Becoming Rwandan? The Impact of Two Decades of Unity Policies on the Batwa

Summary
In the almost twenty-five years after the violence that destroyed much of the country's physical, institutional and social infrastructure, the government of Rwanda has made national unity and reconciliation a priority. Much has been written about its reconciliation policies and their effects. In this literature, Batwa are frequently presented as 'forgotten' or 'invisible', and are portrayed as the victims of a government that does not care for them and of neighbours who despise them. Drawing on qualitative research with Twa, their non-Twa neighbours, government actors, and NGO workers conducted between 2015 and 2017, this paper seeks to build on earlier studies and suggests that the policies of national unity and reconciliation are having a major impact on how Twa construct their identity within post-genocidal Rwanda.

Keywords: Twa, Rwanda, identity, national unity, indigeneity

I. Introduction

In the aftermath of the genocidal violence of the early 1990s, the new government of Rwanda quickly identified ethnic divisionism between 'Hutu', 'Tutsi' and 'Twa' as the root cause of the violence that had engulfed the country (NURC 2004: 6). One of their first acts of the new government was to remove the ethnic identification from official identity cards. Ethnic 'separatism' was later outlawed in a 2001 law on discrimination and sectarianism, which introduced criminal penalties for both individuals and organisations that promote 'divisionism' or discriminate on the basis of ethnicity (Law 47/ 2001; see also Reyntjens 2004: 184).

However, if ethnic hatred was to be overcome and further violence prevented, it was necessary to replace ethnic division with something else. National unity has, therefore, been at the core of the government's reconciliation and rebuilding strategy. This emphasis on national unity has entailed the rediscovery of a single Rwandan identity rooted in the pre-colonial past (Connor Doughty 2016; D. Newbury; Vansina). In this version of history, Rwandan had been a unified country before the arrival of European colonialism. It is this pre-colonial ideal of national harmony to which the policies of national unity strive.

Much has been written about the programmes and policies that have attempted to instil national unity in the Rwandan population. There are two criticisms that are often inter-twined but are worth separating out. The first is that the emphasis on national unity has been used as a tool by the RPF-based elite for entrenching their power. As Connor Doughty notes, "the dominant narrative [of reconciliation and unity] and its lacunae were crucial to legitimizing the government's authority to rule" (Connor Doughty 2016: 71). This has then allowed the silencing of opposition voices in the name of national unity (Reyntjens 2004; Buckley-Zistel 2006). This paper does not engage in this debate.

The second thread of criticism concerns not the use to which such policies are put but instead challenges them on their own terms as to whether they are successful in overcoming the ethnic divide and forging a shared identity based on 'Rwandanness'. There appears to be a scholarly consensus – based on empirical studies – that the policies of national unity and reconciliation, while perhaps understandable and even laudable, have failed; worse, they have been counter-productive. That is, instead of removing ethnicity from everyday life in Rwanda, the effort to impose unity and the draconian methods of enforcing it have instead, it is suggested, made ethnicity *more* salient at the same time as driving it underground (McLean Hilker 2009; Ingelaere, 2010; Thomson 2011). In the words of McLean Hilker, "it [the promotion of a unified 'Rwandan' national identity] has created an atmosphere in which public discussions about

ethnicity are taboo yet continue in private. The result has been to emphasize rather than de-emphasize ethnicity and reproduce the 'ethnic' logic that underpinned the genocide." She concludes simply that the policy "is not working." (McLean Hilker 2009: 96; see also Mgbako 2005). Buckley-Zistel reaches a similar conclusion, that "the Rwandan government is trying to fabricate a unity without reconciliation." (Buckley-Zistel 2006: 112). Ingelaere's study of the experience of 400 'ordinary peasants' of Rwanda's political transition led him to conclude that "the instrumental stance on ethnic identity adopted by the post-genocide regime is not only erroneous but counter-productive." (Ingelaere 2010: 273) The conclusion of this scholarship, the latest study being from 2010, is that the emphasis on national unity – the policies to instil it and the criminalisation of discussions on ethnic identity – has not only not succeeded but is dangerous and risks a return to violence.

The aim of this paper is not to challenge these accounts but to add to them. With the exception of one of the studies (Thomson 2009), these observations and analyses are based on interviews with individuals primarily drawn from the two largest groups within Rwanda: Hutus and Tutsis. The Twa are understandably often overlooked because of their numerical size (although not by Adamczyk 2011). Where they are considered, they are often presented as overlooked or invisible (Thomson 2011). The aim of this paper, and the broader study upon which it is based, is to make the Twa visible and to consider the impact of the programme of national unity on how Twa individuals view their own identity. Our study is limited to the Twa; as such, it cannot tell us how other communities within Rwanda perceive and are responding to the various policies of national unity, although the suggestion has been made that the treatment of the Twa is something of a bellwether for the health of Rwandan societal relations more generally (Taylor 2011).

