

Defying Stereotyping Hutu People in The Rwandan Genocide in The Film, *Kinyarwanda* (2012)

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Summary

Certain academic works and film productions on the Rwandan genocide appear to authorise a new canonicity that simplifies interracial relations between the Tutsi and Hutu people before and during the genocidal war. *Kinyarwanda* is a film that revises the depiction of Hutus as violent people, all eager to kill Tutsis. The film refuses to endorse this mythology and one-sided characterisations of Hutu/Tutsi relations. It shows that there were many Hutu people who perished because they had assisted Tutsi people. It is implied in the film that for film critics to label this category of selfless people Hutu moderates would be a misnomer. Hutus who assisted Tutsis are simply the heroes in the film. Mamdani has convincingly argued that, within the theatre of death in the Rwandan genocide, there were Hutu zealots, along with Hutus who were reluctant, those who were coerced and, most importantly, those who chose to hide Tutsis. The film *Kinyarwanda* defies the official Rwandese ideologies that stereotype Hutu people as guilty by association in respect of the Rwandan genocide. In this respect, the film's authorial ideology is revisionist.

Opsomming

Sekere akademiese werke en rolprentproduksies oor die Rwandese volksmoord blyk 'n nuwe kanoniteit wat die interrassige verhoudinge tussen die Tutsi's en die Hutu's voor en tydens die volksmoordoorlog vereenvoudig, te sanksioneer. *Kinyarwanda* is 'n rolprent wat die uitbeelding van Hutu's as gewelddadige mense, wat almal gretig was om Tutsi's dood te maak, hersien. Die rolprent weier om hierdie mitologie en die eensydige karakterisering van Hutu/Tutsi-verhoudinge te onderskryf. Dit wys dat menige Hutu's gesterf het omdat hulle Tutsi's gehelp het. Dit word in die rolprent geïmpliseer dat die beskrywing van hierdie kategorie onbaatsugtige mense as Hutu-gematigdes deur rolprentkritici onakkuraat sal wees. Hutu's wat Tutsi's gehelp het, is bloot die helde in die rolprent. Mamdani voer oortuigend aan dat, midde-in die teater van die dode wat tydens die Rwandese volksmoord afgespeel het, daar Hutu-fanatici was, tesame met Hutu's wat onwillig was, diegene wat onder dwang opgetree het en, in die besonder, diegene wat gekies het om Tutsi's weg te steek. Die rolprent *Kinyarwanda* daag die amptelike Rwandese ideologieë uit wat Hutu's stereotipeer as aandaagig aan die Rwandese volksmoord bloot omdat hulle Hutu's is. Die rolprent se ouktoeriële ideologie is revisionisties in hierdie opsig.

Introduction

The film *Kinyarwanda* (2012) is a story which shows that during the Rwanda genocide in 1994, neighbours killed neighbours, friends betrayed their friends, and yet some crossed lines of hatred to protect each other. As Rwanda became a slaughterhouse, mosques became places of refuge where Muslims, Christians, Hutus and Tutsis came together to protect each other. In *Kinyarwanda* (2012) the micro-conditions of resistance reflect that unity of purpose could be used to define the contours of peace, nation building, and development in post-genocide Rwanda (Mutasa 2015; Blouin & Mukand 2018). The genocide narrative of *Kinyarwanda* (2012) starts by defining the word Kinyarwanda which refers to, “a Bantu language and an official language of Rwanda spoken by virtually the entire population”. The entire population of Rwanda is mainly composed of three ethnic groups; the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Unfortunately, most research accounts on Rwanda genocide have tended to focus on the Hutu and Tutsi without showing how the Twa (pygmies of Rwanda) fared during the genocide; this conscious “silence” has helped to construct a pernicious discourse that deliberately erases the story of the Twa ethnic group within the context of the Rwanda genocide (Mamdani 2001; Hintjens 2008; Schubert 2012).

