (Rwanda Basic Education Board, n.d.). Therefore, in Senior Six alone, students spend 28 hours across almost seven weeks covering topics directly related to the genocide, not including any time spent at home doing assignments.
- 2 Previous literature has shown how the absence of history education about a conflict during an interim period of reconstruction can be used to prevent ideologically driven narratives from resurfacing (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Dy, 2013, 2015; Henry, 2016; Parliamentary Assembly, 2000), but as a longer-term strategy, avoiding talking about challenging content, such as in Northern Ireland (King, 2009) and Germany (I. Davies, 2000), or erasing information that runs counter to a group's dominant narrative, such as in Republika Srpska (Muižnieks, 2017), may be a barrier to peacebuilding efforts. The question then is: does the inclusion of a significant amount of content such as is seen in the Rwandan case study necessarily aid in peacebuilding?

- 3 A 2019 study found that the repetition of a statement, regardless of whether or not the said statement is deemed plausible at onset, increases the likelihood that a subject will believe it as truth (Fazio et al., 2019). As such, one could argue that the repetition of statements surrounding the 1994 Genocide acts as a tool against anti-historical narratives denying that the genocide took place, something considered incredibly threatening to peace both within the curriculum (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j) and by external academic sources (Altanian, 2021; Bilali et al., 2019; Elósegui, 2017). If that is strictly the case, the logic would follow that the more time given in the curriculum would correlate with better outcomes. However, comprehensive inclusion of a conflict may not be inherently peacebuilding if the content itself is not beneficial to the cause. It is more than a numbers game, the intention behind its inclusion matters. In Cambodia, for example, violence under the Khmer Rouge regime was emphasised to stoke fear and hatred towards the group still active in the country. As such, it became a barrier to reconciliation (Dy, 2013). In contrast, the cross-curricular inclusion of Holocaust education in West Germany was a key part of their post-conflict reconciliation (Krieg, 2015). Which category Rwanda falls into depends largely on how the narratives are presented.

## Structural narrative elements

- 4 Structural components of conflict narratives provide a simplified storyline comprised of characters, plots, roles and motivations (Federman, 2016; Sanz, 2012). Through the identification of roles, they are able to legitimise protagonists and de-legitimise antagonists in the narrative (Federman, 2016). The definition of roles can have drastic impacts on the way the narrative unfolds. For example, education in Cambodia under the PRK government framed the Vietnamese forces as the saviours of Cambodia, occupying the hero role. While Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were certainly portrayed as villains, students were taught that they were the puppets of China, which was a bigger villain, alongside the United States (Dy, 2015). Meanwhile, students living in Khmer Rouge controlled areas during the same time period were taught narratives where the Khmer Rouge was the hero and the Vietnamese were villainous foreign invaders (Munyas, 2008).
- 5 Likewise, the narratives found in the Rwandan history textbooks clearly define the structural roles of the different 'characters' present and allow for an in-depth glimpse at what these roles look like in practice. The villains include the government, militia, security forces, media, broader population, and international community. They seek to eliminate those standing in the way of the current power structure, though the motivation of the latter can better be described as simply wanting to avoid responsibility. The victims include Tutsi and moderate Hutu, though society at large does suffer as a result of the unjust regime. Justice is only achieved through the work of the heroes, seeking to end the genocide and liberate Rwandan society.

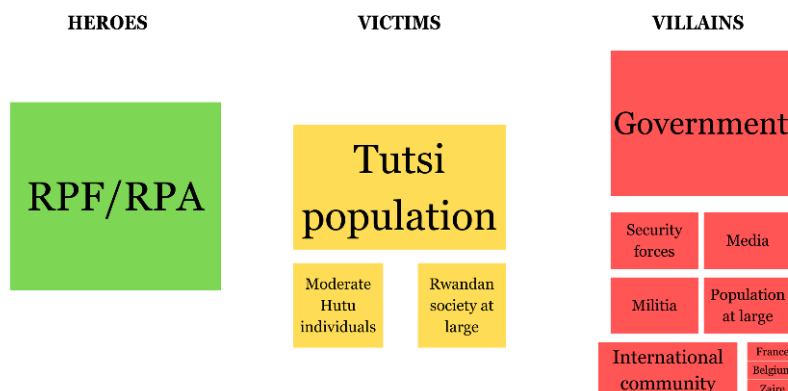
Figure 3: Graphic representation of structural narrative elements



Source : author.

