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Post-genocide identity politics and colonial durabilities in Rwanda

Politique identitaire post-génocide et durabilités coloniales au Rwanda

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While academic literature has long explored the ways in which colonial reification of identity and narratives underpinning unequal racialised status of colonial subjects contributed to cycles of violence in the Great Lakes region, including in Rwanda, few ask the complementary question: Does the colonial legacy imprint on the 'post-conflict' era, shaping post-genocide attempts at nation-building and identity re-engineering carried out in the name of the broader project of peacebuilding? Using the conceptual framework of colonial durabilities, we argue that despite explicit attempts to remove the vestiges of colonialism, the colonial past endures, in everyday expressions of identity as well as in grand policies of its reformulation. The current paper aims to trace these vestiges in the transformations of identity politics and nation-building in Rwanda by looking at three distinct arenas: (i) the architecture of de-ethnicisation policy itself; (ii) the stubborn lingering of racialised distinctions in popular culture; and (iii) the rise of 'new' social divisions based on the country of exile.

Keywords: colonial durabilities; peace-building; identity politics; Rwanda

La littérature universitaire explore depuis longtemps en quoi la réification coloniale de l'identité et les narrations étayant les statuts racialisés inégaux des sujets coloniaux ont contribué aux cycles de violence dans la région des Grands Lacs, y compris au Rwanda, mais peu posent la question complémentaire: L'héritage colonial a-t'il une empreinte sur l'aire 'post-conflit', formant des tentatives post-génocide de construction nationale et de réingénierie de l'identité entreprises au non d'une construction de la paix plus large? En utilisant le cadre conceptuel des durabilités coloniales, nous avançons que malgré des tentatives explicites pour retirer les vestiges du colonialisme, le passé colonial perdure, dans toutes les expressions identitaires du quotidien ainsi que dans les grandes politiques et leur reformulation. Le présent article vise à retracer ces vestiges dans les transformations des politiques identitaires et de la construction nationale au Rwanda en regardant trois domaines distincts: (i) l'architecture de la politique de de-ethnicisation elle-même; (ii) la persistance tenace de distinctions racialisées dans la culture populaire, et (iii) la montée de 'nouvelles' divisions sociales fondées sur le pays d'exil.

Mots clés: durabilités coloniales; construction de la paix; politiques identitaires; Rwanda

Introduction: colonial durabilities in peace-building

Rwanda is an important case study for the lingering of toxic colonial myths on identity and status. First German and then Belgian colonial powers reified, racialised and institutionalized identity

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divisions, creating a privileged class firmly bounded by identity status. It is well-known and accepted that through this, colonialism helped lay a foundation of division and conflict in the country (Mamdani 2001, 9; Kimonyo 2016). But while the academic literature has long explored the ways in which colonial reification of identity and narratives underpinning unequal racialised status of colonial subjects contributed to cycles of violence in the Great Lakes region, including in Rwanda (Mamdani 2001, 2002), fewer ask the complementary question: Does the colonial legacy imprint on the ‘post-conflict’ era, shaping post-genocide attempts at nation-building and identity re-engineering carried out in the name of the broader project of peacebuilding? Does colonialism still linger, and if so, where and how?

This question might seem antithetical to Rwandan post-genocide governments’ decolonial agenda and their radical solutions to identity politics, solutions that explicitly set out to reject colonial ‘heritage’ (Rutembesa, Semujanga, and Shyaka 2003; Shyaka 2003). Even before taking power in 1994, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) called for rejection of ethnicity as a way of defining identity (Chemouni and Mugiraneza 2019), a move which has solidified in the ‘de-ethnicization’ policy and the promotion of ‘Rwandanicity’ (Purdeková 2015; Nzahabwanayo, Horsthemke, and Mathebula 2017). De-ethnicization and Rwandanicity have become cornerstones of a broader project of building a ‘New Rwanda’ and a re-imagined ‘ideal’ Rwandan citizen (see Purdeková 2012, 2015; Sundberg 2016). The rejection of ethnic, racial or regional markers of identity became a cornerstone of the post-genocide peacebuilding strategy. It was meant to avert any future violence by rejecting division and building a common identity as Rwandan.

Importantly, the ‘New Rwanda’ has been built in response to the ‘bad governance’ of the previous regimes (under the ‘Two Republics’)¹ but also to explicitly deconstruct the colonial heritage. This has involved both the rewriting of Rwanda’s history (Pottier 2002) and reactivating multiple ‘homegrown’ activities of unity and reconciliation presented as seeped in pre-colonial tradition, such as the *gacaca* ‘justice on the grass’ courts or the *abunzi* mediators. The government has also promoted autonomy vis-à-vis donors, patriotism and self-sacrifice (Nzahabwanayo, Horsthemke, and Mathebula 2017). It has extolled the importance of changing mentalities of dependence and the importance of dignity (*agaciro*) and self-development (Rutazibwa 2014). Indeed, the government worked actively (even if not completely successfully) to decrease dependence on foreign aid (often repeating that ‘foreign aid is poison’), to increase its tax base and has involved Rwandans across the country in a variety of community works and contributions.

Using the conceptual framework of colonial durabilities, we argue that despite these attempts to remove the vestiges of colonialism, the colonial past endures, in everyday expressions of identity as well as in grand policies of its reformulation. The current paper aims to trace these vestiges in the transformations of identity politics and nation-building in Rwanda by looking at three distinct arenas: (i) the architecture of de-ethnicisation policy; (ii) the stubborn lingering of racialised distinctions in popular culture; and (iii) the rise of ‘new’ social divisions based on country of exile. The focus on identity politics does not capture all colonial durabilities in Rwanda or the region, but should be an especially rich terrain to read for such. This study is thus important in two ways: one, this analysis should expand our understanding of otherwise well-studied topics of peacebuilding and identity politics in the GLR by subjecting them to a ‘colonial durabilities’ reading; two: methodologically, it allows us to analyse how ordinary people use new online spaces to express their ideas about the past and contemporary identity and reconciliation politics where their voices are otherwise silenced or policed in traditional media.

Conceptual framework: excavating colonial traces

How do we conceptualize and excavate colonial traces and effects in the present, in an era conceptualized as double ‘post’ – post-colonial and post-genocide? In a useful conception, Gandhi

(2019:, 4) urges us to see postcolonialism as the ‘theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath.’ But how exactly do we structure that conceptual resistance to colonial effects often described as ‘implicit’ or ‘ineffably threaded’ through everyday life (Stoler 2016, 5)? How to read for the ‘scars and marks’ (Kalema 2018) left on a social body by this multi-faceted but often insidious violence? As Stoler (2016:, 5) has powerfully argued,

colonial pasts, the narratives recounted about them, the unspoken distinctions they continue to ‘cue,’ the affective charges they reactivate, and the implicit ‘lessons’ they are mobilized to impart are sometimes so ineffably threaded through the fabric of contemporary life forms they seem indiscernible as distinct effects, as if everywhere and nowhere at all.

