

Militarism, Ethnicity, and Sexual Violence in the Rwandan Genocide

Rangira Béa Gallimore

This historical and socio-cultural study explores the connection between militarism, gender, ethnicity and sexual violence in Rwanda. It analyzes the evolving connection between masculinity and militarism in Rwanda from pre-colonial times, and the escalation of militarism that preceded 1994 and discusses how the construction of gender as an ethnic boundary marker led to widespread and brutal sexual violence against Tutsi women in the 1994 genocide.

In her article, *Women and Militarism*, Colleen Burke states that “military values contribute to the construction of narrow definitions of masculine and feminine characteristics.”¹ She bases her argument on the definition of militarism offered by the World Council of Churches, which defines militarism as a result of the process of militarization to “achieve a dominating influence on the political, social, economic and external affairs of the state ...[and] as a consequence the structural, ideological and behavioral patterns of both the society and the government are ‘militarized.’”² Thus, war and violence are seen as a direct consequence of militarism. To understand the relationship between sexual violence and militarism, one needs to understand the link between gender and the military. In his book, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War and Vice Versa*, Joshua Goldstein (2001) examines why, in the majority of cultures and at different times in their histories, war was an activity exclusively reserved for men. He considers different disciplines such as biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science and history, and comes to the conclusion that “war is gendered across virtually all human societies”:

Males occupy the ongoing role of potential fighters, even in relatively peaceful societies. Amazon myths aside, in only one documented case (Dahomey) did women make up a substantial fraction of combat forces in a regular standing army over many years. This regularity in gender roles in war contrasts with the much greater diversity found both in war itself and in gender roles outside war (Goldstein, 2001: 10).

The exclusion of women from the army, a common denominator in most traditional societies, originates from an assumption that males and females are biologically different, and because of the difference, women cannot perform military activities as well as men. Despite the evidence showing that women perform as well as men in the military, Goldstein illustrates how cultural norms of masculinity have pushed men to combat in order to prove their virility and masculinity in numerous societies, excluding females from this high-status space.

Masculinity and the Military in Traditional Rwanda

In *The Military and Masculinity in Israeli Society*, Uta Klein (2003) explains the relationship between the military and constructions of masculinity through the social perception of the soldier. The latter is positioned as “an embodiment of traditional male sex role attitudes and behavior. Army service can thus be described as a rite of passage to male adulthood, where the socializing process aims to teach toughness and masculinity and to eliminate what is regarded effeminate” (Klein, 2003: 195).

In Rwandan traditional society, masculine monopoly of the military can be illustrated by the famous Rwandan folktale, Ndabaga.³ The story centres on a young woman named Ndabaga who disguised herself as a young man in order to replace her father who had been forced to grow old in the military because he and his wife had been unable to produce a son. The young woman decided to disguise herself as a man so that she could be admitted in the military camp. She amputated her breasts and dressed in men’s clothing to conceal her feminine figure and appearance. In the camp, she acquired the skills of archery and became an accomplished archer, capable of securing first place in the high jump that is so prized in Rwandan military culture. As the days went by, Ndabaga’s peers became suspicious of her stubborn search for privacy. They followed her to the little shed she used as a toilet and discovered that the formidable military man was in fact a woman, because she was unable to urinate in a standing position.

Ndabaga’s gender was then revealed to the king. Impressed by Ndabaga’s exploits, he congratulated her, but at the same time, was compelled to strip her of her military position and cast her out of the military camp. Ndabaga feared that she would not be able to marry because she had been left as a woman without breasts. She was nevertheless saved from ostracism when the king decided to marry her. However, when she became pregnant, she could

no longer jump or shoot, thereby confirming the perception that women cannot go to war!

At the end of the folktale, the king revoked the law requiring soldiers to be replaced by their sons and disbanded the military camp. His action is understood to have been a necessary way of preserving traditional gender boundaries. As he dismissed his army, the king is reputed to have said, “when a woman goes to war that means things have reached Ndabaga’s stage.”

The king’s utterance has become a part of the collective memory in Rwanda. When repeated in Rwandan modern daily life, it is usually uttered with a tone of regret and fear – a fear that something dreadful has happened or is about to happen, and is used to draw attention to a situation of crisis requiring immediate attention and a solution. The English equivalent of the saying is, “things have gone to the dogs,” meaning they have reached the worst state possible.⁴

The exclusion of women from the military is also linguistically reflected in Kinyarwanda, the principal language of Rwanda. The word for “male” in Kinyarwanda is “*umugabo*” where the radical “*gab(o)*” denotes masculinity. It is therefore not surprising that the Kinyarwanda word for the army is “*ingabo*.” This same word also signifies “shield.” Here, the emphasis is on the protective role played by the male soldier in the society.