- 6 This does not necessarily give the full picture, however. As Sanz (2012) argues, narratives are not merely formed of character archetypes with equal weight. They are divided into main and secondary characters. More time is devoted to understanding the main characters. They are given depth and definition, and their motivations are understood. In Rwandan textbooks, a prime example of this would be the RPF. Entire sections of units are devoted to understanding their role, such as in Senior Two and Senior Three. In studying the long exile, students are provided with an origin story (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k). They are introduced to heroic individuals within the RPF, such as Major General Fred Rwigema and the current President of Rwanda Paul Kagame (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020k). Their motivations are defined and students are even encouraged to think from their perspective, giving justification for their actions and celebrating what they have achieved in the post-genocide era (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k). Students are meant to express appreciation for the RPF (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020a), furthering the narrative's role in garnering support for the ruling regime.
- 7 Students also do not need to guess who the main villains of the story are, though there are many, because it is also explicitly defined in every textbook except Senior Five (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020e, 2020d, 2020i, 2020k). Just like the RPF, the previous regimes including the colonial government, First Republic, and especially the Second Republic are also studied in detail and given depth. Students are introduced to these actors' motivations, primarily the consolidation of power, and how targeting the Tutsi and rival Hutus helped them achieve these goals.

Figure 4: Graphic representation of main and supporting characters in the narratives differentiated by the size of box



Source: author.

- 8 As important as understanding who the main characters are, it is also important to look at the ways that supporting characters are portrayed. There is no better example of this than the general Rwandan population, which is notably present in both the villain and victim categories. The UN estimated the population of Rwanda to be around 7 million in 1994 (United Nations, n.d.). At the time of the Arusha Peace Accords, there were an estimated 20,000 soldiers in the RPF's RPA and 35,000 in the government's FAR (African Union, 2000). Recent research using information gathered from the Gacaca courts, which were set up to help prosecute the perpetrators of the genocide, found an estimated 847,233 to 888,307 active participants (Nyseth Nzitatira et al., 2023). Even if one were to take the statistic of over one million Tutsi victims proposed by the textbooks (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020d, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k), the majority of the population is still leftover. These groups were assigned three possible motivations. They could be motivated to support the RPF because the RPF represented liberation, they could be motivated to oppose them out of fear of reprisal from the ruling regime, or they could be mobilised to support the genocide as a result of indoctrination (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020h). Those belonging from the former category are the only ones free from culpability for the genocide. Alternate rationales for either action or inaction during the summer of 1994 that contradict this are obstructed by this clean, understandable narrative. Students may not be given the opportunity to see themselves, their family, and their community as part of a larger picture and address elements of historical memory unique to their situation (Edlmann, 2017). This creates a lost opportunity for important peacebuilding work.

## The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as the centrepiece of modern Rwandan history

- 9 As demonstrated across the literature relating to post-conflict education, determining how to approach the implications of a recent conflict can be a challenging task. Some may prefer to avoid discussion altogether, leaving dark parts of one's history in the past for fear of resurgence or simply to move forward to a sense of normalcy (Dy, 2015). The case of Rwanda does the opposite, giving its discussion a central role. There is no desire to return to 'normalcy' as the status quo of the previous regime was



fundamentally flawed and there seems to be a strong desire to show how those flaws were overcome. The framing of the genocide helps achieve this by acting as a narrative climax, delineating a tumultuous 'before' from the now peaceful 'after' built from the ashes of the worst humanity has to offer. In doing this, the genocide is not just something that *happened* to Rwanda, it is core to what it means *to be* Rwandan in the new millennium.