The Twa are Rwanda's third group, and are thought to comprise less than 1% of the Rwandan population – although accurate figures are not available. They are understood to be descendants of the Pygmy populations of central Africa, and thus form part of the Batwa population living throughout the Great Lakes Region (Lewis 2000). Traditionally forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers, the Twa were simultaneously a part of pre-colonial Rwandan societies and subject to often extreme marginalisation and negative stereotyping by both cultivators and pastoralists (Vansina 2001; Taylor 2011). As Taylor notes, "Twa were perceived as wild, polluting, and disgusting" (Taylor 2011: 186). These sentiments continued into the contemporary era. The pressure on land and national policies on protecting the remaining rainforests have meant a loss of traditional hunting grounds and hence the loss of Twa's traditional economic activity. This destruction of their economic way-of-life has placed them on the socio-economic margins of society and a lack of access to land has forced many to eke out a living as potters and day labourers (Lewis 2000; Ndahinda 2011). The Twa in Rwanda are generally positioned as among the poorest of the poor. This loss of livelihood has led, it has been claimed, to a crisis of identity among Twa (Lewis 2000: 10).

II. National Unity and the notion of 'Rwandanness'

Given the nature of the violence that wracked post-independence Rwanda, it is not surprising that national unity came to play such a central role in the re-building of the country. The importance of national unity and the institutionalisation of its relationship to reconciliation was cemented during a series of weekly meetings of Rwanda's elite at the presidential residence, Village Urugwiro, between May 1998 and March 1999 – known as the Urugwiro process (NURC 2016: 49 et seq.; Longman 2017: 151 et seq.). The promotion of national unity and the fight against 'secretarianism' was placed squarely at the centre of this new national life. This took the form institutionally of the creation of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 1999 and the design of new national symbols, such as the national motto – 'Unity · Work · Patriotism' in Article 6 of the new Constitution – and the new Constitution itself in 2003. At the narrative level, the emphasis on national unity put the focus on being Rwandan: community belonging

was no longer to be based on ethnic identity but on a national citizenship, on Rwandanness. The aim of the NURC's programmes and policies is to create a citizenship above ethnic division. The unity of Rwandans thus became the absolute grounding principle of the post-genocidal regime (NURC 2016: 59): "Key to any strategy [of national reconciliation and unity] was the redefinition and promotion of a shared National Identity - *Rwandanness* - in which every citizen of Rwanda considers him/herself as Rwandan first, beyond anything else." (NURC 2016: 53).

The cornerstone of this post-genocide regime has been that the violence that dominated post-independent Rwanda has been the result of an ethnic divisionism introduced and enforced by outsiders (e.g. Kagame 2004). Connor Doughty has labelled this the "Government's Master Narrative of History" (2016: 55). In this narrative, the Hamitic thesis or myth has been repeatedly highlighted to show how the *Abanyarwanda* (inhabitants of Rwanda) were a single ethnic group before being divided by colonial rulers. As the accompanying text to the National Genocide Memorial puts it, "We had lived in peace for many centuries, but now [with colonial rule] the divide between us had begun." (Connor Doughty 2016: 56) Moreover, this 'master narrative' continues to assign a negative role to outsiders in more recent Rwandan history. This moral discrediting of the West works to mute their criticisms of government policies and reinforces the need to locate solutions to Rwanda's problems at the national level, within Rwandan culture; as the NURC has frequently expressed it, "unique homegrown solutions for unity and reconciliation" are required (NURC 2009: 54). The point here is not to contest the post-genocide regime's selective reading of history, nor to highlight the way in which this dominant narrative chooses to mask past and present divisions for political gain; this has been done very well elsewhere and from a range of disciplinary perspectives (e.g. Vansina 2004; D. Newbury 2009; Eltringham 2009; Reyntjens 2005; Connor Doughty 2016). Rather it is to highlight what Connor Doughty has named the "'total environment' of reconciliation" (2016: 70).

This environment provides clear roles for the two main groups of Rwandan society based on official designations of collective guilt and innocence. As many studies of the reconciliation processes have noted, the dominant narrative has marked – with one or two exceptions – all Tutsi as innocent and all Hutus as guilty, giving a monopoly on suffering to Tutsis (e.g. Clark 2010, Pottier 2005). In this frame, the 'we' of Rwandan-ness in the reconciliation process is based on a 'genocide citizenship' in which ethnic categorisation is simultaneously negated and reinforced. For example, the apology that President Kagame issued to genocide survivors on behalf of all Rwandans in his speech marking the tenth anniversary of the genocide appears on the one hand to speak to the idea of a national, shared trauma; and yet at the same time reflects a very particular notion of national unity, in which the 'we' being addressed is the 'we' that is responsible for the suffering of Tutsis and must atone for it i.e. Hutus. This becomes clearer in the call by Kagame at a Youth Connect conference in 2013 for young Hutus to make public apologies for the actions of their parents and other relatives (Blackie and Hitchcott 2018: 28). Simply being Hutu is to need to express remorse and to atone for inherited sins. In this way, it is argued, Hutu experience is silenced (Connor Doughty 2016: 70).

However, the diagnosis of what had gone wrong was not limited to ethnic divisionism created by outsiders. The discussants at Village Urugwiro identified both poor governance and poverty as crucial elements in enabling resentment to build and be manipulated into ethnic violence (NURC 2009). According to President Kagame, "As long as Rwandans are impoverished, it will never be possible to have Unity and Reconciliation integrated in the national reconstruction process." (NURC review 2009: 7) Socio-economic development was seen thus as an important part of ensuring "lasting solutions to unity and reconciliation"; and new projects were explicitly seen as opportunities to foster solidarity at the village level through creating and supporting shared socio-economic goals (NURC 2016: 88-89).