Writing about social values in Rwandan proverbs, Pierre Crépeau (1985) describes the pillars of Rwandan ethics. Among the pillars he cites is “*ubugabo*,” which means courage, constancy, patience, firmness. This concept “means first physical virility, that without which a man would not be a man” (Crépeau, 1985: 176). These ethical qualities are mainly attributed to men in the Rwandan tradition and are deeply embedded in Rwandan culture. Rwandans use the saying “*uli umugabo*” to acknowledge and praise notable performances. The expression means literally “you are a man” and is used to congratulate both men and women for their performances.

The Rwandan language consistently reinforces the culture of inequalities embedded in gender roles. By using “*umugabo*” to compliment a woman, the powerful subliminal message is that some acts and accomplishments can only be performed by a man, and women who do perform these are referred to as “men”.

In a similar vein Rwandan women are not allowed to perform oral epic or praise poetry, or “*ibyivugo*.” The Kinyarwanda word “*ibyivugo*” comes from the verb “*kwivuga*” which literally means “to speak of oneself,” in other

words, to “speak about one’s exploits.” The interdiction is encoded in the following Rwandan saying, “*Nta mugore wivuga*” which means “No woman is allowed to speak about her exploits.”⁵

The fighting regiment in Rwanda was called “*intore*”. The same word refers to the warriors’ dance that is still performed today in Rwanda. This dance which mimics the high jumps of war by dancers holding arrows, spears, arcs and shields, cannot be performed by women even in modern Rwandan society. As mentioned in the tale of Ndabaga, women were not allowed in the military camp, called “*itorero*” in Kinyarwanda. This camp was a space of initiation to manhood. During their stay in the camp, young men learned not only martial arts but also the “*intore* dance”, as well as the art of eloquence through epic and praise poetry. In some wars against neighboring kingdoms which shared the same culture as Rwanda,⁶ the combat took the form of a “ritualized ballet.” This traditional sanctuary of masculinity was closed to women.

In the pre-colonial Rwandan society, there was a construction of masculinity in the military from which women were excluded. A July 2001 report by the Rwandan women’s association Haguruka titled *La Femme rwandaise face à la justice* stated that “in the military structure of the Rwandan Kingdom, all Rwandan men belonged to the army.... At the beginning of each reign, a new army was formed. At the end, the king required all his clients to bring their sons (never daughters) who were not members of the army.”⁷

Ethnicity and Gender in Rwanda

Scholars of pre-colonial Rwandan history disagree on the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi.

[----] the most widely accepted interpretation is the cattle rearing Tutsi arrived in Burundi and Rwanda and neighboring regions in successive waves from the North during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, fleeing famine and drought. The agriculturist Hutu they met in Rwanda had immigrated to this fertile region centuries earlier from central Africa. The longest-standing inhabitants of the region are the Twa, a small marginal group (only 1 percent of the population) engaged in pottery making and hunting (Uvin, 1998: 14).

Many scholars⁸ have shown that the region was divided into numerous small Hutu kingdoms in which the three groups coexisted. Some of these kingdoms did not have much power because the Nyiginya Kingdom, a Tutsi

kingdom, conquered the surrounding kingdoms and unified Rwanda into what became the present country. There is general consensus on the mobility amongst and between the Hutu and Tutsi. It has been argued that originally, Tutsi and Hutu were social class divisions rather than ethnic groups. Tutsis were said to have much more economic power because a cattle-based economy was richer than one dominated by agriculture alone. With economic power came the political power. When the cow was introduced in Rwanda, it became a symbol of wealth and prestige. However, all Tutsis did not possess cattle and some Hutus and Tutsis who did not own livestock were able to acquire these animals through the system of “*Ubughake*”, a form of unequal clientship based on a contract between two men: the patron and the client. At the beginning, *Ubughake* was practised between two Tutsi lineages and later it was changed to also allow a contract between Tutsi and Hutu. A Hutu could acquire cattle through his service to a Tutsi patron and also through bravery exhibited on the battleground. The system, in spite its imperfections, enabled social mobility. The class mobility from Hutu to Tutsi, or rather this change of social class/caste, was achieved through the phenomenon of “*Kwihutura*”, which means literally to lose “Hutuness”, and to become a Tutsi. The history of Rwanda shows that the terms Hutu and Tutsi referred to social relations “which were not fixed categories but fluid ones, varying through time and location depending on such factors as wealth, military prowess, family control over a precious commodity, or occupation of prestigious social position” (Jones, 2001: 18). Although scholars of Rwandan history agree on the pre-colonial existence of ascendant mobility between Hutu and Tutsi, they disagree on when this upward mobility started.⁹

Social mobility in pre-colonial Rwanda was also achieved through gender as a social boundary marker. Hutus could ascend class by way of marriage to a Tutsi woman from a rich aristocrat family. It is the correlation between gender and social identity that changed through colonial and post-colonial times into gender and ethnicity to produce the sexual violence endured by Tutsi women in 1994.