- 10 The colonial and post-independence periods act as the rising action that ultimately leads to the genocide. The colonial Belgian administration is highlighted for formalising ethnic distinctions and manufacturing ethnic rivalry as part of a 'divide and rule' strategy common amongst colonial powers. While the colonial powers were originally cosy with the Tutsi elite and King Mutara III Rudahigwa, they favoured PARMEHUTU leaders in the transition between colonial rule and independence in opposition to the unity that the monarch allegedly represented (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020i). In other words, they created an environment of disunity with a heavy focus on ethnic identity and subverting traditional power structures by supporting the PARMEHUTU.
- 11 It is worth noting that the text separates the Tutsi elite privileged under Belgian colonial administration from other Tutsi in the country who did not receive the same benefits. It would be a stretch to say that the Tutsi elite during that time period were portrayed negatively in the text, but asserting that only a wealthy portion of the Tutsi population was favoured under colonial rule helps downplay the perceived differences between the two groups and aids in the overall narrative of victimhood for the Tutsi as a whole. Furthermore, very little is said to showcase the ways in which these Tutsi elite received special treatment during the colonial period, such as having preferential access to educational opportunities and a near monopoly on secondary education (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; McLean Hilker, 2011; Taka, 2020), but much is said about the ways the Tutsi were denied educational opportunities in the Second Republic with the quota system (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020j).
- 12 If the stage for the genocide was set during the colonial period, the period from 1959 to 1994 could be seen as the rising action. In order to justify the 1990 'Liberation War', it was important to establish what the RPF was liberating Rwandans from. As the narrative goes, the two post-independence republics were plagued by bad leadership, with privileged members of society held above the rest with little recourse for wrongdoing (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e). This impacted everyone across the country, not just those targeted by the genocide. When discriminatory policies were discussed, such as the quota system for educational opportunities, they were portrayed with both ethnic and regional elements, put in place to benefit those who had the same intersecting identities as the ruling elite (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d). In outlining the motivations for the RPF on the eve of war, the text dismisses any notion that the conflict broke out to simply subvert which ethnic group held power, rather its purpose was to fix the societal problems afflicting all those outside the political elite. In other words, it was a war of oppressed against oppressor, not Tutsi against Hutu.
- 13 In a speech in 2019, President of the Chamber of Deputies Mukabalisa Donatille is quoted as saying: 'In fact, Rwanda was vowed to become a failed State. But we did not choose to disappear, we chose to live and recover our dignity as a nation. We chose to engage in the process of reconciliation and unity, not revenge that could only make things worse' (The Parliament of the Republic of Rwanda, 2019).

- <sup>14</sup> This is in line with how the textbooks portray post-genocide Rwanda. The consequences of the conflict stretch beyond direct loss of life, destroying vital systems in the country such as the economy and the education sector whilst adding drastically to the burden of the underdeveloped healthcare and justice systems that were ill-equipped to deal with the aftermath (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k).
- <sup>15</sup> The way that the post-genocide government is discussed undoubtedly constitutes a state-supporting narrative, going as far as to claim that the GNU 'eliminated' discrimination (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d), which certainly contradicts what some other scholars have written about this period (Davidson, 2018; Henry, 2016; Mutabazi, 2021). This is where the narrative loses its efficacy as a peacebuilding tool. By all means it is not encouraging students to pick up arms and prepare for battle in the same way that students educated in Khmer Rouge-controlled parts of post-conflict Cambodia were (Munyas, 2008). Nevertheless, for peacebuilding narratives to be effective, they need to be reflective of the lived experiences and changes in society (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). As the subsequent section examines changing narratives about the role of ethnicity in Rwandan society, this caveat is important to bear in mind.