Defining National Consciousness in *Kinyarwanda*

This article intends to explore how the film *Kinyarwanda* (2012) treats the Hutu/Tutsi split and the relationship of members belonging to different religious sects during the genocide. The analysis is also interested in finding out how the film depicts the Twa group that is often “silenced” in Rwanda’s genocide discourses. After defining the word “Kinyarwanda”, the narrative takes us back in time to show a group of young boys and girls singing, dancing and playing music which is suddenly interrupted by the “hate-speech” from a transistor radio demonising Tutsis. A girl enters into a room only to find out that her parents have been murdered. The narrative skips the details of the murder and introduces the activities of The Unity, Reconciliation and Re-education Camp (TURRC) – which was one of the main features of post-genocide reconstruction in Rwanda.

The TURRC is a rehabilitation centre housing ex-Hutu militia and gendarmerie soldiers that were actively involved during the genocide. Some of the militia introduced their names as: Mbarubukeye Thierry, Sagamba Jerome, Byabagabo Joseph, Rubyogo Steven and Nzabandora Pascal. The lady who is in charge of rehabilitation program, speaks about the essence of re-reconciliation: “Forgiveness is not the suppression of anger. Forgiveness is asking for a miracle – the ability to see through someone’s mistakes to the truth that lies in our heart.” Forgiveness forms the bedrock of peace and reconciliation

especially in Rwanda's situation where polarisation was rooted in master cleavages of conflict and power predicated on ethnic differences (Prunier 1995; Pottier 2000). The lady goes further to expound the significance of peace, and how difficult it is to forgive someone:

Forgiveness is not always easy. At times it is more painful than the wound that we suffered, and yet it is more painful than the wound that was inflicted. The first step in forgiveness is the willingness to forgive. So why I'm I talking to you about forgiveness; it is because you were the ones that committed the crime. You the ones people have anger, hatred and bitterness towards You must take full responsibility for what you have done and repent.

The above speech is meant to humanise some elements of the Hutu militia by making them to own up the guilt of killing some innocent people during the genocide. The activity is to be viewed as a precursor to the Gacaca system (meaning, justice on grass) which is a mode of justice owned and administered by the communities in Rwanda. However, as Martin (2002) argues, although the Gacaca system was praised by many in Rwanda for its capacity to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to the communities that were centrally involved, the suppression of dissentious narratives in favour of the construction of narratives of singular memories of Tutsis reflects the biased way in which the history of genocide is written by those with power in post-genocide Rwanda.

According to Lemarchand (1998) the prospects for genuine reconciliation through the Gacacas remained bleak, especially considering the fact that the verdicts of these traditional courts were overwhelmingly biased towards official "truths" of the Rwanda genocide. Put differently, the "truths" revealed through the Gacacas were tailor-made to suit the ideological ends of the ruling elite that is predominantly Tutsi. In the words of Ingaelaere (2008) in post-conflict Rwanda, "truth" remains, "... partial, incomplete, deformed, one-sided, and has a high degree of instrumentality because it lacks a broad-based contextual anchoring" (56). Therefore, in summary Mamdani (1996) contends that the traditional court system in Rwanda exemplified "the pursuit of justice without reconciliation" (4). If put into the film context, Mamdani's (1996) claim resonates well with a scene which shows that it is "only" Hutu genocidaires giving testimony to the crimes of killing committed during the genocide.

Depiction of Rwanda Patriotic Front in Some Films on Rwanda

What is surprising is that there are no RPF soldiers that are made to own up for the "silent genocides" that they committed at Kibeho camp in Rwanda and in the forests of Congo in 1996 (Lemarchand 1998; Umutesi 2004). But what audiences hear in the film are narratives of how the Interahamwe killed their

victims as typified by narratives told by Mbarubukeye Thierry and Sagamba Jerome. Thierry says (p 60):

I was a soldier before the war. I trained some of the Interahamwe youths. When the war started ... I was given a list of traitors. We took them from their homes, schools and churches. Hutus married to the Tutsis were traitors too. And the Tutsi who were married to Hutu. Those too were considered traitors. And all were supposed to be killed.