Colonial effects are not visible as separate entities or phenomena but reside in the way institutions and interactions are structured, conceptually and physically:

These connectivities are not always readily available for easy grasp, in part because colonial entailments do not have a life of their own. They wrap around contemporary problems; adhere in the logics of governance; are plaited through racialized distinctions; and hold tight to the less tangible emotional economies of humiliations, indignities, and resentments that may manifest in bold acts of refusal ... (Stoler 2016, 1).

Following these authors and others whose work has recently looked at the lingering effects of colonialism (Mathys 2017, 2021; Mertens 2018), we take colonial durabilities as ways of ‘cuing’ the present via resilient frames – here specifically identity constructs and boundaries that erupt and reassert themselves in multiple arenas and ways, from the national and macro-political to the everyday and micro-political. As will be seen, they stubbornly ‘wrap around’ and are ‘plaited’ through manifestly decolonial peace-building initiatives. Colonial durabilities operate through what Stoler calls ‘duress’ – imposing themselves and animating ‘visions and practices’ in an uneven and recursive fashion (2016, 6).

Our focus on identity politics is not incidental. The way social identity and subjecthood was structured under colonial rule is considered to have had profound impact on conflicts in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region (GLR) more broadly. The German and Belgian colonial powers did not ‘invent’ ethnicity in the GLR, even though this is the dominant official narrative in Rwanda today. Yet both the German and (subsequently) the Belgian colonial powers did have a clearly discernible and powerful impact on the evolving social categories of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa (see Newbury 1988; Taylor 1999; Mamdani 2001; Pottier 2002; Vansina 2005; Des Forges 2011). To begin with, the salience of these categories (above other social identifications that often proved more key) ‘resulted from colonial-era processes’ (Mathys 2021). But further to this, the colonial powers and the Catholic Church politicized, racialised and institutionalized these social distinctions, structuring a hierarchical and exclusive form of citizenship and belonging in Ruanda-Urundi (Rutayisire 1987; Mamdani 2001, 2002; Longman 2009; Nzahabwanayo, Horsthemke, and Mathebula 2017). The colonizers drew upon a so-called ‘Hamitic hypothesis’ to inform their approach. Tutsi cattle-herders were presented as ‘Hamites’ – a distinct and superior race – descendants of an ancient Christian peoples related supposedly to people of old Palestine. Tutsi were said to have migrated from the North of Africa into the Great Lakes region where they subjugated the agriculturalist Hutu. Based on these racial hierarchies and myths of origin, the colonialists discriminated in favour of the Tutsi, who they believed to be the natural leaders. The Hamitic Myth and the invention of the ‘Hima’ race then underpinned a new racialised distribution of power and privilege (Basaninyenzi 2006). If the colonial influence was so profound, does it still linger today, and in which ways? How can we bring ‘history back in’ (Mathys 2017) to better understand post-genocide narratives of social

identities? In our analysis, we will be reading for colonial durabilities and lingerings of identity distinctions at different levels, looking at ethnicity as a policy construct and ethnicity and racial distinctions as lived experience.

But we do not only consider the way in which colonial vestiges permeate the postcolonial space, but more specifically the post-genocide space. The end of major hostilities and violence, and major regime change in Rwanda in 1994, have created a space for transformation and radical change, social experimentation that has often tried to create a ‘clean break’ with the past. The Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) has appealed to a revolutionary transformation of society (Straus and Waldorf 2011; Rutazibwa 2014). The genocide can therefore be seen as a historical juncture that focuses scholarly attention on change and transformation (Kimonyo 2017), rather than the tracing of colonial remnants. The present paper goes against the academic current by excavating deeper colonial formations that still structure and counteract even seemingly radical social engineering programmes in the aftermath of mass atrocity.

The ‘post-conflict’ label has now been widely critiqued – for obscuring continuities, painting an artificial break with the past, and for conflating violence with conflict. But the continuities pointed to in this critique often refer to the era of war and violence, not to a deeper colonial historical trajectory. A rich literature has now developed around rebel-to-ruler transitions, where multiple authors point to the ways in which civil war and genocide continue to structure politics and society in their wake (Muller 2012; Lyons 2016; Purdeková, Reyntjens, and Wilén 2018; Fisher 2020). But as one of the authors argued in a recent article, ‘militarisation of governance’ in Rwanda cannot be explained by the RPF’s military campaign alone and the ruling elite’s guerrilla past. The permeation of military values and ethos in post-genocide society draws on historical re-readings of pre-colonial society and the selective appropriation of repertoires from that history (Purdeková, Reyntjens, and Wilén 2018). More recent and deeper pasts are tightly intertwined. The same applies to ‘post-genocide’ peacebuilding, and specifically the way in which identities are engineered. Even as the colonial is placed into brackets or outright repudiated in the ‘new’ Rwanda and the ‘pre-colonial’ is said to structure and inspire post-genocide social re-engineering, the paper points to the various ways – both subtle and obvious – in which colonialism still ‘cues’ the present, visible even through the attempts at its negation.

As a result, the paper departs from linear chronological accounts of social dynamics, and instead points to a non-linear overlapping of historical eras typically grouped as ‘precolonial,’ ‘colonial,’ and ‘postcolonial’ or ‘post-conflict.’ In our analysis of post-genocide Rwanda’s identity re-engineerings, we show how decolonial, post-colonial and colonial co-inhabit both social and policy imaginations and practice. Our focus is then on the contemporaneous social assembly of present and pasts in the production of policy and mundane action on identity in the wake of violence, and how chronologies are variably (and sometimes even contradictorily) indexed and implicated in this social process.

Methodology

In terms of methodology, this article is a qualitative study drawing on three kinds of sources. First, it draws on interviews carried out in Rwanda with respondents of different backgrounds who participated in two separate studies between the years 2008–2014. Both researchers were focused on understanding broadly the socio-political dynamics unfolding in post-genocide Rwanda and specifically in understanding the intersections between identity politics, nation-building, state building and peace. The researchers were attuned to ‘everyday politics’ as a way to understand these broader subjects, even as gatekeepers such as the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission had to be navigated to get access to certain platforms and fields of experience (see Purdeková 2015). This approach allowed us to examine, for example, how

identity politics plays out in domains that are rarely linked to peacebuilding, such as popular culture.