## The changing role of ethnic identity in Rwanda

- <sup>16</sup> For many scholars, there is little doubt that the violence against the Tutsi in 1994 targeted victims specifically for their perceived ethnic identification<sup>1</sup> (Hintjens, 1999; Magnarella, 2005; Mutabazi, 2021; Uvin, 1997). This is certainly reflected in the narrative about the conflict presented in the textbooks. The textbooks touch on the intercommunal distrust that emerged post-conflict (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020d, 2020k). Davies (2004) provides two, admittedly challenging in practice, suggestions for educational systems to take up in order to reduce their impact on creating essentialist identities, as had been prevalent leading up to the 1994 Genocide. This involves both acknowledging the complex layers of individual identity that extend beyond a single label and avoiding using stereotypes to disparage societal out-groups.
- <sup>17</sup> Immediately post-genocide, some survivors interpreted anyone from the Hutu group who had been present in Rwanda during the conflict as a participant in the genocide, regardless of individual actions. In other words, collective responsibility was dispensed along purely ethnic lines, removing stories of Hutu people who had put themselves at great personal risk to defend their Tutsi neighbours (Mutabazi, 2021). This response represented the continuation of essentialist identities within Rwanda, which can be dangerous as they portray one group as being incompatible with others and deserving of mistreatment (Torsti, 2007). This is seen in cases such as that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where essentialist ethnic identities serve as a barrier to post-conflict reconciliation across the three major ethnic groups (Muižnieks, 2017; Swimelar, 2013; Torsti, 2007). This is something that, at least to some extent, is combatted in the current versions of the textbook.
- <sup>18</sup> Students are taught that the divisions were artificially strengthened and perpetuated unequal power dynamics, first at the hands of the Belgian colonial administration and later by the governments of the First and Second Republics (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020d, 2020i). In doing so, the weight of these identities is diminished as they are portrayed as less legitimate. This is especially emphasised in the Senior One section providing students with guidance as to how to form their individual identities as part of the larger Rwandan collective (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c), in a

way that fundamentally changes the process of self-identification in Rwanda. Students are taught to no longer identify by the tribal designations that were instrumental in fuelling the violence in 1994, but rather to focus on their national identity.

- 19 Historically speaking, this combined de-emphasis of internal divisions in favour of identities cemented in societal unity is not a unique approach for states to take (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Gallagher, 2004). Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue that moving away from narratives claiming one group within a country has a monopoly on legitimate citizenship by emphasising common ground between groups is a way that education can contribute positively to peacebuilding efforts. As the Tutsi were portrayed as being outside oppressors by regimes (Taka, 2020), this emphasis on everyone being fundamentally Rwandan could be one way of combatting a previous conflict-supporting narrative.
- 20 However, the technique used in Rwanda to erase ethnic differences is not free from consequence, as some members of the Twa group have argued the institutionalised removal of ethnic identities from Rwandan society has erased their distinct culture and ignored discrimination faced from both governmental decisions and society at large (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations, 2015). Calling back to the framework presented by Davies (2004), the de-emphasis of ethnic identity may achieve one goal of reducing the presence of negative stereotypes but ignores the fact that ethnicity may still be important to the construction of one's complex multi-faceted identity and cannot simply be wished away by a top-down approach. Buckley-Zistel (2009) suggests that, as the RPF has historically consisted of Tutsi returnees from exile and continues to dominate Rwandan politics, the exclusion of ethnicity from public discourse effectively masks minority rule and allows for the easy elimination of opposition that, at least in 2009, created resentment from both Hutu and Tutsi and damaged peacebuilding efforts. In light of this, the narrative is, at best, a mixed bag, and at worst could potentially contribute to future conflicts down the line.

## Inclusion of Hutu victims

- 21 In her 2016 analysis of the Rwandan education system, Henry notes that the curriculum erased the existence of victims outside the Tutsi group, such as the moderate Hutus killed for their refusal to participate in the genocide (Henry, 2016). In the 2020 textbooks, these moderate Hutu victims are recognised, albeit with far less frequency than Tutsi victims (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020e, 2020d, 2020k). Be that as it may, their recognition is notable. Some scholars have noted the absence of Hutu victims from the national narrative surrounding the genocide and the impact that has had on accessing post-conflict justice and support (Davidson, 2018; Guichaoua, 2020). After a conflict, there is a tendency for groups to focus on their own suffering and victimhood, which creates an incongruence of understanding between two groups (Bar-Tal et al., 2014). As such, the inclusion of these Hutu victims represents a positive step.
- 22 This inclusion is not so much adding a new narrative to provide a different perspective as it is adapting the existing narrative to be more nuanced in the discussion of Hutu involvement in the conflict. The text makes an effort to distinguish between the Hutu extremists who committed atrocities and moderates who suffered at their hands. This can be seen as another way of combating the previously mentioned blanket guilt cast upon all members of the Hutu group. The textbooks make it explicit that while Hutus from all portions of society can be implicated in the conflict, this does not mean that all

Hutus were (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e). On the one hand, members of the opposition are portrayed as 'evil', juxtaposed to the apparent heroism of the RPF and RPA (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020k). On the other hand, some members of the Hutu group are now able to share, in part, in this heroism. They are considered to be patriots, having fought against the genocide (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e). Moreover, they access the right to victimhood. Their suffering now has some level of legitimacy.

