From Genocide to Jihad:
Islam and Ethnicity in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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Post-genocide Rwanda is currently in a phase of reconciliation and building national unity. Ethnicity is often cited as the primary stimulus to a protracted conflict between Hutus and Tutsis that eventually culminated in the 1994 genocide. The role of ethnicity in post-genocide Rwanda has an associated official and non-official rhetoric. While the government employs and imposes a rigid agenda of "Rwandaness" whereby old ethnic distinctions no longer exist, in local communities there is a widespread perception that this is facile and superficial. In spite of the ethnicity controversy in Rwandan society there is a role for religion as both a stimulus to conflict and a potential source of healing. Rwanda is Africa's most Catholic country, however, the growth of Islam in both rural and urban areas has been exponential since the genocide. What explains the increasing number of Hutus and Tutsis converting from their unifying Christian identities to a marginalizing Muslim identity? This Muslim community is growing amidst widespread poverty and a history of mass violence for which there has been little reconciliation. As such, does the rise of Islam in post-genocide Rwanda represent fertile ground for Islamic fundamentalism or religious based reconciliation? This paper will argue that Islam represents a source of healing and unification for Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda by changing social boundaries and deconstructing ethnicity.

I. The Rwanda Context

The Genocide

Many explanations ranging from ethnicity to political economy have been offered to find answers to the Rwandan genocide that killed approximately 800,000 in the spring of 1994.[1] While labelling the genocide as an "ethnic conflict" is a gross simplification of the factors that mobilized and targeted Rwandan for acts of violence, it is fair to discern that the majority of those killed were Tutsis and some were moderate Hutus. The radical Hutu-led government organized an elaborate propaganda campaign that demonised and the dehumanised Tutsis, referring to them as *inyenzi* (meaning cockroaches). Historically and systematically reinforced by the Belgian colonial administration, Tutsis were hierarchically ordered in society as the superior race. A majority-based Hutu government that followed independence in 1962 did little to assuage a polarized population.

Mobilized by the fear that Tutsis would continue to politically and economically marginalize the Hutus, and eventually render them extinct, radical Hutu extremists called for the

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[1] Estimate of the number of fatalities during the genocide range from 500,000 to one million; the Rwandan government and the majority of NGOs generally assume the 800,000 figure.

extermination of all Tutsis and those moderate Hutus opposed to the government. A plane crash that resulted in the death of President Habyarimana on April 6th, 1994 tipped off the beginning of the genocide. The violence that followed witnessed the slaughtering of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans, primarily by machete, at the hands of the Hutu-led *Interahamwe* militia. The genocide continued for one hundred days aided by the complicity of the Catholic Church, participation of neighbours, and the indifference of the international community. Formal hostilities ceased with the arrival and victory of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front/Army (RPF/RPA) under the leadership of current Rwandan President, Paul Kagame. Despite a formal cessation of hostilities the physical and emotional scarring of the survivors continues to play an important role in the country's politics and attempts at reconciliation.

Post-Genocide

The genocide produced a demographic tragedy that indicates the enormity of reconciliation in terms of scope and process. The genocide caused an initial population displacement of 1.7 million Hutus fearing reprisals, left 400,000 widows, 500,000 orphans, and 130,000 imprisoned upon suspicion of committing acts of genocide.[2] The post-genocide political regime is one that is goal-oriented towards reconciliation through the elimination of a culture of impunity and an aggressive unity agenda. Despite its stated intentions, ethnic politics remains at the core of the government's most controversial policies. Concerns over the legitimacy of the government's power is based on the accusation that it promotes a "Tutsified" state under the leadership of the RPF. President Kagame and the RPF led government have

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[2] Norwegian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights. Prosecuting Genocide in Rwanda: The Gacaca System and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. [on-line] [cited 11/30/2002] [available: http://www.nho.no.rapporter/landrapporter/rwandap.PDF]: 11.
There is little data indicating the number of Tutsis versus Hutus among widows orphans as the official policy of the post-genocide government is that now everyone is Rwanda. However, given that 75-80% percent of the population killed was male and up to 75% were Tutsis, it can be assumed that a similar percentage exists for those that were widowed or orphaned. Those imprisoned are overwhelmingly Hutu.

justified many breaches of civil and political liberties under the rhetoric of unity and reconciliation. The government has resisted multi-party politics and power sharing between ethnically dominated political factions.