Second, the analysis also draws on social media content. Analyzing debates that unfold on social media such as Twitter offers a glimpse beyond the more circumscribed content of conventional media and offers a more accurate barometer of popular opinion and how it is engaged, or not, by political actors. Recently, researchers are increasingly taking interest in how individuals express themselves using online platforms (Duncombe 2019; Mwambari 2021), especially in countries where freedom of expression is limited. Constance Duncombe's study, for example, shows that the online world impacts the offline world and that social media 'blur our online and offline social lives' (Duncombe 2019, 2) and that 'Twitter can both represent emotions and provoke emotions, which can play an important role in the escalation or de-escalation of conflict' (Duncombe 2019, 3).

A key component of Rwanda's post-genocide state building prioritizes knowledge and the digital economy (Mwambari 2017). The use of the internet is mostly concentrated in Kigali, with urban elites having more access than the urban poor. Rural youth have access to the internet, though to a lesser extent than those in Kigali. However, for the case study of Miss Rwanda and Josiane Mwiseneza referenced here, many young people, including those from among the urban poor and those from her hometown, participated in these debates and were engaged in offline activities that followed on from the online debates. In some cases what was shared online travelled to towns around Rwanda through radios that are more accessible to rural areas. Although the use of social media is not widespread or evenly spread in Rwanda, online platforms have become central to national and international debates on Rwanda. For instance, in this paper we analyze messages that were transmitted via social media, especially Twitter, during the 2019 Miss Rwanda beauty pageant. As we will see later, messages around one candidate evolved into debates on identity and reconciliation politics in the country.

Third and last, the article relies on insights from both authors, who have an ongoing interest in Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction and who carried out different studies that touch on similar themes (Purdeková 2015, 2011, 2008; Mwambari 2017, 2020). The authors have different positionality as insider/outsider that allows for varied perspectives on the reconstruction project. Marie Smyth's research has shown that both insiders and outsiders have distinct advantages and disadvantages in carrying out research (Smyth 2005, 15–16). Our respective positionalities – one of us being an outsider and the other insider/outsider (Hesse-Biber 2013; Beoku-Betts 1994; 419 2019, 3) – may strengthen the analysis in this article. We thank our Rwandan research associates and translators who chose to remain anonymous and who participated in this study and provided insights into the case study.

De-ethnicisation: a radical rejection of colonial heritage?

'The youth of today,' an old Rwandan man explains,

at least the majority of them, are oblivious to the fact that during the period well before the advent of the Bazungu [the white colonizers], the notion of ethnic hatred between the Hutu and the Tutsi was non-existent ... Only, upon the arrival of European colonisers was it possible for the latter to exploit the group divisions as a means of securing control. The modern conception of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa as distinct ethnic groups in no way reflects the pre-colonial relationship between them.²

The old man quoted here encapsulates the key tenets of the 'new history' circulating everywhere in post-genocide Rwanda and underpinning the PRF nation-building strategy in the wake of the genocide (Purdeková 2008, 2011, 2015; Buckley-Zistel 2009). Every Rwandan knows and can

easily reproduce the new historical consensus, confirmed by the authors' own corpus of interviews. The new history is based on 'an idealized representation' (Buckley-Zistel 2006) of Rwanda's pre-colonial social relations and places the blame of social division and conflict squarely on the shoulders of the colonizing powers, denying the increasing inequality and social division under the Nyiginya dynasty (Vansina 2005). The idea underpinning the 'new history' is that if the colonizers invented ethnicity, it can be repudiated. It is this reformulated history that underlies the post-genocide leadership's radical rejection of ethnicity and its banning from public and political life under its policy of de-ethnicisation. But how should we interpret this policy? Whether myth-making or not, is de-ethnicisation decolonial, or does it bear traces of colonial 'duress' (Stoler 2016)?

The deployment of 'ethnicity' as a key category through which to glance political histories in countries such as Rwanda and Burundi remain one of the hallmarks of colonial durability (Curtis 2019). 'Ethnic conflict' has become a dominant characterization of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, Rwanda notwithstanding (Desrosiers and Vucetic 2018), this despite a score of works highlighting the politics of exclusion and inequality as core drivers of violence, and despite scholars' exposition of more complex lines of cleavage that preceded the 1994 genocide and contributed to its emergence. New conflicts in the region, such as the Burundi crisis that started in 2015, are still read against the ethnic and genocide frame (see Purdeková 2019), obscuring the real drivers and transformations of this conflict. Paradoxically, even recent works focusing on complicating our views of ethnicity in Rwanda, utilizing concepts such as everyday ethnicity, potential ethnics, mix of identities, and a combination of essentialist and constructivist conceptions (Schraml 2014; Eramian 2015) still reproduce this dominant focus on ethnic identity, as opposed to, social justice and exclusion as core drivers of conflict and inequality (Purdeková 2009). Scholarly works rarely, if ever, engage with historical excavation and conceptual archaeology, with tracing the past's insistent currency (here colonial duress specifically) in the present as seen through dominant frames and concepts.

In view of this, 'de-ethnicisation' in post-genocide Rwanda is a complex endeavour that both openly rejects colonial hardening of identity divisions and racialization of social differences, but simultaneously (and paradoxically) emphasizes identity as a core driver of conflict. On the one hand, the RPF's notion of unity was always predicated on the 'irrelevance of ethnicity' (Chemouni and Mugiraneza 2019).³ On the other hand, what is re-emphasized is still identitarian – commonness of Rwandan culture and values. Identity has been questioned as a root of conflict and violence, yet the 'solution' is still identity-based. Meanwhile, the core focus on rejecting ethnicity obscures other social divides that mark real inequalities in post-genocide Rwanda. In skirting the topic of social justice and the politics of exclusion, and in promoting culture-based and duty-based conceptions of citizenship, de-ethnicisation reproduces – or at least does not unwork and 'render obsolete' – some of the colonial readings of Rwandan society.