These socio-economic or development projects were supported by unity programmes, created by the NURC, to facilitate the process of daily reconciliation and to enable Rwandans to 're-discover the pre-colonial harmony that colonisation had destroyed'. These national

programmes include educational programmes – the *Itorero* programme (or Civic Education Academy) – established in 2007, in which all Rwandans from the age of 7 are "re-introduc[ed to] the culture of serving the country at no financial reward, encouraging patriotism, positive values, responsibility and selfless service." (NURC 2007: 108); and re-education camps – such as *Ingando* or Solidarity Camps – which are residential camps aimed at overcoming the past and developing a common identity (NURC 2007). It also includes programmes that encourage reconciliation through regular co-operation towards shared goals; these types of programmes include *Ubudehe*, in which participation in community work at the village level targeted at general poverty alleviation builds on traditional practices of communal crop planting or house building – and is thus labelled "a homegrown solution rooted in Rwanda's culture" (NURC 2007: 96). A similar programme, although aimed at developing feelings of dignity through self-reliance, is *Umuganda* – a collective action programme on the last Saturday of every month that involves all Rwandans doing communal work together, such as cleaning public spaces, planting flowers, and maintaining drainage. Participation in both these programmes is compulsory.

These educational programmes and programmes of communal or collective work are complemented by a programme that directly addresses questions of identity in relation to the past. This is the *Ndi Umunyarwanda* or 'I am Rwandan' programme. This programme was launched in November 2013 and takes place at both community level and within institutions e.g. the police academy. According to the NURC, and it is worth quoting in full, *Ndi Umunyarwanda* "provides a forum or space for Rwandans in various social groups to discuss issues related to national unity, reconciliation and development. The program encompasses both the atrocities of the divisive past and the hope for a peaceful, reconciled and reunited country. Not all Rwandans need settle on a single interpretation, but the task is to work toward mutually acceptable accommodation. *Ndi Umunyarwanda* program is such a normative shift. By focusing on a shared citizenship – citizenship as a shared fate – the program restores the bond and solidarity between Rwandans." (NURC 2007: 112). Details of the programme are, beyond this statement by the NURC, scarce. A concept document exists in Kinyarwanda but has apparently not been translated. How the programme works in practice is even less clear. Requests for information on the programme from contacts within Rwanda who should be well placed to know how the programme works have resulted in a blank, beyond the limited information put out by the NURC. As one contact noted, he knows little of how the programme works in practice, a realisation that he described as 'strange!'.[1] What seems apparent from the description by our interviewees is that *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is made concrete as a series of messages drawn up by the NURC and communicated in the context of other programmes, such as *Ingando*, but also within the compulsory public meetings that take place at village level. These descriptions portray this communication as less a dialogue than a top-down lesson on what it is to be Rwandan today.

While few scholarly studies on *Ndi Umunyarwanda* or on the impact of the programme have been done, it has already faced substantial criticism for emerging out of the movement calling on Hutus to issue public apologies (The Rwandan 2013; Blackie and Hitchcott 2018). In an argument similar to that made about the silencing of Hutu experience, it is claimed that the Twa are invisible in the reconciliation process. Whilst Tutsis and Hutus have been assigned their respective roles in the official narrative of the genocide, the Twa have indeed been mostly forgotten – as the government sees them as almost entirely irrelevant to its account of how the genocide occurred (Thomson 2009: 316). Moreover, not only are they given no place in the official account, the prohibition on divisionism means that they are also not able to give their own account of their experiences as Twa in the reconciliation forums. The outlawing of divisionism has also entailed that the Twa are not recognised as a minority group, nor as an indigenous people, and thus are not accorded the special status that such labels entail (Lewis 2000; Thomson 2009; Ndahinda 2011). Instead, the government uses a catch-all label of

[1] Email contact with the author; available, cleaned of all identifying information, on request.

'Historically Marginalised Peoples' to capture the historical marginalisation of this group and their continuing socio-economic marginalisation. The inability to identify Twa as Twa under Rwanda law has made advocacy on behalf of this group to address their marginalisation difficult and the relationship between advocacy or representative groups and the government have often been fraught (Ndahinda 2011). Instead, the Rwandan government has adopted pro-poor policies and Twa – because of their lowly economic status – are targeted for assistance not as Twa but for their socio-economic marginalisation. It is this that has led some to suggest that the Twa are rendered invisible by this approach (e.g. Thomson 2009). This invisibility, it is further suggested, allows their marginalisation and the daily discrimination that they face to continue (Lewis 2000; Ntakirutimana and Collins 2017).