II. Theoretical Approaches to Ethnicity and Rwandan Identities

There exist several schools of thought on defining ethnicity and its relationship to ethnic conflict: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. This paper uses a constructivist approach that gives more attention to role of culture than elites; other schools of thought will be briefly discussed with the purpose of exposing their differences.

Primordialism

The primordialist school sees identity as a set of fixed characteristics of individuals or a group that is rooted in biology and an extensive history of practices and traditions that make ones identity inalterable.[3] To primordialists ethnicity is composed of a set of intangible elements that offer an individual a sense of "peoplehood" that ties him/her to a larger group; additionally, it attempts to tie the rather emotional and irrational notions of ethnicity to its mobilization into ethnonationalism.[4] Primordialism does have salience within the narrative of entrenched ethnic differences between Hutus and Tutsis. This narrative, born of colonial anthropologists, focuses on the "migration hypothesis": the ancestors of the Hutus and Tutsis migrated as different peoples into the Great Lakes region of Central Africa.[5]

One of the primary criticisms levelled at the primordialist school is that it does not operationalize the link between identity and conflict. Primordialism finds its utility in

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[3] David Lake and Donald Rothchild. The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation, David Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 5.
[4] John F. Stack Jr. "Ethnic Mobilization in World Politics: The Primordial Perspective" in The Primordial Challenge: Ethnicity in the Contemporary World, John F. Stack Jr. (ed). (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 1-2.
[5] Mahmood Mamdani. When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001:44.

identifying how and where ethnic identities are prevalent and not how it can be the primary factor in mobilizing for conflict. The presence of multiple identities that aid in the mobilization process imply the need for these identities to be manipulated into a coherent cause and effect scenario. Rwandan identities of ethnicity, class, gender and regional heritage were all manipulated to mobilize antagonistic groups.

Instrumentalism

The notion of manipulation is an inherent component of the instrumentalist school of thought. This theoretical approach asserts that ethnic identities are defined within the political process and are manipulated by political and ethnic elites. As a means to collective ends, it is used "defensively to thwart the ambitions of others or offensively to achieve an end of one's own… ethnicity is primarily a label or set of symbolic ties that is used for political advantage – much like interest group membership or political party affiliation."[6] Placed within a larger process of conflict escalation the instrumentalist approach makes it possible to draw parallels between conflicts with similar societal cleavages.

One approach of the instrumentalist school focuses on elite manipulation of ethnic identities: to "create greater internal cohesion and to press more effectively ethnic demands against rival groups, ethnic and nationalist elites increasingly stress the variety of ways in which the members of the group are similar to each other and collectively different from others."[7] Others address the importance of fear, identifying a "fear of the future" syndrome that is the stimulus for ethnic mobilization and almost inevitably, conflict. This approach argues that such

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[6] David Lake and Donald Rothchild. <u>The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation,</u> David Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 6.
[7] Paul R. Brass. <u>Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison.</u> (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1991): 21

fears of the future tend to arise in weak or failed states where there is a fear of assimilation or annihilation.[8]

Both ethnic groups had within them an elite ethnic leadership that became militarised and politicised. The RPF's leadership in ending the genocide and its post-genocide governance has instilled in the minds of the Tutsis in and outside of Rwanda that their survival is only possible with strong, ethnocentric leadership. Conversely, the political elite of the Hutu radicals, known as the "Akazu", was essential to the planning of the genocide, creating the Hutu Interahamwe militia, and distributing hate propaganda via the radio.