The above testimony by Thierry raises some fundamental issues about how the motives of the genocide were, and targets perceived. One of the first motive discernible is subtly revealed through the idea of “war”; it has been a common belief within the Hutu population that the RPF’s invasion of Rwanda in the 1990s was meant to install a minority rule where the majority of Hutus would be made to suffer as slaves. This internalisation of a set of historical and ideological beliefs fuelled by the ongoing civil war was viewed through the optics of ethnicity (McDoom 2005). In the above narrative, Thierry consciously refers to the conflict between Hutu/Tutsi as war, and the implication is that the “genocide” happened in the context of civil war – a fact that is often contested by Paul Kagame who led the RPF invasion of Rwanda. In fact, the situational context of the concurrent civil war created a need to defend self, family and nation that was brought on by a fear of the RPF invasion and its potential military victory. This fear was rooted in the apprehension that the Tutsi “invaders” meant to enslave and punish Hutu in Rwanda (Mamdani 2001). The second view proffered by Thierry is that intermarriages between the Hutu and Tutsi were seriously condemned, and that those people involved were perceived as enemies that deserved to die. All this were echoes of a genocide project triggered and legitimised by state institutions including the security sector, media, government and local authorities (Berry & Berry 1999). So, generally the targets were Tutsi and their accomplices who happen to carry Tutsi blood due to intermarriages; there were described as “traitors” by virtue of entering into a marriage with a partner that belongs to a different ethnic group. An account provided by Jerome – however, presents a different view on what made some people to kill during the genocide:

I was at the road block near Nyamirambo. And I saw a family driving by. A Tutsi family. We knew they were Tutsi even though they did not want to show their identification cards. So, the Bossman made them to get out of the car and kneel down. It was easier to chop when they were on their knees. Especially when you were short like me. Bossman made all of us chop someone. Then he took her baby and he Held it up by the feet. And he chopped off the head.

The above testimony is particularly interesting because it reveals that some militia that killed were coerced to do so by their leaders “Bossmen”, although

generally killing could not be attributed to a single motivational factor such as coercion. Loyle (2009) puts into considering a complex of factors such as opportunism, conformity, ideological indoctrination, defence and fear of being labelled a “traitor”.

Revisions of the Negative Depiction of Hutu People in Kinyarwanda

However, there were among the Hutu that defied the genocide by ignoring messages that were sent to them through RTLM and the newspaper “Kangura”. One such personality is Paul Rusesabagina (Hutu), who together with Zoellner in the biographical account: *An Ordinary Man: The True Story Behind “Hotel Rwanda”* (2006) chronicle how he saved the lives of 1 268 Tutsis and moderate Hutus through witticism, business acumen, simple bribes and lies. Ironically, in post-genocide Rwanda, Rusesabagina’s account has received negative responses from the Rwandan government and news-papers that charged him of having, “... a self-promotion agenda while distorting Rwanda’s history and spreading negative propaganda against the current government through outrageous assertions and dirty campaigns” (King 2010: 299). What is apparent from Rusesabagina’s ordeal is that the government is very uncomfortable if the history of genocide is narrated from an angle that has no official “blessings”, particularly if that angle happened to emerge from a group of people that are labelled as *genocidaires* (Hutu). Without a shred of doubt, Rusesabagina’s “voice” constitute “minority discourses” of Hutu rescuers that have contributed in a significant way during the genocide but are denied audience simply because they belong to the Hutus that are stereotypically viewed as perpetrators of violence during the genocide. This “collective punishment” (Schuberth 2012) has helped to construct a myth in which Rwanda is viewed as a nation of, “... brutal, sadistic merciless killers” (Hutus) versus “innocent victims” (Tutsis) (81).