De-ethnicization has a number of components. Conceptually, it rejects ethnicity as a colonial invention, and embraces pre-colonial unity (*ubumwe*) of the Rwandan people. It is hence anchored in a re-reading of history described in detail elsewhere (Purdeková 2008, 2015; Jessee 2017; Longman 2017). But while unity is repeatedly emphasized, categorical divisions and boundaries are still being reproduced in post-genocide Rwanda, even along the lines of ethnicity. The new historical re-reading aims to be inclusive, re-positioning the Tutsi in Rwandan history by presenting them as Rwandans (unlike previous versions that presented them as aliens or invaders). But in public discourse the Tutsi also emerge as victims of the genocide, and also as heroes and saviours through the RPF military victory (Mwambari and Schaeffer 2011; Thomson 2013). Hutu identity re-emerges through its association with genocide crimes, genocide ideology and bad leadership while their victimhood is minimized

(Kuradusenge-McLeod 2018). The crimes against the Hutu perpetrated by the RPA during the civil war (1990–1994), the counter-insurgency in the Northwest of Rwanda (1997–8) and later in the DRC against masses of fleeing Hutu citizens (1996–1997) are made all but invisible, rendering a distorted picture of violence and victimhood in the region (Straus 2019). The Twa identity has also been reframed as *abasangwabutaka* (those who originally owned the land). In the new rendering, their ‘autochthony’ is being asserted even as their self-determination is denied (Ndahinda 2011, 224; Musilikare 2015; see also Bisoka, Giraud, and Ansoms 2020). Removing the Twa label simply means their (lower) status is still being preserved via a new identifier.

Legally, de-ethnicization outlaws the public mention of ethnicity, and conversely, criminalizes its mention under the rubric of ‘divisionism’ or even ‘genocide ideology.’ In this discursive architecture, de-ethnicization centres around the idea of ethnicity, and implies that it is key to conflict causation and conflict resolution. Yet the new collective identity of Rwandanness fails to address deep rooted problems of exclusion, identity politics and reconciliation politics (Buckley-Zistel 2009; McLean Hilker 2009).

The Rwandan attempt is typically seen as diametrically opposed to the entrenchment of ethnicity in a complex consociational power-sharing system in neighbouring Burundi. The former is, after all, abolitionist – as in, literally, outlawing ethnicity via a decree, the latter accommodationist – entrenching ethnic categories and segments and balancing their power. However, these seemingly ‘opposed’ approaches to identity politics share a set of common denominators. Both represent top-down political engineering that operates on a ‘groupist’ (Brubaker 2004) vision of society, and both reproduce the bi-polarity thesis of Hutu-Tutsi cleavage as a core conflict ingredient. Neither of the two represents an identity politics that renders ethnicity obsolete.

De-ethnicisation is marked by further paradoxes. The policy does not mean that ethnicity has been ‘unsayable’ as the officially mandated term ‘genocide against the Tutsi’ demonstrates (Baldwin 2019). The government has also been encouraging all Hutu to come forward and apologize for the crimes committed in their name. The Ndi Umunyarwanda campaign states

the genocide against Tutsis was committed in the name of Hutus, thus for the real healing of Rwandan society it is indispensable that Hutus, whose name was used in the genocide crime apologize to Tutsi victims, denounce such acts and distance themselves from perpetrators, and fight clearly against the genocide ideology and ethnical divisionism (cited in Blackie and Hitchcott 2018, 28).

These dynamics extend to the Rwandan diaspora, where Hutus face similar pressures (Kuradusenge-McLeod 2018). In the words of Kuradusenge-McLeod, ‘according to the national identity policy in Rwanda, ethnicity is unimportant, but those who live abroad, especially Hutus, still face stigma and negative treatment based on the label of perpetration attached to their ethnicity’ (2018, 427). But ethnicity is not only ‘sayable,’ it structures social action: ‘even though ethnic identities are no longer legal, people are still discriminated against and even persecuted based on their Hutu, Tutsi or Twa identities’ (ibid 2018). Neither does the official de-ethnicisation policy preclude ethnicity being mentioned or belaboured in private. As multiple authors have demonstrated (see e.g. Buckley-Zistel 2009; McLean Hilker 2009), ethnic markers remain part of everyday life. Moreover, de-ethnicisation does not prevent ethnicity and its racialization bursting into popular public discourse itself (Grant 2019, 2017). The latter is perhaps the most striking and is revealed through the heated debates around the Miss Rwanda 2019 pageant. The pageant shows how ethnic labels and racialised stereotypes of beauty continue to maintain their hold in popular discourse and imagination.

Beauty race: miss Rwanda pageant and colonial vestiges

The beauty pageant was re-introduced in Rwanda in 2009 and gained popularity immediately. In its 8th year, Miss Rwanda has now become one of the most prominent cultural and recreational events that unites and divides opinions amongst Rwandans. Its popularity as a social phenomenon closely compares to football, music and the tour du Rwanda competitions, important popular cultural events that attract thousands of Rwandans from within the country and the diaspora, as well as visitors. They are meant to symbolize the ‘new Rwanda’ and its rebirth in popular culture (Grant 2017). Yet none of these events bring such close scrutiny of body and demeanour as Miss Rwanda does. The Miss Rwanda pageant allows individuals space to express their opinions about national policies on identity politics, the Ndi Umunyarwanda campaign and reconciliation projects.

On the face of it, a beauty pageant seems an unlikely setting for mass public contention over ethnicity, race and discrimination. However, the 2019 Rwanda beauty pageant allowed ordinary Rwandans to express their views not only on the competition but also on other issues such as the politics of identity and peacebuilding. They used ‘the perceived anonymity that Twitter can provide through disguised handles’ to express ‘damaging views and content’ via Twitter and other social media sites (Duncombe 2019, 2). The 2019 beauty controversy showed clearly how ‘indirect power- less visible, less regulated by institutions’ (Watkins 2017, 124) – here in the form of politics of aesthetic and intimacy- can affect, even oppose institutional, formal power.

Let us consider the following tweets, one of many that demonstrates the heated argument over the treatment of a particular contestant, considered and labelled as Hutu in public discourse⁴: ‘@Mastermind152: ‘This Kagame strategy: silent discrimination: throughout this hatred message on #missRwanda2019 we know and understand there really is no reconciliation.’ Or the following by @enterskills: ‘The so claimed concept of ‘Ndi Umunyarwada’ (I am Rwandan) should be declared void now. This is beyond discrimination. Double standard! #Rwanda is on the edge again.’

The contestant referenced in the tweets above, a woman called Josiane Mwiseneza, inspired massive popular support on behalf of what some style as the ‘silent majority’ (a referent for the Hutu) and won the miss popularity title in the 2019 contest, but by the same token took a lot of abuse on social media, creating a public uproar. Among other things, she was likened to a gorilla and compared to a former Hutu President, associated with ‘genocide deniers,’ and ridiculed for her low social status and lack of foreign language skills. The controversies and debates over #Josiane Mwiseneza made Miss Rwanda 2019 much more than a beauty contest – it became a politicized arena where subversion of de-ethnicization met with problematic colonial-era identity stereotypes and labelling. Beauty, race and ethnicity have been powerfully interlinked during colonialism. Particular class, demeanour, skills and features came to designate distinction, status, beauty and power. This mix resurfaced powerfully in the 2019 pageant.