Constructivism

The constructivist approach provides somewhat of a middle ground between primordialism and instrumentalism. This approaches argues that ethnicity is not an individual attribute but a social phenomenon that is constructed from a dense web of social interactions.[9] Constructivism allows for structural change and negates ethnicity as a fixed identity. Ethnic identity is inherently attached to other social identifications, such as region, religion, clan, and other non-material based identities. This has brought the study of ethnicity into a broader historical time frame. The issue of change can be addressed in terms of group boundaries. Horowitz states: "a group may become more or less ascriptive in its criteria for membership, more or less acculturated to the norms of some other group, more or less internally cohesive, and more or less ethnocentric or hostile towards other groups."[10]

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[8] David Lake and Donald Rothchild. "Spreading Fear: The Genesis of Transnational Ethnic Conflict" in The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation., David Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998): 8.
[9] Lake and Rothchild 1998: 6.
[10] Donald L. Horowitz. "Ethnic Identity" in Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (eds). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975: 114.

Constructivism gives due credit to both the primordialist and instrumentalist schools. By recognising the importance of seemingly immutable characteristics of ethnic identity, constructivism recognises the strength of primordialism but disagrees that this inevitably leads to conflict. In turn, constructivism follows along instrumentalist lines by recognising the important of elites and leadership in the mobilization process; however, disagreement between the two schools in evident in the degree to which these identities can be manipulated at the whim of politics. Particularly among conflict studies in Africa, analysis of ethnicity is changing. Aside from incorporating other social cleavages, "the old argument that ethnicity was wholly a dependent variable to be explained only in terms of elite manipulation and competition for scarce resources is now being re-examined".[11] Constructivists do not see ethnicity as inherently conflictual. Instead conflict flows from a "pathological social system" that breeds conflict from many social cleavages and is not under the control of the individual.[12]

Identifying ethnicity as a social phenomenon and characterising the pre-genocide conditions as a "pathological social system" has great explanatory power in the case of Rwanda. For ethnic elites to be successful in "constructing" opposing ethnic identities they required tools to do so. Such tools were apparent in the discourse of the genocide that played upon primordial references of ancient hatreds, colonial domination and the assumptions on both sides that the mere existence of each group threatened the other. The media was an outlet for this discourse that permeated all levels of society and all regions of the country.

The elites had a complex web of social cleavages in Rwandan society to manipulate: these predominantly included region, gender, socio-economic and political status. The socio-economic differences between Hutus and Tutsis were partly based on status and material issues,

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[11] Osaghae, 2001: 27.
[12] Lake and Rothchild 1998: 6.

however, it had profound social implications in terms of lifestyle and political status. The genocide can be contexualised as a conflict originated by new Hutu elites motivated by the fearful collective memory of a dominating Tutsi class from the pre-colonial and colonial era. On the one hand, it was the "politicised intellectuals who are at the origin of the massacres, and not the peasant masses."[13] On the other hand, the deepest levels of socio-economic cleavages pitted landless individuals against their neighbours, making the genocide extremely "intimate" and personal. The Hutus elites were adept at identifying their desired targets. The "authorities redirected the hatred and potential violence of the poor – especially of angry desperate young Hutu men – away from the rich and onto the Tutsi, the latter wrongly portrayed as invariably aristocratic and privileged."[14] The genocide initially targeted the elite – Tutsi politicians, lawyers, judges, clergy, etc – then spread to the general masses including moderate Hutus.

Regional differences are often ignored as a source of cleavage and north-south differences among Hutus characterised differences in the extent of violence. The colonial administration allowed the Tutsis to expand their rule into the northern parts of Rwanda. The northern Hutus separated themselves from the Hutus of the south and despised them for sharing a common culture and even kinship with the Tutsi.[15] Prior to the genocide, President Habyarimana who was from the northeast, reversed the southern favoured policies of his predecessor. An increase in aid from France meant that finances were being spent disproportionately in the north-east. Everything from political status, to economic development to parts of the university were transferred north in the decades prior to the genocide.[16] A more radical clique grew around Habyarimana and they reacted against his more moderate policies to

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[13] Johan Pottier. Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002:33
[14] Ibid: 34
[15] Ibid: 35. Citing from Africa Confidential 25 (9).
[16] Ibid: 36.

the Tutsis in the late 1980s and 1990s. The radical central elite (Akazu) and its Interahamwe paramilitary group sought to target moderate Hutus in the southern districts. The distribution in genocidal violence demonstrates a remarkable divide between northern and southern Hutu.