The social mobility system changed after contact between Rwanda and the colonizers. Germans colonized the country between 1887 and 1919. At the beginning, their policy in Rwanda was based on indirect rule with respect for the pre-existing political and cultural entities. However, Germans saw Rwanda through Western eyes. Their understanding of Rwanda was based on the classificatory system adopted by British explorer John Hanning

Speke, who applied an 18th century European theory of racial types to the peoples he encountered during his quest for the source of the Nile. Following Speke, the Germans introduced the “Hamitic theory” in their understanding of Rwanda and especially of Tutsi people. According to the “Hamitic hypothesis,” Tutsis were more civilized than other groups, and presumed to be descendants of Ham, the Biblical son of Noah (Semujanga, 1998). The first writings by Germans about their early contacts with Rwanda were not translated but a summary can be found in a document published by Louis Lacger (1961) titled *Ruanda*.

Belgians colonized and ruled the country after the Germans between 1919 and 1962. They drew upon the German writings and in their own documentation, attributed the same “racial” superiority to the Tutsi group. Gérard Prunier summarized this Western understanding of Rwanda in the following terms:

The Europeans were quite smitten with the Tutsi, whom they saw as definitely too fine to be 'negroes'. Since they were not only physically different from the Hutu but also socially superior, the racially obsessed nineteenth-century Europeans started building a variety of hazardous hypotheses on their 'possible', probable, or, as they soon became, 'indubitable origins' (Prunier, 1995: 6-7).

The following is a racially constructed description of Tutsi found in the 1925 Belgian Colonial Report:

The Mututsi of good race has nothing of the Negro, apart from his color. He is usually very tall, 1.80 m. at least, often 1.90 m. or more. He is very thin, a characteristic which tends to be even more noticeable as he gets older. His features are very fine: a high brow, thin nose and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth. Batutsi women are usually lighter-skinned than their husband, very slender and pretty in their youth, although they tend to thicken with age. [...] Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feelings which is rare among primitive people. He is a natural born leader, capable of extreme self-control and of calculated goodwill.¹⁰

The Belgian colonizers reinforced the notions of intellectual superiority and beauty attributed to the Tutsis by the Germans. In the beginning, Belgians governed Rwanda according to the indirect rule policy established by the Germans. It was only between 1926 and 1931 that the Belgians changed their policy and introduced a series of reforms that drastically changed the socio-

economic rapport between Hutu and Tutsi. The introduction of forced labor which exacerbated the “*ubuhake*” system practiced by the Tutsis, intensified the economic exploitation of the Hutus. It was also under Belgian rule that ethnic construction reached new levels with the introduction of schools for Tutsi children. Tutsis were given administrative positions from which Hutus were excluded. This widened the gap between Hutu and Tutsi especially when the so-called ethnic differences were written and fixed on the identity card issued to each Rwandan.

With the institutionalization of ethnicity, the colonial-ascribed characteristics became generalized for each group. Tutsis and Hutus themselves internalized the identities assigned to them by the colonizers. In other words, Rwandans were deeply affected by what Frantz Fanon (1968) identified as the “historical void” in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, as they knowingly and unknowingly became victims of the colonial “representation”.

“Hutu were deprived of all political power and were materially exploited by both the whites and the Tutsi. They were told by everyone that they were inferiors who deserved their fate and came to believe it” (Prunier, 1995: 39).

It became common to hear the word “*ibihutu*” instead of “*abahutu*” from the mouths of some Tutsis. Here, we have a shift in the noun class marker. The Kinyarwanda noun “*umuhutu*” which belongs to the class of humans is shifted into the class of animals and objects by using “*ibihutu*.” The common noun “*ibihutu*” used in this context has a pejorative meaning. It was also common to hear Tutsi mothers telling their children not to “act as a Hutu” or to acquire “Hutu manners.” Hutu women themselves would say, “my kid is ‘*agatutsi*’” (a small Tutsi). Here the use of a diminutive noun denotes a Hutu child who is thin or tall or who has the “so called Tutsi good manners”.

The “Hamitic theory” was Eurocentric, racist and promulgated a theory of natural superiorities based on race, language and culture. However, within Rwanda, the domination by Tutsi and the exclusion of Hutu from political and economic centres of power was not entirely accepted. Strong Hutu resentment and resistance became manifest. In the late 1950s, following pressure from the Catholic Church, the Belgians began to introduce reforms that ostensibly encouraged the growth of modern political institutions. Traditionalist Tutsis resisted these reforms as they considered them a threat to Tutsi supremacy. In 1959, there was an attack against a Hutu activist that sparked the first spate of violence against the Tutsis by bands of Hutu militia.

Many Tutsis were killed, their houses looted and burnt. After this killing spree, the Belgian administration abolished the monarchy and replaced Tutsi administrative personnel with Hutu. Many Tutsis left the country in search of exile. In 1962, Rwanda became independent and was governed by Hutus. The latter established a strong policy of discrimination against Tutsis. This was the beginning of Hutu nationalism, dominated by the “Parmehutu” political party which defined Rwanda as a nation understood in terms of ethnicity namely, the Hutu ethnicity.