In the 2019 beauty contest, the candidature of Josiane Mwiseneza stood out given her background as a rural girl from western Rwanda. The region has often been associated with the Hutu population, who were part of Habyarimana’s government. Her unique background and boldness turned her into a social media star. Her popularity led to her being selected amongst those who would represent her Northern region in the national competition. She was voted as Miss Rwanda’s favourite candidate by receiving a majority of likes on Facebook and other social media tools that were used to vote. Her participation throughout the event led to public debates on questions of her ethnicity: Was she Hutu, some asked, or Tutsi? And was someone who looked like a Hutu allowed to run for Miss Rwanda that requires measuring of height and a kind of beauty that has been associated with Tutsi women?

While measuring a contestant's height might be common practice in beauty pageants globally, in Rwanda it carries symbolism tied to colonialism and the post-colonial politics of beauty. This kind of measurement of one's physical appearance had been used during colonialism in determining who was Tutsi, Twa or Hutu (Baines 2003; Brown 2014; Okech 2019). It resonates with Alexander Barns' writings for the Royal Geographic Society in London on Hutus' and Tutsis' distinct features (Krüger 2010, 96). Although the Miss Rwanda selection team does not measure nose and eyes, the act of measuring itself symbolizes practices that were also used with Vernier Caliper tools to determine who was Hutu or Tutsi (Mwambari et al. 2017). The measurement is also entangled in colonial ideals of beauty, which favoured Tutsis' tall and slender bodies, thus excluding 'Hutu' and 'Twa'. The idea of who is an ideal beautiful Rwandan woman has thus always caused controversy (Baines 2003). Indeed, the first three of the infamous Hutu commandments⁵ represented Tutsi women negatively. Their beauty was not questioned but rather recognized as something that would tempt Hutu men (Chrétien 1993). Similar narratives of Tutsi women as 'bait' and temptation circulated in Tanzania among encamped Burundian Hutu refugees (Malkki 1995). Beauty was politicized – one of the reasons young Hutu men gave as they raped and killed Tutsi women during episodes of violence (Baines 2003; Burnet 2012; Jessee 2015; Mwambari 2017). Ethnic and gender stereotypes fuelled the targeted use of sexual violence against Tutsi women (see also Des Forges, Human Rights Watch, and International Federation of Human Rights 1999). As a survivor reported, Hutu young men often told their victims 'if there were peace, you would never accept me' (Baines 2003, 488).

The issue of language also arose. Language became a topic of debate during the finals when Mwisenzeza took to the stage and could not speak French or answer in English correctly. Her language skills – which to some online commentators showed the failure of the education system (the majority of Rwandan youth cannot express themselves in any of the colonial and official languages) – assured her elimination. A debate then erupted online and the judges were blamed for being unfair: Why should someone who had a fair chance to win the contest fail due to being unable to master a colonial language in a country that has a policy of decolonization? One of the commentators was Ange Kagame – President Kagame's daughter- whose tweet is telling. She tweeted: 'Speaking Kinyarwanda should suffice. Miss Universe pageants have translators for the contestants that don't speak English. PLUS, the questions themselves are poorly worded in poor English (sad emoji).' One of her followers reacted: 'Ibi bigaragaza ukuntu tugikoronijwe mu bwonko kandi ubukoroni bw'ubwonko burica,' meaning 'this shows how we are still colonized in our minds and colonization of the mind kills.'

This interaction highlights how language itself was politicized in the beauty pageant and how the 'colonial' roots of official languages were invoked by different people on the ground to question 'model' womanhood. Indeed, many Rwandans in rural areas do not speak either English or French, which automatically brings forth complex intersections of class, ethnicity, even migration histories. After all, the English language entered officialdom only after the genocide and has been typically the domain of Tutsi returnees from Uganda. Hence colonial durabilities in Mwisenzeza's story do not only relate to ethnicity, but ethnicity as it intersects with other domains of identity and identity politics.

On January 28th, 2019 BBC Gahuzamiryango (the Kinyarwanda/Kirundi section of the British Broadcast Cooperation that came into existence after the 1994 genocide) picked up the Miss Rwandan story. It asked on its website 'Irushanwa Miss Rwanda 2019 ryaba ryarashyize ahabona ikibazo cy'amoko cyari cyihishe mu Rwanda?' Has Miss Rwanda 2019 publicized the question of ethnicity that is hidden in Rwanda?

The BBC Gahuza (as it is popularly known amongst Rwandans both in the country and in the diaspora) has been banned in Rwanda for its programmes that air diverse views on Rwanda's

troubled past and on questions of ethnicity and belonging in post-genocide Rwanda. Scholars have previously pointed to Rwanda's history being a sensitive and potentially dangerous topic and these debates tend to be divisive (Straus and Waldorf 2011). As discussed above, the post-genocide government has banned identity labels of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa as part of the reconciliation project, styling Rwanda as a post-ethnic society (Purdeková 2008; Ingelaere 2010; Nikuze 2014). But while the government has defended its campaign to 'de-ethnicize' the post-genocide society through the Ndi Umunyarwanda project, instead of diminishing in relevance, ethnic labels have gained more prominence amongst Rwandans, as exemplified during the Miss 2019 beauty contest. Part of this salience relates to the perceived disenfranchisement, especially of Hutu youth, and the uneven dividends of the economic model of development advanced by the Rwandan government after the genocide. Economic growth has largely benefited those in the capital city of Kigali, rather than the population in rural areas where Mwiseneza Josiane came from (Sommers 2006; Nyenyezi Bisoka and Ansoms 2020). It also telling that this event and the participation of Mwiseneza attracted comments that are usually reserved for private conversations. This has shown multiple voices disagree with the government's politics of reconciliation and its approaches to peacebuilding and economic development. The politics of belonging in post-genocide Rwanda thus not only intersects with ethnicity, race and language, but also class.

Conversations on Miss 2019 and Mwiseneza's candidature escalated and became outright offensive. Online spaces became avenues to channel hatred against the Hutu, mock government reconciliation efforts such as Ndi Umunyarwanda, Itorero and other reconciliation projects that target youth.

Some of the tweets that circulated and caused debates included:

Igihe ni iki Abahutu nabo bagatorwa muri nyampinga, Josiane 100% turi kumwe ikamba rigomba kuba iryawe igihe Abatutsi batorewe birarambiranye.

Translation: Time is now that Hutus can be selected to be miss, Josiane 100%, we are together, the crown must be yours, we are tired of Tutsis always being voted'

Ntamuhutukazi wabaye miss rwose ise yaraguye tingitingi nyuma yo kunywa amaraso y'abana b'inzirakarengane, ndarivuze ndamaze,

There is no Hutu who has ever become Miss when her father died in Tingitingi (reference to refugee camp in Zaire) after he drunk the blood of innocent children, I have said it whatever the consequences.