Many attempt to attribute the scale of participation in the violence to material-based interests and rational calculations. Indeed many Hutu participants were swayed into killing based on the promise of greater status and material wealth from looting, political standing and seizure of land. However, to attribute the genocide to a "resource crunch" or simple criminal behaviour ignores the intricacy of what constructivists identify as a pathological social system. As Mamdani argues, the violence was clearly political and not criminal or class oriented: "the violence did not pit the poor against the rich. If anything, it divided the poor – and the rich – into antagonist groups: Hutu against Tutsi."[17]

The post-genocide social system in Rwanda is experiencing of a government led policy of ethnic de-construction. The aforementioned policy of "Rwandaness" suggests that many, at least in the Tutsi dominated government, believe that the fundamental social differences are based on ethnic identity. A quick and easy denunciation of these identities at the level of national policy does seem to be filtering to the communal level. In post-genocide Rwandan society, religion is now a component of the social system that can be used as a force for change instead of an imposition of tradition and violence. Religion can change and redefine ethnic group boundaries. Both in context of the genocide and post-genocide society, is exclusive of Rwandans but inclusive of both Hutus and Tutsis.

III. Islam in Rwanda

There has been very little written on the Muslim community in Rwanda. They represent an extremely small proportion of the population and historical detail on the growth of Islam in

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[17] Mamdani 2001: 202.

this region is scarce. However, if the history of conflict in Rwanda tells us anything it is that no minority is too small to be significant.

Islam in Central Africa

The growth of Islam in the neighbouring areas of Rwanda, comprising the Central African countries of the Congo, Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania, stemmed from trade caravans originating from the Swahili coastal regions of Eastern Africa. In the 1830s and 1840s caravans began to penetrate the African interior in response to a steady increase in the demand for ivory and slaves. This trade was almost completely dominated by Swahili Muslims who experienced great difficulty in reaching and impacting local communities. Therefore, the number of inland African people affected was small.[18] Few local Africans adopted Islam and those who did were among the immediate entourage of Arab and Swahili merchants.[19] The Kingdom of Buganda, the dominant region of what is now known as Uganda, was most heavily influenced by Islam. Several kings, particularly the Kabaka Mutesa, took a personal and political interest in the Muslim traders. He studied the Quran and had portions of it translated from Arabic into the local language.[20] By the time of Mutesa's death in 1884 the positions of converted Muslims in Buganda was threatened by the increasing presence of Christian missionaries. With the assistance of the Imperial British East Africa Company, the "wars of religion" saw the victory of Christians over Muslims.[21]

It was not until the British and German colonial administrations took hold that Islam was able to penetrate further into the interior kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi. Once the

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[18] David Sperling (additional material provided by Jose H. Kagabo). "The Coastal Hinterland and Interior of East Africa" in History of Islam in Africa. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall L. Pouwels (eds). Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000: 287
[19] Ibid: 289.
[20] Ibid: 292.
[21] Ibid: 293.

administrative centers were discovered they attracted an influx of Muslims traders. Therefore the

influence of Islam was most prevalent in the administrated and increasingly urbanized areas.[22]

The result in these areas was that Muslims and non-Muslims learned to coexist, unlike the

coastal areas where Muslim communities were much more segregated from the hinterland.