In *Nation and Narration*, the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhaba (1990) proposes that “Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being” (Bhaba, 1990: 1). Hutu nationalism emerged out of forced divisions, legacies of dichotomized identity, and complex power struggles exploited by colonialists and Rwandese alike.

After the establishment of the First Hutu Republic, several Hutu party leaders married Tutsi women as a confirmation of their newly acquired power. During the massacres of 1959, a song sung by Hutu militiamen while attacking Tutsis stated the fate of Tutsi women as follows: “*Ibyo bigore byanyu, tuzabipfakaza, ibyo bikobwa byanyu tuzabirongora,*” meaning “We will make your big wives (Tutsi wives) widows, and as for your daughters we will marry them.” The verb used in Kinyarwanda is “*kurungora*”, an ambiguous verb that can mean to marry or to rape. In the mind of a Hutu singing this song, a Tutsi woman was the representation of a mystic beauty, an object of desire, a trophy to acquire. The process of “*kwihutura*,” as social ascension in pre-colonial era became somehow perverted during colonial rule, especially after the creation of consolidated ethnic identities. It seemed that a Hutu marrying a Tutsi woman realized what Frantz Fanon (1966) called the “racial dialectic”. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1966) writes about the alienation of a black man in the following terms:

“I wish to be acknowledged not as Black but as white . . . who but a white woman could do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her noble love takes me onto the road of self-realization. I marry white culture, white beauty, whiteness” (Fanon, 1966: 188).

The love and hate relationship between a black man and a white woman is at the basis of what Fanon (1966) sees as the ambivalence between “race

and sexuality.” In the case of Rwanda, one can speak about the ambivalence between “ethnicity and sexuality”. During the post-colonial period, the racial/ethnic division was used by Hutu leaders to incite Hutus to massacre Tutsis in 1959, 1963 and in 1973. This hate and violence against Tutsis did not stop Hutus from marrying Tutsis. On the contrary, in the late 1970s and 1980s, there were frequent intermarriages between Hutus and Tutsis. These unions were not considered out of the norm, and were often experienced as being based on romantic love among young people of the post-independence Rwandan generation.

What then triggered the misogynistic images of Tutsi women present in the pre-genocide media propaganda? The answer to this question lies in the history of Rwandan militarism and in the overt and covert active military role that was played by women during the pre-genocide militarization and militarism of Rwanda.

The Military and Ethnicity in Rwanda

In pre-colonial times the traditional army of the king was recruited from among the three ethnic groups in Rwanda: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. All Rwandan men were a part of “*intore*”: Rwandan historian Gérard Prunier states: “All men were part of the *intore* (fighting regiments). And the scruffy Twa pygmies were greatly appreciated as soldiers....” (Prunier, 1995: 15). It was also known in Rwanda that Hutu men were appreciated by the king because they were equally efficient on the battle field. It has been argued by many scholars¹¹ of Rwanda that reference to the concept of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa as “ethnic or tribal groups” is paradoxical in pre-colonial Rwanda. This is because Hutu, Tutsi and Twa share the same language and beliefs. Prunier shows that the army can also be seen as another element of cohesion between groups. “[W]ar acted as a kind of ‘social coagulant’ where Tutsi, Hutu and Twa, although still unequal, were nevertheless first and foremost Banyarwanda facing the common enemy” (Prunier, 1995: 15).

The king’s ethnically diverse army continued to operate in Rwanda even under German rule. The Germans, unlike the French and Belgians, allowed the system of indirect rule that left the Rwandan monarchy and its administration intact. However, during the unrest and killings in 1959, Belgium used some Belgian and Congolese military to restore the peace in Rwanda. The king’s traditional army of warriors that used to defend the king was dismantled and divided after the Belgians dropped their allegiance to the Tutsi and began to

systematically privilege the Hutu elite. In 1960, at the request of the territory's new Hutu leadership, the Belgian administration created a new modern styled army called the "Garde territoriale" (Weinstein, 1997: 61). Recruitment was exclusively Hutu men, intended to provide a military shield for the new Hutu regime that the Belgians were helping to put in place.

This pre-independence period also marks the beginning of modernization of the Rwandan army to replace the emergency colonial army made up of Belgians and Congolese that stabilized the country during the massacres of 1959. It was only following the military coup led by Juvénal Habyarimana in 1973 that a few Hutu women were admitted to the Rwandan national army.

From Militarization to Military Rule

After the coup led by Juvenal Habyarimana in 1973, the power and leadership of Rwanda were in the hands of the military. The glorification of the ideals of a professional military class came into existence after the coup. The military title was revered in the new military government of Rwanda. For example, President Habyarimana was simply referred to as "The General Major". Many military officers occupied the role of leadership in the government. In fact, being in the army provided protection from internal Hutu enemies from the North. There was no threat from Tutsis either, because when Habyarimana assumed the presidency, he promised to end the cycle of violence and to allow those Tutsis who had fled to neighboring countries out of fear to return. He calculated that with his promise, no Tutsi from outside would shake the "peaceful Rwanda".