Constance Duncombe's research has shown that 'statements on Twitter have the capacity to both represent emotions and also provoke strong emotional reactions from other users, leading to large-scale debates that become integrated into offline political outcomes' (Duncombe 2019, 2). This was the case with Miss 2019 in Rwanda. Through the reactions of social media users, exchanges became emotionally charged and often referenced the past and referred to colonial durabilities in identity politics in Rwanda. The debates provoked by the Miss 2019 pageant reactivated identity divisions and racialised stereotypes on beauty. These debates show the colonial lingerings in the everyday experience of Rwandans today.

Mwiseneza's choice to focus on child malnutrition was nother factor that animated the internet, even eliciting comments from a government minister. Each competitor had to choose a societal problem they would focus on if they won the Miss Rwanda title for the year. Mwiseneza chose the problem of malnutrition among young children. This issue had been singled out nationally as a threat to wellbeing of children in Rwanda in 2018. A government minister expressed her

personal opinion, supporting Mwiseneza's focus on malnutrition, which attracted attention from supporters who used the minister's statement as an indication that the government was in support of her. The minister later retracted her statement and explained the context of her comments. Since that incident, no other government individuals or agencies commented on Miss Rwanda 2019 or individual candidates. This was unusual as government officials often defend government reconciliation policies and use twitter to respond to foreigners discussing Rwanda (Duncombe 2019, 1). But when it came to the abuse directed against Mwiseneza, only one organization – the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) – reacted with a statement via its Twitter handle:

Komisiyo y'Igihugu yo kurwanya Jenocide (CNLG) iramagana imvugo yuzuye ivangura rigamije gukwirakwiza amacakubiri ashingiye ku moko ya Hutu/Tutsi no kugaragaza ko hari ubwoko buruta ubundi. Mu Rwanda ntutukiri igihugu kirangwa n'amacakubiri ashingiye ku moko. #MissRwanda2019.

The Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) prohibits conversations that are promoting divisions based on ethnicity of Hutu/Tutsi and that suggest that there is superior race or ethnicity. In Rwanda, we are no longer a country that is based on division based on ethnicity.

Commenting on a photo that compared Mwiseneza to a former Hutu President Kayibanda, the CNLG director continued:

Uriya mwana si Kayibanda nta ruhare afite kuri Kayibanda n'ibya Kayibanda. Uriya mwana ni uwo ari we, afite uburenganzira nk'abandi banyarwandakazi. icyo twabwira rero urubwiruko ni uko bata-gomba kumurebera mu ndorerwamo y'ibyashize n'ibitari ibye nibyo atakoze, nibyo atavuze.

Which loosely translates to:

That child [Mwiseneza] is not Kayibanda, she has no connection to Kayibanda and actions of Kayibanda. That child is who she is, she has the right like the other Rwandan women. What we can tell the youth is that they should not look at her through the lens of the past and what is not her and what she did not do and she did not say.

Kayibanda was the first Hutu elected president after the 1959 events that saw the overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy. Although he was removed in a coup d'état in 1973 by one of his generals, Juvenal Habyarimana, he was idolized as the first Rwandan Hutu to have taken power from the Tutsi monarchy and Belgium colonization (Akyeampong and Gates 2012). However, the tweet was not rendering a positive comparison. By suggesting the youth should 'not look at her [Mwiseneza] through the lens of the past,' the CNLG statement stood in direct contradiction to the Ndi Umunyarwanda campaign that encourages precisely that. After all, it has encouraged all Hutu to repent for their fathers' sins.⁶

In a country that demonstrates otherwise tight social control, these public discussions were difficult to control by government agencies. They happened both online and offline did not participate.

What the story of Mwiseneza shows us is that the controversy revolved around much more than ethnicity or race. The unmistakably colonial concepts of a hierarchy of races (and the repugnant likening of a 'lower race' to an animal), codes of beauty, or the tying of status to mastery of a foreign language speak of resurgent colonial frames that reach beyond the simple ethnic classification exercise. In the remainder of the article, we will consider an additional identity axis after the genocide– the emergence of returnee group identities – and their colonial ties.

The abasajya, abajepe, abasopecya and abadubayi: ‘new’ regionalisms after the genocide?

Colonial durability in post-genocide Rwanda is evident also in the context of what the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame dismissively called ‘artificial’ identities based on Rwandans’ countries of exile that have emerged and compete with the Ndi Umunyarwanda national de-ethnicization policy. In referencing these in an official speech, Kagame effectively acknowledged their existence. Perhaps he called these identities ‘artificial’ because of their perceived ‘inauthentic’ nature compared to an overarching Umunyarwanda identity promoted by the government. In other words, one can interpret the President’s dismissal as a way to say these identifications are not worth society’s attention and should be discouraged and forgotten. Importantly, besides identities based on country of exile, many other identities are commonly used in post-genocide Rwanda that deserve analysis in their own right.⁷ Nonetheless, the new ‘regionalisms’ show fascinating colonial durabilities in identity politics that reach beyond race and ethnicity.

The regional dispersion of Rwandans during and at the twilight of colonialism gave birth paradoxically to both a left-inspired political platform of non-ethnic Rwandan society promoted by the exile-born RPF (and codified in its 8-point programme), and new host country affiliations that came to full politicization and crystallisation after the diaspora’s return to Rwanda in the wake of the genocide. Though population within today’s Rwanda has migrated across the region since pre-colonial times, what is striking is that the post-genocide returnee identities are strictly following lines of ‘nation-states’ as inherited from colonial rule (as detailed below), rather than indicating truly regional, border-defying identities.

Additionally, there is another ‘colonial lingering’ visible here: pre-colonial identities *were* often very regional (see Newbury 1987, 2001) and the suppression of regional identities in the GLR (such as *mugoyi*, *mukiga*) was also a trait of colonial policies. For example, pre-colonial identities such as Abagoyi and Abacyiga found in west and northern Rwanda were suppressed as they interfered with dual identities in the colonial minds of Hutu and Tutsi and the idea of Banyarwanda contained within a pre-colonial homogenous kingdom and the way such a kingdom should be governed (Mathys 2021; Newbury 1987, 2001). Kagame’s remarks on ‘artificiality’ of alternative, exile-based identities thus needs to be seen against this past. The remarks contradict long histories of migration, overlapping identifications and identifications spanning borders and instead promote a ‘natural’ and single identification as ‘Rwandan.’