Growth and Conversion to Islam in Rwanda

Muslim merchants and slave traders had a difficult time penetrating Rwanda because of

the centralized control of the Mwami (king). This system allowed for the kingdom to mobilize a

military resistance extremely quickly when faced with an undesired external influence.[23] Aside

from the marginal influence of merchants, the most serious influx of Muslims into Rwanda was

in 1908. The dominance asserted by Christian missionaries in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and

Sudan resulted in the flight of their local Muslim communities to neighbouring areas, including

Rwanda where Catholicism had not yet taken such a strong hold.[24]

The merchants, traders, and newly converted Rwandans were primarily restricted to the

Biryogo neighbourhood of Kigali, where the Al-Fatah mosque now stands (built in 1913).[25] The

local strand of Islam was restricted to the practices, customs and language of Swahili and

Rwandan Muslims had little to no contact with Mecca or other leading centers of Islam.[26] The

medium of conversation and religious instruction was and remains Swahili; in Muslim schools

the study of the Swahili language is compulsory. However, when a convert to Islam becomes

"Swahili" this indicates not just a linguistic switch but a change s/he undergoes from an ethnic to

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[22] Ibid: 295.
[23] Christopher C. Taylor. <u>Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994.</u> Oxford: Berg, 1999:37
[24] Rodrique Ngowi. "Rwandan Muslims". Associated Press. November 07, 2002. [on-line] [available:http://www. Mpac.org/]
[25] Ibid.
[26] Marina Tolmacheva. Review of Jose Kagabo. <u>L'Islam et les 'Swahili' au Rwanda</u>. Paris: Editions de L'Ecole des hautes etudes ne sciences socials, 1988. in *African Studies Review,* Vol 33 No 1, April 1990: 179.

cultural-religious identity.[27] Therefore this is an early indication of the distinctness of Rwandan Muslims from the majority of Christian or animist Rwandans. Not only were they set apart as a religious group but linguistically and culturally their identity was Muslim and not Hutu or Tutsi. For most of the twentieth century Muslims represented only approximately one per cent of the total population – being numerically deficient meant that Muslims were reluctant to divide themselves ethnically.[28] Muslims were a "socially marginal people and this reinforce(d) a strong sense of community identification which supersede(d) ethnic tags."[29]

Conversion among Rwandans was primarily in communities that existed on the margins or had been uprooted in some manner. This included commoners and landless peasants. Many Muslims believed that converting would bring them riches through increased access to trade. Paradoxically conversion also meant less access to education (particularly that provided by the West) and limited employment possibilities.[30] While the Muslim population of pre-genocide Rwanda remained small it become increasingly institutionalised and more active in civil society. Currently, there are several Muslim schools, maddrasses, and a Muslim Association of Rwanda that helps new Muslims in learning about their faith. The community is mobilized by the leadership of Sheik Salih Habimana who has ensured the growth of mosques in nearly all of the counties, cities, and towns.[31]

Muslims have become more politically active through the non-ethnic based Democratic Islamic Party (PDI). It is the only political party with a religious component and claims to have

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[27] Ibid: 179.
[28] Gerard Prunier. <u>The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide.</u> New York: Columbia University Press, 1995: 253.
[29] Ibid: 253.
[30] Tomacheva 2002: 179.
[31] Laurie Goering. "Islam Blooms in Rwanda Genocide's Wake". Chicago Tribune. August 5, 2002. [on-line] [available:http://www.zawaj.com]

non-Muslim members.[32] The PDI participated in a power-sharing arrangement under the Hutu

dominated Habyarimana party in order to present a more solid front against a growing opposition

before the Arusha Accords in 1994.[33] Political links with extremist Hutu parties were severed

after the genocide and during the recent 2004 Presidential elections the PDI lent their support to

the incumbent President Kagame.