III. Our data

The data presented here was collected as part of a broader project investigating Batwa socio-marginalisation in Rwanda, done together by Communauté des Potiers du Rwanda /Rwandese Community of Potters (COPORWA), the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) and Tilburg University. The interviews of members of the Batwa community were conducted in two waves: a 24 interview pilot study that allowed us to test and refine the categories; and an additional 65 interviews. The participants were drawn from a cross-section of the Batwa community and were selected using purposive sampling on the basis of location, age, gender and level of education. Interviews took place in all districts of the country, including the capital. A third wave of interviews, focus groups and other types of interaction were conducted with strategic actors at the local and national level, such as sector and district leaders, members of parliament and other public institutions. The interviews were semi-structured interviews based on a conversational format, with the questions as a guide for the interviewer but not a rulebook. The interviews ranged from 2-4 hours in duration and were audio recorded; a representative number of interviews were also filmed where the participant gave additional consent to being filmed.[2] All interviewees were offered full anonymity. Many agreed to waive this in order to be filmed, although they were also offered the possibility of obscuring their face and voice. Only the interviewer and the interviewee were present during the interview and we were strict in enforcing this (with exceptions obviously made for the presence of young children). Where an interviewee was not alone, and others would not (or could not leave), researchers returned at a later date. For those that were filmed, a cameraman was also present for parts of the interview. The lead researchers did go out into the field to observe several interviews but these were not then included in the analysis, although they do feature in the documentary. By using individuals known in the communities to conduct the interviews, and by adopting a private conversational format, we hoped to ensure that individuals felt able to speak freely. There was agreement within the project staff and the in-country stakeholder group that this had been achieved, as far as it is ever possible to know: the extent to which interviewees felt able to talk about ethnicity and to complain about local leaders frequently elicited gasps of shock from our more politically-sensitive, Kigali-based stakeholders. These interviewees were thus either not able or did not feel that it was necessary to conform their speech to government narratives in these instances (see, however, Bouka 2013).

As well as questioning Twa, we also interviewed a very small sample of non-Twa neighbours, non-activist NGO workers,[3] individual within the sector and district leadership, and national politicians. This category of 'strategic actors' amounted to 20 interviews in total. This data was used here to triangulate our findings.

The interviews were conducted by six local researchers with experience of community organisation in Batwa communities as employees of or freelancers with COPORWA. They were

[2] The filmed interviews were compiled into a 20-minute documentary; it is available to watch at http://www.inclusivedevelopmentrwanda.org

[3] By this, I mean workers with NGOs that do not take a political line on the rights of Twa.

trained in the project methodology over a 2 day session, with a subsequent day of training following the analysis of the pilot interviews. The interviews were transcribed by the interviewers and then translated into English. The translated transcripts were checked by bilingual project staff, with a focus on consistency and terminology. The choice for particular translations were discussed within the project and with project stakeholders during the three workshops held in Kigali in February 2014, October 2015 and October 2017. The interviews were analysed using grounded theory (Bentzon, Hellum, Stewart et al., 1998; Hammett, Twyman and Graham, 2015). On the basis of the pilot interviews, a set of codes were identified, intensively discussed with in-country project stakeholders, refined and then further refined during the main body of analysis. The initial findings were road-tested in four feedback sessions in May and June 2017. These sessions were held in Kibeho/Nyaruguru (Southern Province), Cyanika/Burera (Northern Province), Nyamata/Bugesera (Eastern Province) and Nyange/Ngororero (Western Province), and were attended by Twa individuals as well as by officials from the sector and district leaderships. The findings were further interrogated during a stakeholder workshop in Kigali in October 2017.

In addition to the difficulties of creating the conditions in which interviewees can speak freely – and of never knowing for sure whether you succeed – one potential weakness of our methodology concerns the selection of interviewees. The selection was made by COPORWA, according to the criteria agreed by the project partners. Yet in addition to providing support, advice and financial assistance to Twa communities, COPORWA is first and foremost an advocacy organisation. The trade-off in gaining access to the communities was that COPORWA would select interviewees that have reason to be grateful to them and/ or would re-produce the organisation's demand for government recognition of the Twa as an indigenous people. This fear did not materialise. As will become clear below, interviewees were largely either ignorant of claims made on their behalf or rejected them.

IV. Pragmatism and empowerment

The data presented below is part of a project investigating Twa socio-economic marginalisation; in particular, we were interested as to whether identity as an indigenous people functioned as a barrier to the inclusion of Batwa in Rwandan society. Our interviews were not explicitly focused on identity and we did not ask – for obvious reasons – about how individuals viewed their ethnic identity. Instead, we asked interviewees to tell us about their lives and, more importantly, to tell us about the good life as they see it. Where identity came up – as it did in the vast majority of the interviews – it was raised by the interviewee.

Twa Culture as Past?

Twa identity was viewed by many of our interviewees as a barrier to their progress. In this way, Twa culture in its broadest sense – the way of life, the markers of Twa identity – was portrayed as a thing of the past. For a small number, this was a cause of regret but not for most, who appeared to take a practical approach to the decline of traditional practices. One gentleman in the north of the country told us:

> *The negative things about traditional culture are that we used to live in bad living conditions. We had to struggle a lot to get clay and earn a living. We would also carry loads like traditional beer and be paid for that. There was no dignity in that. (Mr. G1, Nyamesheke District)*

In southern Rwanda, a Twa women confirmed this desire to place traditional Twa identity in the past as something to be left behind:

> *Wherever they [Twa] were, there were some issues, including trading insults. Even now there are still places where this still happens. There was also a culture of begging. There are those who do not understand yet the times they live in and adapt accordingly. They are still stuck in traditional culture. (Ms. B2, Rusizi District)*

For the younger generation, traditional practices – we were frequently told – were no longer relevant. For example, when asked about Twa culture and the role that it played in his life, one interviewee in his twenties told us *"By traditional culture, I understand culture of the past… You will bear with me because I do not know much about it.(3)"*

The negative attitudes that were expressed towards Twa traditions came in relation to traditional economic practices, such as pot-making, day-labouring or begging. Traditional practices of dancing and singing were also largely placed in the past but with some regret, particularly by older interviewees. This negative approach to Twa identity – particularly as it relates to economic practices and hence to being poorer on average than other Rwandans – connects to the strong desire, expressed almost across the board, for progress and, relatedly, to self-empowerment. What we found was that moving away from Twa traditional practices was understood by Twa to be key to improving their lives; put more strongly, there was a very strong connection in the minds of our interviewees between the possibility of socio-economic improvement and jettisoning the Twa way-of-life. Similar findings were reported by Adamczyk in her study (Adamczyk 2011).