However, the discrimination policy against Tutsis established in 1959 continued even under the new president. Exiled Tutsis held Habyarimana to his promise and asked to return to their country. Habyarimana refused because he believed that Rwanda did not have sufficient resources to provide for everyone and land was also scarce and thus could not accommodate everybody. After many unfulfilled demands, the exiles formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-led army that mounted an attack in 1990 from across the Ugandan border and occupied a part of Rwanda. The counter-offensive from the Rwandan army was the real beginning of a sharp escalation of militarism in Rwanda. Recruitment by the Rwandan army increased tremendously and Dina Temple-Raston estimates that: "The ranks grew from a few thousand soldiers to forty thousand in just three years. By 1992, the military consumed almost 70 percent of the Rwandan government's

budget. Between 1985 and 1990, the military gobbled up 1.6 percent of the nation's GNP; by 1993, three times that amount" (Temple-Raston, 2000: 26). Small arms were distributed to the Hutu gangs who were later trained to form what is now known as the "Interahamwe," militia which did most of the killing of Tutsis in 1994. While the training and recruitment of new soldiers was going on, Rwanda sought the help of neighboring Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Zaire sent a contingent of soldiers to Rwanda. The Zairian soldiers were not the best combatants. They suffered losses and had discipline problems such as looting and raping women. They were called back to their country shortly after their arrival. There was also a short presence by Belgians and a longer stay of French soldiers sent in to support the Rwandan army. French military co-operation is alleged to have included arms deals with the pro-Hutu government and contributing to the training of the army. French special military forces were also suspected of having armed and trained soldiers who later organized the militias that carried out most of the genocide killing. Whatever the French government's motive for their presence was, it undoubtedly contributed to the rise of militarism in the country.

In October, 1993, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was established by Security Council Resolution 872 to provide peacekeeping service in Rwanda with 2,548 military personnel. This UN peacekeepers' mission was to stabilize the country and to push for a peace settlement between the Rwandan government and the RPF rebels. However, this mission failed when President Juvénal Habyarimana's plane was shot down on his return from signing a peace agreement in Arusha, Tanzania. This event triggered the genocide, the mass killing of Tutsi and Hutu sympathizers. The Rwandan military and Hutu militia, assisted by Hutu civilians, went on a rampage, killing almost one million people in about 100 days in 1994.

Militarism and Sexual Violence

During the months preceding the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, militarization escalated, fuelled by anti-Tutsi propaganda. During this time, the number of women, all of them Hutu, in the Rwandan army increased.

In the pre-genocide propaganda against Tutsis, this active role of women in the military was used against Tutsi women, who were called "*ikizungerezi*," a word which means "dizziness." The word "*ikizungerezi*" comes from the verb "*kuzengereza*," which means to make dizzy. To have "*ikizungerezi*" is to be dizzy. To call someone *ikizungerezi* (especially a woman) is to imply

that this person can make your head spin. In other words, the “*ikizungerezi*” woman is someone who can make a man lose his mind through her art of seduction. In the pre-genocide media propaganda, the word was applied to Tutsi women in general.

The recruitment into the RPF was done through different cultural manifestations, plays, songs and dances. Some of the songs were aired on Radio Muhabura, which was run by the RPF. The most popular songs were those sung by a famous female Tutsi singer, Cecile Kayirebawa who lived in exile since 1973. Among her songs was one titled *ikizungerezi*. This metaphoric word was not used in everyday life in Rwanda, but it became fashionable during the months leading up to the genocide, and was applied to all Tutsi women by Hutu extremists.

The Hutu extremist newspaper *Kangura* published many images showing Tutsi women engaged in all kinds of sexual orgies with General Dallaire, the head of UNAMIR and his peacekeepers. The caption on one of the pictures reads: “*General Dallaire n’ingabo ze baguye mu mutego w’ibizungerezi*”, meaning “General Dallaire and his army have fallen into the traps of ‘*ibizungerezi*’” (plural form).¹² During the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan extremist Kantano, a very well-known announcer on RTLM radio, broadcast a message in which he asked Hutu women to become “*ibizungerezi*” towards the French soldiers of the Operation Turquoise - “seduce them so that they become our allies as do the Tutsi women”. By inciting his own women to become “*ibizungerezi*”, Kantano indicated that these Tutsi women had seduction powers desired by the other group. The Tutsi woman was concurrently an object of envy and desire, as well as the object of hate in the eyes of extremist Hutus. In his book, *Récits fondateurs du drame rwandais*, Josias Semujanga states that the “*ikizungerezi*” as a woman, is desirable because she is beautiful. She is considered the “Rwandan Delilah” (Semujanga, 1998: 194).