Islam During and After the Genocide

Muslim communities played an essential and uncommon role during the genocide: they

provided safe havens for both Tutsis and Hutus.   For the most part Muslims were not

participants or even complicit in the genocide. Muslims were regarded by everyone as a group

apart and not to be targeted in the violence. For many they were not even considered Rwandans

because they were Muslim. Whereas in most communities neighbours and friends targeted each

other, Muslim families provided safe havens to strangers. A Tutsi widow and mother of three

hid with a Muslim family and stated: "If a Hutu Muslim tried to kill someone hidden in our

neighbourhoods, he would first be asked to take the holy Quran and tear it apart to renounce his

faith…. No Muslim dared to violate the holy book, and that saved a lot of us."[34] Many

testimonies of survivors who were saved by Muslims have been documented in the African

Rights report published in 1994.[35] The provision of safe havens during the genocide has

changed the national view of Muslims who are now considered as Rwandan as everyone else.

Authorities have allowed them to expand their propagation activities and teach more Rwandans

about the Muslim faith.[36]

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[32] U.S. Department of State. "Rwanda: International Religious Freedom Report 2002" Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and labor. October 7, 2002. [on-line] [available:http://www.state.gov]
[33] Prunier 1995: 253.
[34] Ngowi 2002.
[35] African Rights. Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance. London: African Rights, 1994.
[36] Islamic Voice. "Rwanda Wakes Up To Islam." December 1999. [on-line] [available:http://www.zawaj.com]

Rwanda's post-genocide society has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of conversions to Islam, among both Hutus and Tutsis. The Muslim population is now estimated to be as high as fourteen per cent of the total 8.2 million Rwandans: double the pre-genocide Muslim population.[37] Several factors account for this dramatic demographic change. First, Islamic institutional and national presence presents a stark contrast to the Catholic Church who is largely seen as complicit in the genocide. Many of the highest ranked Hutu priests and clergymen have been tried in local courts and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) for inciting Hutus to kill Tutsis and providing false safe havens for Tutsis so they could be sought out and killed more efficiently.[38] Second, Tutsis who were offered safe havens are converting to Islam after learning more about the faith and developing a profound respect for their protectors. Additionally, they hope that their conversion will protect them from further attacks. Jean Pierre Sagahutu is a Tutsi who converted to Islam after being offered a safe haven. He states that "When they pray, Hutu and Tutsi are in the same mosque. There is no difference. I needed to see that."[39] Third, Hutus are converting in search of a new spiritual healing. Knowing of the blood on their own hands, they join Tutsis in converting to save their souls and also in fear of reprisals.

The Rwandan Jihad: Struggle for Healing

The Muslim community has played an integral role in the post-genocide reconciliation process. The Interfaith Commission for Re-integration of Rwanda is headed by an Anglican Archbishop and the Muslim leader, Habimana. The goal of the commission is to "seek ways and

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[37] Emily Wax. "Islam Attracting Many Survivors of Rwanda Genocide" in Washington Foreign Post Service. September 23, 2002: A10.

[38] The title of Philip Gourevitch's book is taken from a letter written by a Tutsi Adventist clergy to Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, the head of Rwandna Seventh-day Adventist Church who faced trial at the ICTR. The letter informed him that "tomorrow we will be killed with families" and sought help from the church. The response was " "you must be eliminated. God doesn't want you anymore." See, Philip Gourevitch. We Wish to Inform that Tomorrow we will be Killed with uur Families: Stories from Rwanda. New York: Picador, 1998.

[39] Wax 2003: A10.

means of ending ethnic animosity while promoting dialogue and the free expression of all people."[40] Furthermore, mosques represent one of the few places where genuine reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis is taking place. The community has also withstood challenges for negative change. A small group of Pakistanis who visited Rwanda frequently had funded a group of local Islamic fundamentalists who attempted to take control of a mosque after the genocide. The Muslim Association of Rwanda kicked them out of the community.[41]

Muslims have viewed the reconciliation process with a remarkably different lens that non-Muslim Rwandans. A recent convert to the faith stated: "reconciliation is not necessary for Muslims in Rwanda, because we do not view the world through a racial or ethnic lens."[42] Muslims have nevertheless recognized their role in the need to reconcile Hutus and Tutsis. Habimana explains that "we have our own jihad, and that is our war against ignorance between Hutu and Tutsi. It is our struggle heal… our jihad is to start respecting each other and living as Rwandans and as Muslims."[43] The Muslim community is as it was in the early days of the twentieth century: willing and desiring to live amongst non-Muslims and to be considered Rwandan all the same. The government's policy of "Rwandaness" was designed to promote harmony among those who are still divided by ethnic identity, however, it has also allowed the Muslim community who were never divided in such a way, to be considered as equals with Catholic Muslims.