- 23 The same cannot be said for civilians that died in the broader context of the civil war surrounding the genocide (Federation Internationale Des Droites De L'Homme et al., 1993). Out of all six books, there are only four sentences mentioning said civilian victims (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020e, 2020h). The Senior Five unit on genocide denial denounces any figures 'overemphasising' Hutu deaths as a form of genocide denial, as they minimise the gravity of the genocide. Furthermore, too much discussion of these deaths could run the risk of being considered interpretive genocide denial as described in Senior Five, as may be used to justify the actions of genocidaires (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j). These deaths may contradict the narrative proposed showcasing the RPF as the faultless liberator for all Rwandans from tyranny - a false dichotomy whereby the acknowledgement of civilian deaths during the civil war somehow negates the suffering of Tutsi and moderate Hutu during the genocide.

## Adherence to a single narrative

- 24 In discussing how to improve the efficacy of post-conflict education, Munyas (2008), McLean Hilker (2011), and Keaveney (2009) mention the importance of introducing multiple perspectives to encourage critical engagement from the students. This is something that is largely missing from the Rwandan context, a notion reflected in Jessee's (2021) analysis of government-supported genocide memorial sites. Students are instead taught to reject anything that does not fit into the dominant narrative as genocide ideology or genocide denial. For example, students are repeatedly presented with the statistic that over one million Tutsis were killed over the course of the genocide (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c, 2020d, 2020i, 2020j, 2020k) as an undisputable fact. So indisputable, that minimising this figure is tantamount to genocide denial (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j).
- 25 However, this does not reflect the reality that accurately determining the number of victims is difficult. Different methodologies can produce different figures depending on the data source and how it is interpreted, with figures ranging from 206,000 to 1,744,000 (Guichaoua, 2020). For example, for scholars relying on official government census data, the figure mentioned in the textbook would be impossible as there were fewer than one million Tutsi living in Rwanda at the time (Verpoorten, 2005). Rather than teaching students how to critically engage with statistics or even explaining why certain methodologies may undercount or overcount victims, the textbook attributes malice to contradicting research and encourages students to reject contradictory information without further investigation. According to Bar-Tal (2014), discrediting sources providing counter-narratives is one way of ensuring the dominance of conflict-supporting narratives.
- 26 This inclination towards a single narrative is not specific to one statistic but is repeated throughout the curriculum. Although every single textbook and teacher's guide instructs students to look outside the textbook for information in order to complete

tasks, particularly through the internet (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020b, 2020c, 2020a, 2020e, 2020d, 2020f, 2020i, 2020g, 2020j, 2020h, 2020k, 2022), more research is needed to determine whether these introduced materials counterbalance this narrative trend. Nevertheless, the reality is that students are not bound to the classroom. Outside of formal education, they are exposed to a variety of different narratives depending on the experience of families and communities during the conflict, narratives that can be incongruent with each other if taken at face value (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). This is not unique to the Rwandan context and is a repeated theme in literature about post-conflict education (Boßmann, 1977; Gasanabo et al., 2016; Meseth & Proske, 2015; Munyas, 2008; Torsti, 2007).