Defying Stereotype in Kinyarwanda

To debunk the “myth” that Hutus still harbour an “ethnic ideology and genocide mentality” (ibid) in post-genocide Rwanda, the Hutu militia at rehabilitation camp are shown dancing and singing a song that encapsulate messages of peace and nation-building: *We shall rebuild the nation! Turn it into paradise on this earth. We shall rebuild it!* However, a shift to another scene in the film tells a different story of fear, betrayal and escape. In this story, Bertrand – a trainee Tutsi priest recounts how he was constantly called the “brother cockroach” by fellow trainees that belonged to the Hutu ethnic

group. In response, the senior Hutu priest offers as a counter-narrative what he saw at the road block:

Yesterday at the road block I saw a Hutu man killed for refusing to lift his machete and swing with the others. The killers had caught a woman that they thought would pass as a Hutu but the woman refused to give them her identity card. They could tell I could see her by her nose. This man stood back from the others, and when they were done with the woman, they killed the man.

What the above narrative shows is that an act of defiance or choices not to kill would receive a death penalty. That there were some Hutus prepared to sacrifice their lives as their way of opposing genocide means that Tutsis cannot only be the ones to hold the “monopoly of suffering” (King 2010: 300) often presented as the master narrative of the Rwanda genocide promoted by the government. Thus, the silence of surviving Hutu moderates, which in post-genocide Rwanda is constitutive of a “minority discourse” should have had an outlet in post-genocide Rwanda but is muffled by government’s attempts to present the Tutsi as the “only” victims of the genocide (Thomson 2011). When Bertrand demanded to know why the Senior Priest was telling him the story of a Hutu man that was killed for refusing to conform to the act of killing that had become the norm among Hutu extremists, he told that: “*I’m telling this because I have taken the risk to have you here*”. But the hypocrisy and pretentious gesture of the Senior Priest was soon to be exposed when he is seen telling the soldier and militias where the trainee Tutsi priest was hiding. However, when the Senior Priest leads the group to the room, they find it empty, and the soldier comments sarcastically: “It looks like your ‘brother cockroach’ really knows how to hide like a cockroach”. Apart from being described as “cockroaches”, Tutsis were also described as, “collaborators”, “rebels”, “traitors” and “invaders” (Varadharajan 2008: 23). This act of name-calling is a strategy adopted by the Hutu extremists in order to belittle the value of Tutsis so that the genocidaires could be psyched up to kill with impunity. The labelling and stereotyping as “cockroaches”, is sorely over-charged with allegorical meaning as part of what Michael Rogin calls the “surplus symbolic value” of victimised people (Shohat & Stam 1994: 183). Evidently, the symbol of victimage is dramatised through a scene when the trainee Priest is seen running for dear life with a group of militias in hot pursuit. His figure is beautifully captured in semi-shadows mixed with dark shades to symbolise the diminished hope of many Tutsis that were caught up into the web of violence and the brutalities of genocide.

Representations of Ideologies of Inclusivity of Human Agency in *Kinyarwanda*

The film *Kinyarwanda* (2012) should be credited for showing a new trend in the Rwandan genocide narratives where Muslims are depicted as saviours of the beleaguered Tutsis and Hutu moderates. This trend is ably enacted in a scene showing a young Muslim asking his father that: *How long will we continue to keep the Tutsis?* The young man further reveals that it was increasingly becoming difficult to keep the Tutsis into hiding because his family was running short of food, medicine and water. But his father insisted that they should keep their pledge of saving the endangered lives of the Tutsis. In a broader context, Muslim elders group together to discuss the plight of the Tutsis. For many during the Rwanda genocide, religion and faith became symbols of hope, peace and unity among the victims of attacks as well as among people who decided to make a difference in Rwanda by helping the targeted groups (Dona 2000). Much as there has been a will among some church members to help the victims of attack, the discussion of the Muslim elders reveals the contradictory role of the church during the genocide. To this effect, Hassan says: “We cannot be arrogant. We cannot forget that there are Christians saving lives.” *And we cannot forget that there are Muslims in the death squads.* The hard choices that people made to become part of the death squad, saviours of the beleaguered Tutsis and Hutu moderates or inactive bystanders, reflect the complexities of the Rwanda genocide (Tadjo 2002; Nkunzimana 2009).