Concerns over a militant Islam developing in Rwanda has been noted among the international community. The spread of radical Islamic fundamentalists from northern Africa into Sub-Saharan Africa has garnered considerable attention. The international crackdown on

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[40] Afrol News. "Rwanda religious unity discussed". July 8 2003. [on-line] [available:http://www.afrol.com]
[41] Ngowi 2002.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Wax 2003: A10.

Islamic extremism has sent many students from the madrassas in Pakistan to Africa where they are gaining influence among communities and with political leaders. A push for expanding Islamic law (sharia) is evident in Tanzania and Kenya and increasingly arrests of radicals have been made in Malawi, Zambia and South Africa.[44] There have been speculations that some of the madrasses in Rwanda are receiving funding from Saudi Arabia and that there are links between Al-Qaeda and President Kagame and his inner circle. Suspicions are based on the training of Rwandan troops by Al-Qaeda cells in Somalia and Eritrea and Kagame's central role in a "web of international terrorism, arms trafficking, illegal mineral trade, invasion and civil war" dating back to years before the genocide.[45]

Rwandan Muslims are aware of this newly consolidated concern over Islamic fundamentalism: "I know people in America think Muslims are terrorists, but for Rwanda they were our freedom fighters during the genocide."[46] The persistent levels of poverty, spread of AIDS and the violent history of genocide may be fertile ground for fundamentalism, however, this concern is notably absent among Rwandans themselves. The Muslim community has convinced Rwandans at large that the divided fabric of their society provides a natural constituency for a jihad that struggles to heal.[47]

IV. Post-Conflict Reconciliation and the 'Boundaries' of Islam

Addressing the role of Islam in post-genocide Rwanda should not be overstated both in terms of its potential positive or negative contributions. It is unlikely that Muslims will surpass the number of Catholics or that the elimination of ethnic identities will be solely attributed to the growth of a new religious identity. However, Islam can contribute significantly to conflict

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[44] Paul Marshall. "Radical Islam's Move on Africa" in Washington Post. October 16, 2003: A25.
[45] AfroAmerica Network. "Kagame links with Al-Qaeda probed by USA". August 10, 2002. [on-line] [available:http://www.abarundi.org]
[46] Wax 2003: A10
[47] Ibid: A10.

resolution, prevention, and reconciliation without bringing a substantial portion of Rwandan society into its fold. Its presence in both urban and rural areas will show local populations that the coexistence of Hutus and Tutsis as one collective identity is possible. The role of Islam in this process should be assessed in two ways: the role of religion, specifically Islam, in post-conflict scenarios; and from a theoretical perspective that suggests that Muslim communities have been capable of changing group boundaries and thus deconstructing ethnicity.

The dual nature of religion - as both a catalyst for conflict and a unifier in its resolution – has made many hesitant to use religion as a method of conflict resolution. Said and Funk state:

> "Religion is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g., freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace."[48]

In the context of conflict religion can establish the "criteria or frames of reference for determining the rightness and wrongness of events." [49] The Rwandan genocide left a society where many believe Christianity to be a tool of violence and destruction, and Islam as source of protection and healing. While this is perhaps simplistic and dichotomising, for those who converted this was the perceived choice. Ironically, because one religion played such a shocking and complicit role in the genocide, and alternative religion can present itself as a source of reconciliation.