One of the ways in which the Belgian colonizers maintained their colonial hold in Rwanda was through a policy of divide and rule, not unlike colonial powers elsewhere in Africa (Mamdani 1997). The Belgian colonial administration first attempted to continue to work with the Tutsi monarchy, following in the footsteps of the Germans. However, just before the 1959 events that allowed Hutus to take power, Belgians changed their policies to favour the Hutu majority. In this way, the colonial administration further intensified existing social divisions between Hutus and Tutsi and politicized them, which influenced the exodus of Tutsis to neighbouring countries as early as 1950s. The Tutsi who fled in 1959 had strong monarchical ties – they were exiled on the eve of independence, when the Tutsi-dominated monarchy was being replaced by a Hutu elite dominated Republic, an epoch accompanied by widespread violence known in Rwanda as *muyaga*.

Elite Tutsis tried to fight back throughout the 1960s with support from China and Cuba. However, their insurgency did not amount to any political changes internally (Guevara 2001). The Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) that ended the genocide and won the civil war that started in 1990 comprised a new generation of fighters drawn from exiled Rwandans in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, DRC and beyond (Lemarchand 2004; Reyntjens 2004; Kimonyo 2016).

The RPA soldiers had been raised in refugee camps by parents who continuously reminded them that they belonged to a country of ‘milk and honey’ (Prunier 1995, 66; Longman 2017). Like Burundian refugees in Tanzania, their status as refugees led them to create a ‘nationness, history and identity’ (Malkki 1995, 1).

But just as the RPA/RPF successfully fostered a ‘Rwandan’ identity across the countries of exile, upon return to Rwanda, fractures emerged based on countries of exile, leading to the new labels of *abasajya*, *abajepe*, *abadubayi* and *abasopecya* and a new perceived hierarchy of power among them. These returnee groups included people whose families fled in 1959 but also others whose relatives had left Rwanda through many waves of pre-colonial migration and due to, among other reasons, forced settlement policies during colonialism and post-colonial periods (See Newbury 2005; Mathys 2014; Tegera 2010; Mararo 1999).

‘*Abasajya*’ is a nickname that refers to those Rwandan refugees who returned from exile in Uganda. It is derived from the term *umusajya* – meaning ‘a man’ in luganda. *Aabajepe* or *AbaGP* in turn identifies Rwandans who returned from Burundi and are linked to the presidential guard who killed a lot of people.⁸ *AbaDubayi* refers to those who came back from the Democratic Republic of Congo and refers, pejoratively, to their alleged tendency to flash their wealth (hence the reference to Dubai). Finally, *AbaSopecya* or *Abasopecya* refers to those who were born in Rwanda and never left. It derives from the acronym *SOPECYA* (*Société Pétrolière de Cyanguu*), the only petrol station allegedly open during the genocide.

As one interviewee confirmed, these names were created by University students to talk about different girls’ behaviour in relationships. For example, the name *abaGP* was given to girls who came from Burundi because GP killed a lot of people during the genocide and the girls who migrated from Burundi were stereotyped as having AIDSs. The *Abadubayi* were girls who were considered flashy, and were not judged to be good wives. *AbaSOPECYA* were girls who were in Rwanda before, during and after the genocide. They were always present, like the patrol station *SOPECYA* after which they were named that never closed before, during and after the genocide. *Abasajya* was a name given to girls from Uganda because they continuously spoke in Luganda to identify each other.⁹ While it was explained that these labels started in University circles, they quickly spread and became referents for whole returnee groups. While most of *abadubayi*, *abajepe*, and *abasajya* are connected to Tutsi families and the majority are elites or middle-income families, *abasopecya* are all kinds of individuals with different backgrounds, including Hutu and Tutsi, but the term is rarely used for Twa.¹⁰ These identity labels are commonly used among Rwandans and each category emerged through complex stories and interactions in post-genocide Rwanda.

Though some of these labels have been discussed in previous studies, the authors have often reduced the Rwandan social landscape to two distinct groups, referring to ‘returnees’ and differentiating them from those who have stayed in Rwanda. For instance, a study that interviewed 46 Rwandans between 15 and 35 from 2004 to 2005 noted: ‘Some were born and grew up in Rwanda and witnessed first-hand the civil war (1990–1994), the genocide (April–July 1994) and its aftermath in Rwanda or in refugee camps in Zaire now Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC’ (Whitaker 2003). Others grew up outside Rwanda in neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, Burundi and Zaire, and ‘returned or ‘arrived’ in Rwanda after 1994’ (McLean Hilker 2009). Although Rwandans also returned from Kenya, Tanzania, and some western countries, the majority were from the neighbouring countries of DRC, Uganda, and Burundi, hence the coded names. The returnee labels have had profound impact on how Rwandans differentiate recent populations that migrated at distinct times.

While most people from Burundi and DRC started their own churches, social events and rarely integrated into well-established ones, those who migrated from Uganda – the *abasajya* – mostly integrated into Anglican churches given the colonial links between the Anglican

Church and Uganda. For example, in the Zion Temple where the leader of the church came from the DRC, you will most likely find middle class *abadubayi* (those coming from DRC) while in some Pentecostal Churches you will most likely find those from Burundi.¹¹ In contrast, evening entertainment events promoting old songs (*karahanyuze*) organized at city hotels and in other clubs around the city draw mostly *abasope*, who sing pre-genocide songs and play bands from that era.¹² Those who speak old Kinyarwanda rarely speak good English and mostly grew up in francophone Rwanda.¹³ This was the case with Mwiseneza mentioned above.

President Paul Kagame acknowledged the existence of these new labels, proclaiming them ‘artificial identities.’ In past speeches he has rarely commented on these different migration-based identities. Speaking as if he was asking questions to his audience comprising of different leaders during the 2018 Unity Club annual meeting, President Kagame said:

[...] if you cross the national borders, it becomes a different scenario. But even in that context, there is a way to change the narrative and the thinking. As you know, in the course of our history, there are some people who have had to become refugees; who have had to flee from Rwanda, to live in foreign countries. We all have been greatly affected by this situation. Some went to Tanzania, others to Uganda, (DR) Congo, and Burundi. (Kagame 26th October, 2018, Unity Club, Kigali)

He then continued to remind the audience about the recent migrations:

There is, however, something puzzling, and to appreciate how puzzling it is, you first need to understand the context and the circumstances in which these people left the country: they left Rwanda, running for their dear life. How do they automatically become Burundians, when they left Rwanda because they were running from danger? Anyway, yes, they can become Burundians if they want. But my point is this: once these people return to Rwanda from Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and (DR) Congo, and they meet in Rwanda—their home country—why do they continue to see themselves as Burundians, Ugandans, Tanzanians, and Congolese? (ibid)