Portrayals of Positive Images of Muslims in *Kinyarwanda*

The contradictions of the genocide are revealed too through cases where some endangered Tutsis hesitated to approach Muslims because of the negative perceptions built around Islam as a religion. To some, the religion is associated with rebellion and extremism which seemed to curry favour with the Hutu extremism that spearheaded genocide in Rwanda. However, when one elder tries to clarify his point by pointing out that there are Muslims, Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda, he is quickly reminded that the Twa should also occupy an important space in the history of the Rwanda genocide: “I know we pygmies are easy to overlook but we are here you know!” This brave reminder, coming as it were from a member of the Twa ethnic group, is a serious indictment to the Rwanda genocide studies that have chosen deliberately to erase the picture of the Twas as active participants in the genocide. This serious “gap” in the studies of Rwanda genocide should be addressed because a total neglect, reckless disregard or wilful blindness to the plight of the Twa group can amount to cultural genocide. This has wider economic and political implications in post-genocide Rwanda. The strength

of religion is shown through a visual image showing Muslims preaching the gospel of peace, harmony and respect of each ethnic group in Rwanda. This way, the Muslim image as a “unifier” is sanitized against the backdrop of stereotypes and phantoms of Muslims as, “radicalists”, “fundamentalists” and “terrorists” (Bharucha 2014: 71). The elder further clarifies the role of Islam as a religion of peace and harmony.

In contra-distinction to the image of peace advocated by the church, there is a scene in the film *Kinyarwanda* (2012) which shows a group of soldiers accompanied by the *Interahamwe* ready to slaughter a group of terrified Tutsis including the trainee priest. The priest is told in clear cut terms that he is targeted for killing: “Oh, this cockroach priest they are looking for. You’re the one they are looking for, right?” *This is the Tutsi priest on our list*. To build a case against the priest, and further increase his epistemic vulnerabilities to the machete blows, the Soldier accuses him: “I used to come to the church when I was young. And you always used to say you were better than me, better than everyone else” At this point, history is being invoked here to reflect the toxic nature of hate rooted in a mindset cultivated over a long period of time in which Tutsi were described as “arrogant”, “cultivators of a superior complex” Check (2008: 23) and master oppressors of the Rwandan Hutus. The soldier further mocks the terrified priest: “There is something I don’t understand. If you believe in God why are afraid to die? Don’t worry, I’ll make it quick!” However, before the attack commences, the group is disturbed by a woman witch doctor who chants, dance and blow a windfall of charms towards the soldiers and *Interahamwe* to make them weak. Indeed, the victims are rescued at the opportune moment, and they are led by the witch doctor through a safe passage to be rescued by the RPF soldiers that have begun to make significant progress in repelling the militias and gendarmeries. The film consciously erects this scene in order to show that African Traditional Religion (ATR) with its beliefs in the potency of charms also played a significant role in saving the lives of the targeted groups during the genocide. Often stereotyped as “traditional” “archaic” and “obscurantist”, ATR has helped to promote peace by weakening the aggressive power of the perpetrators of violence in Rwanda. Thus, the ritualistic element in killing, often one of the main features in the Liberian civil war, had its counter-narrative in Rwanda where traditional medicines were used for defensive purposes. However, very few studies have been carried out to explore how ATR played a part in defining the contours of genocide in Rwanda; what is more visible is the role played by the church in either protecting the victims or fomenting violence (Courtemache 2004).

Irony as Creative Tool of defiance in *Kinyarwanda*

Even as the film delivers a heavy subject of genocide, it has its light moments of humour. In a typically African hoax, a Hutu boy stirs the curiosity of the militia by telling that his family was hiding some guns and “cockroaches”. When asked to show the evidence of what he was saying, the boy puts a DVD tape with a film showing soldiers shooting at each other, then he says: *These are the guns I was talking about* He goes to the cardboard and kicks it severally. A stream of cockroaches drops from their hiding place, flood the house and quickly scurry in different directions trying to find nooks and crannies. The militia leaves the room without a word or making an attempt to search for the Tutsis who were actually hiding in another room of the house. This dramatic conflict between the militia with their urge to kill, and the “moral imperative” (Allen 2012: 3) to protect so ably demonstrated by the boy shows that in Rwanda not all Hutu were ready to betray their Tutsi neighbours. Undoubtedly, hard choices were made individuals to defy the genocide in order to save the lives of the Tutsis.