At the same time, however, few Twa welcomed the alternative designation by the government as Historically Marginalised Peoples (HMPs). This label caused confusion, was subject to frequent ridicule by our interviewees and was widely viewed as insufficient to address their marginalisation:

> *Even the name itself HMP is problematic, even if it reflects how we currently are. Others make progress but when they see you, they say, look at that HMP. Should we always be captured under that label? The name is like a bad omen to us. Perhaps the state cannot do anything for us if we remain labelled as HMPs. (Ms. B2, Rusizi District)*

As Ms. B2 makes clear, her main reason for rejecting the HMP label is the way in which the designation of being historically marginalised appears to trap Twa in poverty.

Where we encountered despair and hopelessness, this despair was frequently coupled with Twa identity:

> *In general, nothing goes well. We are not making steps forward like others. We keep staying behind. We live indeed like HMPs.* (Mr. B1, *Rusizi District*)

Yet where we encountered an entrepreneurial attitude – notably among the younger generation – we found, too, that Twa identity was associated with a backward attitude. A young man in Nyaruguru district told us:

> *We cannot stick to being just Batwa and wait for some assistance to come because of this. (Mr. D3, Nyaruguru District)*

Instead, he continued in the interview, Twa had to take responsibility for themselves. The government's narrative on self-reliance has been picked up by a good number of our younger interviewees; young Twa adults of both genders frequently expressed a desire to start their own small business. A young mother in Nyamsheke District told us:

> *All we lack is means. If I had means, I would think of starting up a business. I can carry a basin of tomatoes and sell them on the street and see whether I can afford some flour for [my] children, or make profit and satisfy some other needs. (Ms. G2, Nyamsheke District)*

This attitude of self-help echoes the government's narrative throughout its reconciliation and unity policies of responsibility. Moreover, our interviewees appeared to accept the government's connection between anti-divisionism and socio-economic development. That is, co-operation towards development was not only good for them as individuals and for their families, but necessary for society as a whole. A woman in Rusizi district told us:

> *I would love to be able to live with other people without any discrimination based on who the person is. I think we can develop better if I am able to work in cooperatives with others.* (*Ms. A1, Rusizi District)*

This is not to say, however, that the connection between Twa identity and a lack of development was shared by all. One interviewee rejected this connection, appearing to view the focus on identity as a way of avoiding addressing socio-economic concerns:

> *They just circumvent things [the material disadvantage]. Why can't they leave us alone and we keep the name of Twas? (Ms. J12, Ngoma District)*

This was not, however, a widely shared view in our data. The extent to which such statements reflect the 'true' feelings of the Batwa is impossible to ascertain. Here our data – or our interpretation of the data – departs from conclusions drawn by Ntakirutimana and Collins in their recent study on the implementation of the HMP label in Rwanda (2017). While the findings of the two studies concur on the rejection of the HMP label by Batwa communities, their conclusion that self-identification as Twa (87% in their study) is evidence of a strong desire to retain their Twa identity is not supported by our data. Where we indeed found a clear self-identification as Twa among our interviewees, this was not evidence of a desire to retain the label but a part of a description of what was wrong with their lives.

In contrast to Twa identity, our interviewees overwhelmingly viewed national identity as positive. Just as our interviewees associated Twa identity with being poor and marginalised – with lacking dignity – they associate inclusion with being Rwandan. There is a clear connection between improving their lot in life – what we have translated as progress – and identifying as Rwandan. For example, when asked what gave them joy in their lives, several respondents told us that being Rwandan together with others made them happy.

'They cannot stop calling us Twa'; and yet.....

A woman in Kicukiro district that we interviewed told us that open discrimination is a thing of the past but she suggested that differences are still present: *"They still, here in this area we live in [Kigali], call us Twa but they say at our church that you can only be marginalized by history when you do not know God ... they cannot stop calling us Twa. (Ms. J9, Kicukiro District)"* This comment highlights the incongruity between official messages – one can only be marginalised by the past – and the daily reality for many Batwa. While a significant number of our interviewees reported simply that discrimination against them was a thing of the past – both in daily relations and in relationship to authorities – a sizeable number, of mainly male interviewees, stated that daily acts of prejudice continue, such as name-calling or the refusal to accept hospitality.

However, even where prejudice continues as a part of daily life, what is clear is that the situation is much better than it was (whenever that was – it was not clear when our interviewees were talking about the past, how past the past was). Many talked about a lack of discrimination and about how good relationships now were between Twa and their neighbours, irrespective of their background. The observation below, by Ms. B2, seems to suggest that differences between groups are fading and that how others react to perceived differences has changed:

> *Traditionally, they were characterised by their clothing, their language/dialect and their livelihood activities. They spoke Kinyarwanda but differently. Even now some still speak those dialects. Hutu neighbours used to find our way of speaking funny. But that was mainly in the past. We no longer hear those remarks these days. (Ms. B2, Rusizi District)*

Where prejudice and exclusion was once linked to cultural differences, where prejudicial behaviour continues, it is now more frequently linked – both by Twa and in our interviews with non-Twa neighbours – to socio-economic conditions rather than to direct ethnic discrimination; that is, both report that where non-Twa will not share with Twa, it is because they are dirty, not because they are Twa. The continued name-calling suggests that this is not the whole story, but it does appear that, at least according to our interviewees, prejudice against Twa is declining.