He continued to ask for frank engagement on reconciliation issues among Rwandan leaders of different backgrounds,

Why does this become another form of identity? Another form of *ethnicity*? [emphasis added] It’s amazing. Some of those people who fled and met in Rwanda after returning from exile—but who insist on continuing to identify themselves with the countries that hosted them as refugees—are actually brothers and sisters! In some cases, you find that for instance one sibling lived in Burundi while another lived in Uganda. In some other cases, nephews and their uncles fled to different countries. But once they were back in Rwanda, they claimed different identities. How can brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts have different identities? (ibid)

He then concluded by linking these new identities to the government’s campaign:

Ultimately, ‘*Ndi Umunyarwanda*’ (‘I am Rwandan’ – a campaign aimed at unifying Rwandans around one national identity), is the answer to all of these problems, which are artificial and superficial. (ibid)

Interestingly, President Kagame likens the new regionalisms to forms of ethnicity (as they are tied to different languages adopted in exile), and treats these similarly, as something easily disposable. Just like ethnicity and race, regionalisms based on countries of exile are portrayed as artificial, as surface-level, add-ons to the ‘true’ core of Rwandanity traced to pre-colonial times. Paradoxically, this discourse emphasizes both a primordial form of attachment (Rwandanness) and the need and possibility of de-constructing ‘false’ layers of identity.

As we can see, not only are ‘new’ identities tied to and shaped by colonial history, the still predominant and resilient focus on the ethnic frame – itself a vestige of colonialism – obscures these and explains the lack of scholarship and analysis of how new forms of networks, commonality, identification and privilege shape post-genocide society and intersect with the nation-building project. Rwanda’s experiment with de-ethnicisation has generated scholarship investigating its anatomy, potential, its subversion, remaining tied to ethnicity as an organizing concept. Moreover, ethnicity has been exclusively linked to the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa identities, completely obscuring the new language-based distinctions of post-genocide Rwanda as a ‘returnee society.’ Overall, there are no in-depth studies of the ‘new regionalisms’ (or in fact ‘old regionalisms’ for that matter, dating to the Republics) available at all, the topic being usually confined to context and footnotes.

Conclusion

The search for colonial durabilities could be encapsulated in the question ‘What is both past and not over?’ (see Stoler 2016, 25). But more than this, the present paper asks ‘What is both past and not over in the very active, contemporary struggles to reject that very past, to render it obsolete through radical social transformation as part and parcel of a peace-building process in the wake of divisive conflict? If colonial durabilities have been identified and discussed as core contributors to the conflict in the GLR, Rwanda notwithstanding, why and how should we read for colonial durabilities in ‘acts of rebellion’ – in the very open rejections of colonial heritage visible in the arena of post-genocide identity politics, be it in reference to ethnicity, regionalism, language or in the search for the ‘traditional’ and home-grown?

The paper shows that colonialism lingers in attempts at its rejection – at the level of policy- as well as alongside these attempts- in popular culture and public discourse, and in scholarship. This is not to invalidate these genuine decolonial attempts, but rather to create a more nuanced reading, demonstrating the obstinate continuity of certain frames and concepts that exist *within and alongside* decolonizing language and agenda. To explain what might seem a paradoxical co-occurrence, we borrow Stoler’s conceptualization of historical transformation through the lens of ‘recursive analytics, or history as recursion,’ the kind of history that is ‘marked by the uneven, unsettled, contingent quality of histories that *fold back on themselves* and, in that refolding, reveal new surfaces, and new planes’ (Stoler 2016, 27). This conception precisely tries to avoid the notion of repetition. ‘Rather, they are processes of partial re-inscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations’ (ibid: 28).

Colonialism thus does not linger in a direct way, but its resonances are no less potent, even within forms of its explicit unworking into which they are partially inscribed, whether these be the rejection and suppression of ethnicity and regionalism or the proliferation of ‘neo-traditionality.’ Colonial vestiges are visible in the ways in which ethnicity is managed and experienced, in its durability, despite its rejection. But more than this, we have tried to show that focus on ethnicity is both still predominant and itself limiting. Colonial durabilities in identity politics are more complex, and manifest in the controversies over racialization of beauty, in the popular readings of how race, class, language and status intersect, in the formation and dismissal of ‘new’ regionalisms. These colonial cues do not propagate in any sort of linear, continuous fashion but are re-assembled by new actors and networks in the wake of genocide as people ‘come together,’ as new policies and new vision of citizenship and nation are fashioned. The colonial frames are reassembled imperfectly, partially, but no less powerfully.

Disclosure statement

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Notes

1. After the genocide, the RPF-led government often blamed the nature of governance (discrimination, corruption, and turn to extremism) of the previous regimes (First Republic under Kayibanda (1962–1973) and Second Republic under Habyarimana (1973–1994)) as a contributing factor to the emergence of the genocide.
2. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/187258>, accessed on [date].
3. ‘The idea of unity conveyed in the songs emphasizes not so much the equality between ethnicities but the irrelevance of ethnicity as a category.’
4. As far as we know, she has never self-identified as such publicly (to be verified) and the contest does not mention or record ethnicity of participants, in line with national policy.
5. The ‘Hutu Ten Commandments’ was a document published in the 1990 edition of Kangura, a paper that was distinctly anti-Tutsi and promoted Hutu Power. The ‘manifesto’ is considered a core piece of hate propaganda in the run-up to the 1994 genocide. Notably, the first portion of the manifesto is dedicated exclusively to the appearance and character of Tutsi women.
6. For many years the project had been championed both in Rwanda in the Diaspora by a famous politician Honorable Bamporiki Edouard, who is also author a book titled ‘Their sins our shame’.
7. For example, survivors meaning Tutsis who survived the genocide against the Tutsi, perpetrators referring to Hutus or specifically interahamwe who targeted and killed Tutsis and their sympathizers in 1994, and bystanders who did not hide anyone together with heroes who have been awarded with national medals for hiding Tutsis. Other labels that are used informally include Hutus who became refugees after 1994 in neighbouring countries and especially DRC camps. These are often called pejoratively Tingi Tingi after a refugee camp that welcomed many Hutus in DRC after the 1994 genocide. These labels are linked to the legacies of colonialism, war and genocide against the Tutsi.
8. Interview with a young Rwandan in Kigali, April 2009
9. Interview with a former University student who was in University immediately after the genocide and belonged to different social groups. August, 2019.
10. Interview with a young female University student, May 2009.
11. Interview with a young male University student, May 2009.
12. Interview with a young entrepreneur and leader in a church, June 2009.
13. Ibid.

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