This hate and love discourse assumed greater transparency in *The Hutu Ten Commandments*, another pre-genocide document published by the extremist journal *Kangura*. In four of these commandments, there is fear that the dangerous Tutsi woman has reached the Hutu heart, and more pertinently, the mind of the Hutu in the military. She is seen as the most dangerous spy who works for her brothers in the RPF army. The so-called Commandments are:

1. Every Muhutu should know that a Mututsi woman, wherever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall

consider a traitor any Muhutu who:

- marries a Tutsi woman;
- befriends a Tutsi woman;
- employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine.

2. Every Muhutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife, and mother of the family. Are not Hutu women beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

3. Bahutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.

7. The Rwandese Armed Force (soldiers) should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October (1990) war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi (*Kangura*, 1990: 6-8).¹³

In the Seventh Commandment, “the usual criteria of beauty common to all Rwandans, are subverted to imply another discourse, a discourse which forbids military officers of the first and second (all Hutus with only one exception) republics to marry Tutsi women” (Semujanga, 1998: 193). Tutsi women are therefore the forbidden objects, and are at the center of the forbidden desire.

Towards the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the different practices of ethnic discrimination and the anti-Tutsi propaganda have helped Habyarimana legitimize and radicalize the Hutu nationalism. Many studies on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, nation and genocide (Fein, 1999; Sharlach, 1999; Hutchinson & Madut, 2002; Jones, 2000; Jones, 2002; Baines, 2003), have analyzed how ethnic identity is created, constructed and maintained through the use of gender as a marker, and how gender, by blurring the purity of ethnic boundaries, poses an obstacle to the purity of the “ideal nation.” In her article, *Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis*, Erin Baines regrets the fact that “fewer analyses examine the genocide in terms of a gendered nation building process, inscribed on the physical body despite the visceral role of body in any genocide narrative” (Baines, 2003: 479). Baines shows how “Hutu extremists considered Tutsi women as “sexed” and not ethnicised in Rwandan nationalist discourse” (Baines, 2003: 479). She argues that the 1994 genocide was an extreme attempt not only to purge the “Hutu nation” of the Tutsi, but also to actively engender a vision of the “Hutu nation”.

In his book, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, Eric Weitz (2003) argues that the polarization created by leaders into an “us”

and “them” based on artificial categorizations of race/ethnicity and nation led to the “necessary” elimination of “them” for survival. This mandatory elimination and exclusion of Tutsi for the sake of Hutu ethnic survival was illustrated by the rejection of mixed marriages between Hutu men and Tutsi women during months preceding the genocide. Marrying a Tutsi woman was somehow considered an act of treason, a rejection of one’s Hutu identity. This can also explain why some Hutu militiawomen incited militiamen to rape; they were more resentful towards the mixed unions because they felt betrayed and rejected by their own men who preferred Tutsi women.

Gender as ethnicity marker, which was considered as a means of empowerment for the leaders of the First Hutu Republic, was seen as a dangerous arm of disempowerment under the Hutu nationalism. Mixed marriages constituted an obstacle to ethnic divisions in the society and to the purity of the Hutu ethnic group:

“Because official ethnic identity (marked on everyone’s national ID card) was decided by the father in pre-genocide Rwanda, a Hutu man who married a Tutsi woman produced offspring who were legally Hutu. Inter-marriage between Hutu men and Tutsi women thus conferred the full benefits of Hutu to progeny who were perceived by many as racially impure” (Taylor, 1999: 155).

The confirmation of Hutu nationalism sees Tutsi women as carriers of gender markers that produce ill marked progeny dangerous to ethnic boundaries. As Christopher Taylor puts it, Tutsi women were “liminoid beings” (Taylor, 1999: 155).

In the Human Rights Watch report, *Shattered Lives*, one Tutsi woman stated that when a group of raped women passed by the roadblock, the militia shouted: “Kill them, you have to kill them. They will make Tutsi babies” (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 54). In the militia’s words, we see the clear purpose of the Rwandan genocide – the purification of the Hutu ethnic group. Any marriage or any sexual union with a Hutu military officer was seen as polluting the masculine sanctuary of “Hutuness” and masculinity.

In reviewing research on women as boundary marker in India, Bosnia and other countries that faced ethnic conflicts, Lori Handrahan found that:

“[B]ecause of the patriarchy of ethnicity, a man can produce children that are ethnically *his* by raping any woman, regardless of the latter’s ethnic distinction, because in fact, she is a boundary-marker for male defined collective ethnic identity, and only enjoys her ethnicity as long

as she remains inside and adheres to the 'boundaries' of ethnicity as assessed by male ethnic leaders" (Handrahan, 2004: 438).