- 27 The solution proposed by the textbook is to dismiss conflicting narratives as genocide ideology, even if they occur within one's own family. Their memories are not reliable, as they are told through the lens of what they had been indoctrinated into believing (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020j). In practice, however, students do not always produce an expected output of understanding when given a specific input of information. For example, in post-war Germany, students' knowledge was greatly shaped by parental influences, as well as mass media, contributing to low levels of historical knowledge and undesirable moral attitudes amongst German teenagers despite efforts made in history classes (Meseth & Proske, 2015). Students are told to reject what does not fit, but that does not always work. Even previous studies of Rwanda have found that the official narrative promoted by the state may be known as the publicly acceptable way to speak about the conflict, but not necessarily believed as truth (McLean Hilker, 2011). Furthermore, Edlmann (2017) argues that exposure to a broad range of narratives about a conflict, especially conflicting ones, is an important psychosocial element of the peacebuilding process. The absence of it leaves a gap that may lead to the deterioration of peace over time. Therefore, this adhesion to a single narrative may be detrimental to long-term peace in the country.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. The textbooks refer to the genocide as being tribal in nature rather than ethnic (Rwanda Basic Education Board, 2020c) but make reference to ethnicity as a contributing factor.

# Conclusion

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- 1 It has only been thirty years since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. In East Germany, Jewish victims of the Holocaust were barely mentioned thirty years after its conclusion (I. Davies, 2000). Thirty years after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, very little content about the conflict was included in the curriculum (Dy, 2013; Munyas, 2008). In light of the relative youth of this conflict, there are many things Rwanda is doing well in the way it is teaching the next generation about a very influential portion of its history. Students have the chance to learn about the conflict and its influence on multiple aspects of society and are given the opportunity to engage with the content and think critically, at least to an extent. Although other scholars (Davidson, 2018; Guichaoua, 2020; Henry, 2016) have lamented the exclusion of Hutu victims from the official narratives about the conflict, these victims receive explicit recognition in the 2020 curriculum. Furthermore, distinctions are made between extremist Hutu and the general Hutu population, severing portrayals of collective guilt placed as a result of ethnic identifiers alone.
- 2 There are narrative elements, however, that may not be entirely peacebuilding. On the surface, creating a narrative invalidating essentialist ethnic identities in pursuit of a post-ethnic society may be perceived as a positive step. However, as Buckley-Zistel (2009) shows, it is not entirely reflective of how many Rwandans actually see themselves, and could instead be used as a tool to dismiss legitimate grievances that have a place in the peacebuilding process. Thus, the de-emphasised role of ethnicity in education may be positive in some respects and negative in others. Although combatting genocide denial is, in principal, a positive step for peacebuilding (Altanian, 2021; Bilali et al., 2019; Elósegui, 2017), it can also be used to promote a single narrative view. Students are given a very clear narrative, separating a dreary and violent past from a hopeful future of unity and justice. This narrative is the only one given space, without giving students the tools to understand other potentially valid experiences that do not align perfectly with the characterisation and the flow of what is presented. Despite providing ample time devoted to the study of the genocide, the majority of Rwandans are relegated to being minor characters in the narrative, denied agency and allocated three simplified potential motivations without room to discuss the breadth of experience. Rather than being given tools to reconcile narrative differences, students are instead taught to reject what does not fit as genocide denial or genocide ideology.

- 3 Ultimately there are multiple factors influencing decision makers in how they portray events in a textbook. The desire to bring about reconciliation in a society marred by conflict can certainly be one of them, but it is not the only factor. Different contexts have different needs, and they cannot all be judged in the same way. Though only the decision makers themselves can ascertain their motivations with absolute certainty, the Rwandan case study shows how the apparent motivation to garner support for the ruling regime, in this case the RPF, also shapes the portrayal of different narrative elements. This reflects what Dy (2015) suggested about Cambodian political goals influencing education decisions rather than educational theory alone. Importantly, one cannot come to the conclusion that this *will* be present in all situations just based on these two studies. Further research in additional cases may identify other elements motivating curriculum designers as well. These are not inherently conflict-supporting, but they can also simply decrease the efficacy of peacebuilding narratives as evidenced by the way that lived experience may not mesh with the top-down narratives being provided.
- 4 As such, care must be taken by international advisors to truly understand the context of post-conflict countries and the needs of the local actors they are working with in shaping post-conflict history education. Just as top-down narratives from the national government may lose their efficacy if they do not match the experiences of the population, solutions posed at an international level need to be reflective of the local situation as well. In pursuing a greater understanding of how these additional factors influence the creation of post-conflict narratives, better guidance can be given to decision makers as to how to accomplish these goals without adversely impacting vital peacebuilding work.

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