This appears to be the result of two narrative streams. The first is being preached in churches, both Catholic and Protestant. More than a dozen interviewees, primarily but not only women, told us that they know that they are equal because all are equal in the eyes of God; for these believers, they felt a sense of belonging within their local community most strongly when in church or doing church-based activities. The space of equal belonging created by churches thus appears to be playing an important role in reinforcing the government's message of national unity. The second stream is the official government narrative, in particular the messages

embedded in the Ndi Umunyarwanda programme. The improvement in relationships with neighbours is also frequently attributed to the government. One man in Nyaruguru district told us in response to the questions concerning what the good life means to him:

> *Another thing that makes me happy and I would like to share is that he [the President of the Republic] addressed the problem of our marginalization as we now are able to interact and share with others. We used to be discriminated against. We could not drink from the same cups as others. Now, we are no longer treated differently from other people. (Mr. D3, Nyaruguru District)*

Similarly, a man from Kayonza district spoke of the improvements that the government policy on national unity have brought to their lives. *Ndi Umunyarwanda* is, as reported by our interviewees, beginning to change people's behaviour, at least outwardly:

> *You used to go by in the past and people would whisper: look at them, they never improve. Ndi Umunyarwanda programme is therefore important because it has abolished that. … We are more confident with Ndi Umunyarwanda. I even heard that the government is about to abolish this thing of calling us HMPs so that we may be like all other Rwandans. (Mr. K5, Kayonza District)*

Mr. K5 told us that the Ndi Umunyarwanda programme, and the government's message on Rwandanness, had given him confidence. He clearly therefore felt that the message on Rwandanness was open to him; that is, he was not excluded from ideas of Rwanda identity because he was Twa. Indeed, the opposite seems to be the case. This challenges earlier studies, such as that by Thomson, that suggest that the narratives on national unity are, in practice, excluding Twa by not including them as Twa.

Perhaps even more interesting than the possibility that the unity messages of one Rwanda is giving marginalised individuals confidence in their place in society is that even where interviewees reported continuing prejudice, they told us that they used the government narrative to challenge it, defending themselves and disciplining others. As a man in Nyamesheke district told us:

> *We live peacefully with other villagers but they are not always friendly to us. They never stop calling us by that name. They call them names, children but also adults call us names. They still call us Batwas and other names that I cannot repeat here. … People still use what is in their hearts. For instance, recently I went to a pub and we drank banana beer. Then someone bought a beer but refused to share with others. I asked him why he refused to share his drink with us while we are all Rwandans. Isn't that discriminatory behaviour and divisionism? He took off and ran away. So, even if we say that we are all Rwandans, people have not yet fully grasped the value of that.* (*Mr. G1, Nyamesheke District*)

A similar sentiment was expressed by a middle-aged woman in Gatsibo District who had a small business selling vegetables at the market. She told us:

> *We are able to sit and talk without discrimination based on who you are. Those who insist on ethnic identifies have problems of their own and I do not pay attention to what they have to say. (Ms. F1, Gatsibo District)*

This suggests an internalisation of the government's narrative. Some Twa are apparently using the unity narrative to facilitate their inclusion in society, both externally in relation to others and internally, to be able to ignore prejudice when it occurs. Our interviews suggest therefore that this programme has empowered some Twa to challenge prejudice against them and has created feelings of societal belonging despite continuing prejudice.

In the above quotes, we had asked about relationships with neighbours and the broader village community; we did ask towards the end of each interview whether interviewees were aware of government programmes and whether they benefitted from them. We allowed the interviewee to name programmes (i.e. we did not name them but asked whether they knew of any government programmes). The *Ndi Umunyarwanda* and *Girinka* programmes were the programmes that all except the most deprived of our interviewees were aware of.

V. Analysis: how should we understand this data?

In her account of her doctoral fieldwork in Rwanda 2008, Larissa Begley has described an atmosphere amongst ordinary Rwandans of debilitating fear and suspicion in everyday life (Begley 2013). She is not alone, of course, in highlighting the level of control of the Rwandan government. Thomson *inter alia*, in her 2011 article and follow-up book, details the resistance of Rwandan 'peasants' to the government's reconciliation policies. In her evocative language, following Scott's notion of hidden transcripts, it was only possible to 'whisper truth' (Thomson 2011; Scott 1990). How then should we make sense of our interview data, that sees the majority of our interviewees apparently eschewing identity as Twa – gladly or indifferently assigning it to the past – and investing instead their identity as Rwandan?

One way of doing so is to accept that we did not manage to build sufficiently deep trust relationships and that – simply put – our interviewees repeated back to us the government line on national unity. The government tells them that discrimination and Twa identity is a thing of the past, and hence this is what they told us – whether because they were frightened of possible repercussions or because they did not find the topic important enough to be bothered to deviate from the government's line. On the latter point, it is necessary to remain cognisant of the risk that our subjects are not as riveted by certain topics as we are as researchers and that the practical concerns of daily life are far more important to them. Thus, that our interviewees simply told us what was convenient for them – their 'truth' – is of course possible and one would be foolish to discount it entirely (Thomson 2010). However, there are several reasons why I do not take this line, beyond the obviously self-serving one.