The pre-genocide Rwandan media recuperated many colonial images of beauty attributed to Tutsi women in the colonial discourse and manipulated them to create a sexualized enemy to be demystified and punished by rape. Sexual images, i.e. images of nudity and sex created all kinds of sexual fantasies in the mind of many militiamen. A genocide survivor from Kigali told me that a few weeks before the genocide, she surprised some of the neighborhood housekeepers viewing sexual and pornographic images published by *Kangura*. She asked them, "What are you doing with the newspaper?", since they were illiterate. They answered her in Kinyarwanda: "*Reka twihere ijisho*" which means literally, "let's nourish our eyes". Many rape survivors' testimonies can attest to this: "They said they were raping me to see to see if Tutsi women were like Hutu women" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 42); "Before he raped me, he said that he wanted to check if Tutsi women were like other women before he took me back to church" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 43); "One Interahamwe said 'you Tutsi women are very sweet, so we have to kill the men and take you.'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 45-46); "He said many things during the rape and he hit and kicked me. He said: 'we have all the rights over you and we can do whatever we want'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 46); "They were saying: 'we want to see how Tutsi kazi (Kinyarwanda word for Tutsi woman) look inside'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 47); "They said that they had to take Tutsi women because before the war they were not able to take them. They said that Tutsi women stayed to themselves before" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 48); "Eight young men did bad things. I couldn't breathe... After raping me, they told me: 'we thought Tutsi women were different but we found they are just the same'" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 51); "Then, they told me to show them what I used to do to my husband" (*Shattered Lives*, 1995: 55).

In his book, *Sacrifice as Terror*, Christopher Taylor explains the active role played by women on both sides:

"During the genocide... women were important as both agents and symbols and this can be seen in several different ways. As agents, women played important roles on both sides during the conflict. In the Rwandan Government Army, for example, there were many female Hutu soldiers (6). Although no woman to my knowledge was involved in actual combat operations against the Rwandan Patriotic Front, in the Hutu extremist militia groups there were women who engaged in

the killing of Tutsi civilians. Other extremist women acted as neighborhood informers keeping note of Tutsi individuals and families who resided in their section. After the onset of the violence on 7 April 1994, these informers indicated where Tutsi families lived to bands of Hutu extremist youth, the Interahamwe. Informers of this sort were often rewarded with the property of their victims. On the other side, the side of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, composed of about seventy to eighty percent Tutsi (7), women were active in fund-raising activities and in the preparation and dissemination of RPF literature. Whether there were women in the military organization of the RPF, I do not know. The fact that Tutsi women were killed during the 1994 genocide in numbers equal to, if not exceeding those of men bears witness to the fact that they were not perceived as innocent non-combatants. This fact should be seen in contrast to earlier incidents of ethnic violence in Rwanda, in 1959 to 1964, for example, and again in 1973, when women were not killed in numbers comparable to that of men" (Taylor, 1999: 154).

Abasa (we are all the same), a Rwandan association of 60 women who were raped during the genocide, is comprised of Tutsi and Hutu women who were married to Tutsi men. Some of these Hutu women were told by the rapists to do what they used to do with their Tutsi men. It was assumed that these Hutu women had somehow learned the sexual practices of Tutsis. This illustrates their existing fantasy, because sexual education for Tutsi and Hutu women was the same.

The testimonies cited above suggest a sexual mystification of the "Tutsi woman" who became much sought after, particularly by senior military officers. In this respect it is notable that many Tutsi women were raped by the militia, whose members were recruited from the underprivileged and destitute young men of the streets, many of whom had come to the city to make a living, and failed. The genocide had somehow allowed the men from the lower rungs of the social ladder to reach up and touch what had hitherto been out of reach. In many cases, it shows that Hutu militia used rape to demystify Tutsi women and to put an end to the myth of the idealized image of a Tutsi woman. The above testimonies clearly reveal how the bodies of Tutsi women became a battleground, a space where men took their revenge and marked their victory, an "expansion of ethnic territory by the male conqueror" (Handrahan, 2004: 437).

Conclusion

This article presented an analysis of the cultural and political construction of masculinity in the heavily ethnicised (Hutu dominated) Rwandan military and I have shown how militarism reached its peak in the pre-genocide months and extended to broader cultural and sexual myths that fuelled the worst sexual violence against Tutsi women in the history of Rwanda.

By way of a postscript, it is worth noting the manner in which women have responded to the devastation wrought by the genocide. Women's organizations, along with constitutional provisions, have catapulted women into political power in unprecedented numbers. Women are now playing important roles as political leaders in Rwanda. With regard to militarism, it appears that the name *Ndabaga* may have lost its essentialist meaning, thanks to the activities of the Ndabaga Association. During the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process in Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi ex-combatants had to face harsh, poverty-stricken lives. A group of women ex-combatants banded together to form the Ndabaga Association in order to help each other find and create possibilities for work. They became advocates on behalf of women ex-combatants, who currently face numerous gender-specific obstacles. Thus, the association Ndabaga brought a gender perspective to the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process in Rwanda. Ndabaga Association was the first female ex-combatant association to be formed in the Great Lakes Region. In 2004, the Ndabaga association extended its activism across borders when its members requested to be a part of the UN Peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Using the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 clause on peace and security from a gender perspective, they defended their position and their demand was honored.¹⁴ The Ndabaga association has profoundly challenged the patriarchal society and its reification of differences, and has rejected the conventional and conservative norms in which the character of the Ndabaga folktale was entrapped.¹⁵