Many attempts have been made to differentiate Christianity from Islam in regards to their views on peace and peace building. For Muslims, "peace is understood to imply not only an absence of oppression and tumult, but also a presence of justice and conditions for human

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[48] Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk. "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution" in *Peace and Conflict Studies,* Vol 9 Issue 1, May 2002: 37.
[49] Ibid: 38.

flourishing."[50] Rwandan Muslims have been at the forefront of advocating a proactive

communal approach to reconciliation, as opposed to the mere absence of violence between Hutus

and Tutsis. Furthermore, "Islamic conflict resolution is fundamentally a social phenomenon,

authoritative in form and group-oriented in emphasis… its focus is more on relationships than

formal arrangements."[51] From this we can also find relevance among Rwandan Muslims whose

participation in the inter-faith commission and the use of mosques and madrassas as places of

meeting and healing among Hutus and Tutsis is increasing.

The challenge for Islam in Rwanda will be its ability to bridge gaps with non-Muslims in

Rwanda. Its history is one of growth despite marginalization amidst a strong Catholic majority.

This pattern of relations has become easier with increased religious tolerance and understanding

of Islam amongst the government and local populations. Additionally, Muslim leadership has

demonstrated an essential willingness to communicate and collaborate with the Christian

leadership. The ability of Islam to affect reconciliation will depend very heavily on its

relationships with all Rwandans and its ability to show the unity of its membership.

From a theoretical perspective it is useful to look at the growing Muslims communities as

an example of changing social boundaries. If ethnic identities were constructed, whether by elite

ethnic entrepreneurs or by a complex social web, they can be deconstructed. Ethnic group

membership does not have "irreversible criteria or is of an ascriptive and involuntary nature" and

"even religious conversion does not necessarily mean the complete relinquishment of all

previous beliefs, practices or group attachments."[52] However, religious conversion is a social

boundary change that can make ethnic differences seem less immutable and polarizing.

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[50] Ibid: 42.
[51] Douglas M. Johnston. "Religion and Conflict Resolution" in *Fletch Forum of World Affairs,* Volume 20, 1996: 58.
[52] Anthony H. Richmond. "Ethnic nationalism: social science paradigms" in *International Social Science Journal*, February 1987: 4

Horowtiz elaborates on the importance of social groups and changing boundaries within the constructivist school of thought. He states: "intergroup boundaries are constructed in social life just as they are constructed in the laboratory. The scope of group boundaries is not foreordained and boundary change is common."[53]   Many recently converted Muslims may consider themselves on some level to be Hutu or Tutsi especially when these identities are imposed on them by non-Muslim friends and relatives. However, their ethnic identity does not divide amongst themselves and is not subject to the manipulation of either their leaders or other social forces. Rejecting ethnic divisions in the Muslim community is not a product of the genocide and was present since the initial growth period in conversion. The genocide merely reinforced the stable boundaries of religion against the destructive ones of ethnicity.

Islam will not be able to sway those who seek material gain from ethnic conflict or those continue to deny that Muslims can ever be "Rwandan". The majority that participated in the genocide did not do so upon such assumptions. However, conversions to Islam reflect a growing perception among some Rwandans that social boundaries can be changed. In particular it reflects a refusal to submit to an inevitable connection between ethnicity and conflict and ethnicity and identity. The reconciliation process in post-genocide Rwanda hinges on many things and many will dispute that ethnicity, present or absent, will make a difference. Ending impunity, alleviating poverty, demilitarisation and political liberalisation are among the many monumental tasks faced by the national government and local communities. However, the history of Rwanda teaches that a small minority can either lead the country out of despair or sink it deeper into a cycle of fear and violence. The growth of Islam has shown a unique ability to foster reconciliation among two ethnic groups who had previously known no other identity than their ethnicity. As the Rwandan

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[53] Donald Horowitz. "Structure and Strategy in Ethnic Conflict." Prepared for the Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington DC, April 20-21, 1998:18

jihad continues to take its course the deconstruction of ethnic identities in this Muslim

community will provide new tools for changing social boundaries.

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