The first reason is that our interviewees were frequently outspoken, sometimes shockingly so given the highly politicised context. Our interviewees were heavily critical of local authorities and of the implementation of various development programmes; for example, of the rolling out of cooperatives. And they were willing to be filmed doing so, without the offered distortion of their image or voice. Moreover, many were equally outspoken on questions of identity. A decision was taken within the project staff to redact some of what our interviewees said on film in order to protect them; and yet, when the documentary was shown at a workshop in Kigali in October 2017, at which the head of the NURC was present, there were still audible gasps of shock at what some dared to say. This suggests that at least some interviewees were not self-censoring due to fear of repercussions and were willing and able to deviate from the official line. We cannot know, of course, whether this was true for all. On the question of whether our subjects simply did not find the topic of identity interesting, some cared enough to be critical of government policy, for example on the name 'HMPs', and all bar two disputed the line pursued by the representative organisation, COPORWA, that Twa are an indigenous people. This is certainly not to say, however, that it was their most important concern.

The second reason for taking our findings seriously is that our findings echo earlier fieldwork on identity amongst the Twa. In her 2008 study, Christiane Adamczyk found that the once strict division between Twa and 'other Rwandans' was, as she put it, "softening" (Adamczyk 2011: 181). While many still felt stigmatized, Twa reported that the traditional practice of *kunena*, in which Twa were served food and drink separately to protect others from their impurity, is no longer widely practised. Our findings, based on fieldwork conducted 7-9 years later, suggest that this softening has continued; stigmatisation remains present in daily life – reported to us primarily by young men – by a large number of our interviewees told us that incidents of discrimination were rare or a thing of the past. Given that they were willing to complain about many things, it would be surprising if they were not to tell us of incidents of discrimination that they experienced, particularly as this does not contradict government policy.

That Twa feel more Rwandan and are accepted as such by the rest of society would also appear to be confirmed by official government findings. It is also a feeling shared with other groups. The desire to be Rwandan is widely spread throughout the Rwandan population, at least according to the Reconciliation Barometer survey data collected at five-yearly intervals by the NURC. In 2010, more than 90% of the population, according to the survey, agreed that they are

proud to be citizens of Rwanda and share common values; an even higher percentage reported that they want their children to think of themselves as Rwandans above other identities (Barometer 2010: 55). The 2015 Barometer reported a slight increase in the number who are proud to be Rwandan - 95.6% as opposed to 90.2%. However, 87.7% now feel Rwandan above all other identities, which represents a major increase since 2010. The Barometer report puts this increase down to "[p]rograms such as Ndi Umunyarwanda and Itorero ry'igihugu, which promote unity among Rwandans" (Barometer 2015: 47). This reported increase in feelings of Rwandanness are reflected in increased feelings of trust among Rwandans. According to the Barometer, 95.6% strongly or fairly agree that they can leave their child in the family of somebody of another social category, "(like ethnic, regional, religious)". Moreover, 93% either strongly or fairly agree that there is no discrimination "whatsoever" in social spaces and 93% also strongly or fairly agree with the statement that "Now, Rwandans trust each other without discrimination" (Barometer 2015: 97). This shows a significant improvement since 2010, when only 72.8% felt that there was no discrimination in social spaces.(Barometer 2015: 99).

Our findings thus suggest – in contrast to earlier studies – that the policies of national unity, notably the *Ndi Umunyarwanda* programme are working to decrease discrimination and stigmatization of Twa. Adamczyk also found a willingness among Twa to embrace government narratives of unity and development. She quotes a young man as saying "Today, I am no Mutwa anymore. I am a Munyarwanda and I want to develop myself" (Adamczyk 2011: 186). The notion of Rwandanness on offer is one that the government links to progress. While referring back to the past via the claim that national identity is rooted in Rwandan traditional values, the version of Rwandanness is one that is primarily future-orientated, linked to the hope of a better life. By tying national identity both to the past – a long ago harmonious past – and to a promised socio-economic development in which the poverty of today can be overcome, being Rwandan is extremely attractive to the socio-economically marginalised Twa. Our interviewees, in sketching for us what inclusion in Rwandan society looked like to them, spoke almost exclusively in terms of self-progress, both in terms of actions that they needed to take and in terms of the help that they needed to be able to start a process of self-improvement. Given the government's frequent characterisation of development as a personal attribute – for example, the topic of the 10th National Dialogue Council in 2012 was "Agaciro (dignity): Aiming for self reliance" – this is not so surprising. Our interviewees appear to have internalised government narratives on self-development or self-reliance as key both to personal dignity and to national development. That they have done so suggests that many Twa are taking a practical or pragmatic approach to their identity. Our findings thus confirm and build upon Adamczyk's earlier study; where Adamczyk found this pragmatic attitude among only a handful of individuals, our study suggests that an acceptance of the practical attractiveness of being Rwandan is now much more widespread among the Twa.

Describing attitudes towards identity as pragmatic can easily sound cynical or can be interpreted as a 'forced' reaction to top-down external pressures. But we should not be too quick to view the seeming willingness of our interviewees to give up Twa identity for the promise of development and inclusion that is articulated by the Rwandan state. As the description of our findings above suggest, a number of our interviewees – albeit a small number – appeared to buy into the narratives of national unity. The process of unity and reconciliation is clearly top-down and, moreover, backed up by force (Zistel-Buckley 2006); yet our data appears to suggest that ordinary Twa are taking these top-down messages about Rwandan identity and using them to make a place for themselves in contemporary Rwanda. The *Ndi Umunyarwanda* programme has apparently empowered some Twa to challenge prejudice when they encounter it and is generating feelings of societal belonging.