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Endnotes

- 1 See Colleen Burke (not dated) "Women and Militarism", article posted on the website *Women International League for Peace and Freedom*. <http://www.wilpf.int.ch/publications/womenmilitarism.htm>.
- 2 See "The power and promise," February, 2005: 1, [http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/41c6b7355083931ec1256c14002d2a77/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c/\\$FILE/LF_MilitarismWeek3.pdf](http://www2.wcc-coe.org/dov.nsf/41c6b7355083931ec1256c14002d2a77/88fedfe1d5295b9ec1256fd300352f8c/$FILE/LF_MilitarismWeek3.pdf).
- 3 See "La Fille dans l'impasse" in Pierre Smith, *Le récit populaire au Rwanda*, Paris: Association Classiques Africains, 1975, pp.181-83. The English translation of passages from the tale that appear in this article is mine. The title of the

folktale in the original version is “Ndabaga”. In this article, I will refer to the tale as such.

- 4 For a lengthy study of the Ndabaga folktale, see Gallimore, Rangira Béa. “From ‘Ndabaga’ Folktale to the Modern ‘Ndabaga.’ From the Construction of Masculinity to the Deconstruction of Masculinity in Post-genocide Rwanda.” (Forthcoming). *The Construction of Masculinity*. eds. Helen Mugambi and Jita Allan Tuzylina. USA & UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd & Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- 5 The only woman who ever transgressed this patriarchal law in Rwanda is Queen Nyirayuhi, also known as Queen Nyiratunga, during the regency of her son Yuhi. Queen Nyiratunga was known in Rwanda as a rebellious woman who violated many other patriarchal laws. According to Simon Bizimana, researcher of “Institut de Recherches Scientifique et Technologique” in Butare Rwanda, Queen Nyiratunga also presided over Gacaca trials (traditional trials), smoked in public and broke many more taboos. However, Nyiratunga was forced to abandon those male privileges when her son became a major and then king of Rwanda.
- 6 I am referring here to the kingdom of Burundi and the Nkole kingdom in Southern Uganda.
- 7 The translation is mine. The original text in French as stated in the Haguruka (2001) report titled “*La femme rwandaise et l'accès à la justice*”: “S’agissant de la structure militaire du Royaume du Rwanda, tous les hommes rwandais appartenaient à une armée.... Au commencement de chaque règne, une nouvelle année était formée. A cet effet le Mwami ordonnait à ses clients de lui amener leurs fils (jamais les filles) qui n’étaient pas encore membres d’une armée,” (Haguruka, 2001: 34) - <http://www.grandslacs.net/doc/3989.pdf>
- 8 Prunier (1995), Bigirumwami (1958), Chrétien (1974), Kagame (1972), Muzungu (2003), Newbury (1988), Newbury (1991), Vansinam (2001). An exhaustive list of other scholars who studied this issue can be found in a document published by the Rwandan Ministry of Science and Technology titled *The Teaching of History of Rwanda. A Participatory Approach*. 2006. Available at <http://www.hrberkeley.org/pdfs/Rwanda-Curriculum-English1.pdf>.
- 9 In this study, I do not engage in these debates that go beyond the scope of this article. However, a good summary of these historical polemics can be found in the book, *Aiding Violence. The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, by Peter Uvin (1998), especially in the section titled, “Rwanda before Independence: A Contested history”, pp. 13-18.
- 10 Ministère des Colonies, *Rapport sur l’administration Belge du Rwanda-Urundi* (1925), p. 34. Quoted in Jean-Paul Harroy. 1984. *Le Rwanda, de la féodalité à la démocratie* (1955-1962), Brussels: Hayez, p. 26. Quoted by Prunier (1995: 6).
- 11 Kuper (1977), Destexhe (1994), Prunier (1995), Chrétien (1997), Braeckman (1994).
- 12 See, Kangura, February 1994, no 56, p. 15. Image reproduced by Jean Pierre Chrétien, *Rwanda: les media du genocide*, Paris: Karthala, 1995 p. 366. Many images of the type were published in the same journal.
- 13 In Jean-Pierre Chrétien, 1995:141-42; the translation is mine.

- 14 In 2006, I had the opportunity to travel with Ndabaga women who were returning home from the peacekeeping mission in Darfur. In my conversation with some of them, they all agreed that integrating women in the peacekeeping forces had given the organization an important gender dimension. Their service had also given the Ndabaga association world recognition which has increased and reinforced the ranking of Rwanda in the highest position on the issue of gender balance in government.
- 15 For a longer study of the modern “Ndabaga Association, see my forthcoming study mentioned above, titled “From ‘Ndabaga’ Folktale to the Modern ‘Ndabaga:’ From the Construction of Masculinity to the Deconstruction of Masculinity in Post-genocide Rwanda”.