In her study to find the extent of women’s participation during the Rwanda genocide, Hoggs (2010) refers to an extraordinary story of woman, who previously had hardline views though married to a Tutsi, recounting how she came to wear military uniform on two occasions during the genocide. In the first instance, this permitted her to get through the roadblocks to save her Tutsi niece who had been attacked but remained in a ditch. When sub-sequently caught by the *Interahamwe* trying to hide the girl, she offered herself as a sex slave to the local head of the *Interahamwe* in order to protect the girl, and other, from rape. The girl was thus released and survived the genocide. On the second occasion, she wore the military uniform and travelled with her *mari de viol* (rape-husband) to Butare in order to find her husband and children who were hiding. She achieved this with the assistance of the young *Interahamwe* member, though together with her husband decided that it was safer for him and the children to remain in Butare and for her to remain with her *mari de viol*. Unfortunately, the woman received bitter criticism from people who saw her travelling with the *Interahamwe* and wearing a military uniform. The few examples provided shows that in Rwanda there are many “unacknowledged” heroes in as much as there are many villains that have never come into the open to account for the atrocities that they committed during the genocide. This serves as a counter-narrative to the single narrative of RPF heroism often projected by the government of Paul Kagame in Rwanda. Drawing on Primo Levi, Lemarchand (2008: 67) reminds us that the “memory of the offence”, no matter how inaccurate or constructed, “is always selective” and hence fundamental for the creation of a “convenient reality”.

Rethinking the Value of Depictions of Collective Memory in *Kinyarwanda*

Rwandan critics, especially from the independent media fraternity, argue that construction of collective memory, for instance through annual memorial days and media campaigns, allows the RPF regime to gain so-called “genocide credit” (Reyntjens 2004: 23) which refers to the exploitation of genocide memory in order to avoid criticism about its human rights abuses or what Silva-Leander (2008: 1610) calls the, “gradual Tutsification of the state by the RPF”. The most contentious issue revolves around the construction of a genocide narrative that labels a section of society as *genocidaires* (Hutu) while others are constructed as *victims* (Tutsi). Those that are labelled negatively forfeit the right to have their narratives occupy “real and imaginary” spaces within Rwanda’s historiography. By offering a heteroglot of voices, the film *Kinyarwanda* (2012) succeeds considerably to puncture the underbelly of official accounts built upon the, “phenomenon of historical exceptionalism” (Zegeye & Vambe 2009: 34) that for a long time has tended to sustain the pride and political intransigence of the ruling government in Kigali. Nonetheless, the end of the film with a wedding ceremony is a sure sign of unity, hope and new life for the posterity in post-genocide Rwanda. The next chapter will analyse how peace and hope have been sustained or frustrated by the Kagame regime in post-genocide Rwanda.

Conclusion

Kinyarwanda initially uses stereotypes of Hutu people as bloodthirsty. This, the film does in a way that identifies it with many films from Rwanda about the genocide created by Rwandans and non-Rwandans. However, *Kinyarwanda* introduces new creative dimensions in the representations of human agency before, during and after the Rwandan genocide. The plight of the Twa people that is often underplayed is highlighted in the film. The positive role of Muslims is revealed. This is important because earlier films on the genocide and their critics had tended to project Christianity as the only religion that Rwandans know. These acts of revising perceived ways of apprehending the Rwandan genocide demonstrates a departure from past films. At the same time *Kinyarwanda* openly rehabilitates the images of some Hutu people most of whom had been depicted mainly in negative light in some films on the Rwandan genocide. In addition, in *Kinyarwanda*, the enforcement of a “unitary” but collective memory by the new Rwandan authorities is resisted. These ways of authoring new visual discourses of the Rwandan genocide reveal the complexity of human agency before, during and after the genocide.

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