One consequence of the connection in our interviewees' minds between progress and belonging and being Rwandan is the willingness to abandon traditional Twa culture. In 2008, Adamczyk found communities that were very proud of their Twa culture, notably dancing,

singing and pot making, and she found individuals who articulated a layered approach to identity. One woman in Adamczyk's study proclaimed that she was "a Rwandan Twa woman" (Adamczyk 2011: 187). While we found that some individuals, notably older members of the community and more commonly men, were reluctant to let go of certain traditional practices, such as dancing, for the majority of interviewees, identity was not layered. The choice appeared to be between being Twa – associated with the desperate circumstances of their current lives: poverty, lack of land, and social marginalisation – and being Rwandan, and the future-orientated possibilities of progress.

Here, too, our findings resonate with the sentiments expressed in national surveys, in which of course the vast majority of respondents are Hutu and Tutsi. In the 2010 barometer, a large majority (72.1%) strongly agree that they are proud to be Rwandan; where 'strongly agree' and 'agree' are taken together, the figure is close to 100%. Moreover, only 3.3% of respondents listed their ethnic identity as a second identity, with 6% listing it as their primary identity (2010 Barometer: 53-54). If we contrast these figures with the number of those who felt proud to be Rwandan, there is only a very small group of Rwandans who combine identification with an ethnic group and being proud to be Rwandan. In introducing the section on citizenship and identity, the authors note, that "choosing to strengthen shared identity should not equal negation of individual identity…." (Barometer 2010: 53). Yet although the authors do not appear to rule out layered identity, this possibility does not appear to be taken up by many in Rwandan society.

In his work on acculturation from a cross-cultural psychological approach, J.W. Berry has studied social and cultural change in individuals and communities in the context of coming into contact with the western world, primarily through immigration. He provides a useful frame for understanding our findings. Acculturation in this field of cross-cultural psychology is defined as the mutual influence of two autonomous cultural systems, usually in an unbalanced manner in which change is stronger in one direction than the other. However, according to a still influential U.S. Social Science Research Council report of 1954, acculturation should not been understood as a passive process; while it may be stimulated from outside, it is driven by internal dynamics (Berry 1980: 217). Acculturation, then, differs from the usual framing of assimilation by minority rights scholars by necessarily allowing a number of alternative goals and processes (Berry 2005: 701). As Berry notes, acculturation can result in a rejection of the dominant culture and a reaffirmation of traditional values. Whatever the choices made by individuals, however, the process of acculturation can nonetheless result in "serious cultural disintegration and loss" (Berry 1980: 218). Berry's frame is drawn from his observations – and those of others – of the range of choices that non-dominant cultures make when confronted with western culture, rather than a list of ideal-type interactions.

Using Berry's frame, we can characterise the attitudes of our respondents as assimilation: they appear to be choosing not to maintain their cultural identity and seek instead daily interaction or inclusion with others. Where individuals opt for assimilation, they "prefer to shed their heritage culture, and become absorbed into the dominant society." (Berry 2005: 705). Assimilation is thus not always involuntary. It can be sought and desired by the non-dominant group. This does not mean that as individuals they do not experience some form of loss but their preference for becoming fully part of the broader society is stronger. Berry's work suggests that simply because change is top-down and enforced, it does not necessarily mean that it is also unwelcome.

V. Concluding Remarks

This paper – and the data upon which it is based – suggests that the programmes of national unity, notably the *Ndi Umunyarwanda* programme, are working in relation to the Twa. They are working to reduce discrimination, prejudice and stigmatisation of the Twa. They are also working in the sense that Twa are adopting the unity narratives in how they think about their

own situations; they connect being Rwandan with development and the hope of their own socio-economic inclusion, and embrace it. Finally, the national unity narrative is working in that – slowly – it appears to be providing Twa with the tools to challenge the prejudice that a significant number still encounter in daily life. And the messages of national unity are helping some find their own place within Rwandan society. While this may not be an ideal choice, it is nonetheless a choice.

Our findings do not negate or replace the many more critical accounts of the Rwandan government's national unity programmes and policies. Nor can we say whether the battle for hearts has been won i.e. that the changes that we observe in how Twa (and others) identify themselves in relation to others are as much felt internally as they are acted out in society. Instead, similarly to more recent studies, what this paper suggests is that we may need to begin reflecting anew on these programmes and that a more nuanced framing may be called for.

Acknowledgements

The findings on which this article are based are the product of a three year research project, conducted jointly by the Communauté des Potiers du Rwanda /Rwandese Community of Potters (COPORWA), the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) and Tilburg University, the Netherlands. This project is part of the research agenda of the INCLUDE Knowledge Platform Development Policies and funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through NWO-WOTRO. Their support is gratefully acknowledged. More information about this project, including a full report of our methodology and findings, and the accompanying 20-minute documentary, is available from the project website (http://www.inclusivedevelopmentrwanda.org) and the INCLUDE platform (http://includeplatform.net/). Thanks, too, to the two anonymous reviewers – their comments were an excellent illustration of what academic peer review is all about.

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