BECOMING RWANDAN: PATHS TO INTEGRATION

FOR THE POTTERS

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Anthropology

by
Anna Rushton Kamanzi
Spring 2016
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DEDICATION

To Bruce
My sounding board, my translator, my husband
My sample of one.
I love you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and sincerest appreciation to Dr. David A. Eaton, Jr. whose mentorship, kindness, support, phenomenal teaching, and countless hours of advice have meant more to me than I can ever say. Your introduction to this beautiful continent has provided a means for endless exploration and adventure. I am honored to count you among my friends and I look forward to continuing to work together in the future. I would also like to extend my sincerest thanks to my second committee member, Dr. Loker. Your patience and guidance throughout this process have been invaluable.

To my mom and Janice, thank you for your patience, support, and help with my daughter while I completed classes, research, and writing. Your hard work and dedication has been nothing short of inspiring. Amaya, thank you for your amazing spirit and willingness to move across the world with me. We sacrificed a great deal so I could pursue this degree and research project and I am forever grateful that you were by my side through it all. To my husband, thank you for your tireless help with this project and your support at home so I could finish writing.

Dr. Dizard, and Dr. Brazeal have guided and inspired me throughout my time as a graduate student at Chico State. Your poignant observations, insistence on betterment, and constant encouragement has made me a stronger, more capable, and better prepared anthropologist. Thank you to the entire Anthropology Department for
always supporting my work and for providing a nurturing academic home for many years.

Finally, to the Twa community and all of the Rwandans who have welcomed and encouraged my research, murakoze cyane. I have enjoyed the friendships, laughter, and honesty we shared and I look forward to meeting again.
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The interplay of economy, ethnicity, and stigma has contributed to a contemporary condition of material precarity and exclusion for Twa ‘Potters’ in Rwanda, inheritors of distinct long-term foraging lifeways shared with other Pygmy groups across equatorial Africa. Though now marginalized, Twa have been symbolically central in the development of Rwandan social systems and identities as a pole of aesthetic judgments, cultural differentiation, and ethnogenic processes. This thesis explores the Twa’s transition from a semi-nomadic, free-foraging lifestyle which allowed for opportunistic trade and relations with sedentary neighbors to one of forced relocation in village settings. Emphasis is placed on understanding the challenges the Twa face as they attempt to make the transition from forest-dwelling forager to Rwandan citizen in contemporary Rwanda. Post-genocide law and development policy aims to ameliorate stigma and suffering for the Twa and other groups after devastating war fueled by ethnic
divisions. In particular, the elimination of ethnicity from public discourse attempts to reshape social bonds, collective identity, and individual opportunity in a newly integrated country. What are the impacts of these policies on ‘Potters’ who increasingly seek their livelihoods far from forest reserves and in towns and cities in Rwanda? How is the intimate experience of stigma reimagined, renegotiated, removed, or reinforced?

Examining anthropological themes of ethnicity, stigma, and autochthony, and drawing on scholars of the Great Lakes region, this thesis examines these problematic ventures of this autochthonous minority in a rapidly modernizing, urbanizing, non-ethnic Rwanda.
CHAPTER I

STUDYING RWANDA’S TWA COMMUNITY

Introduction

Densely populated, extraordinarily youthful, and predominantly rural are all descriptions which come to mind when thinking about the population of Rwanda. It is the most densely populated country on the African mainland with 459 people per square kilometer of land area. Rwanda’s thousand hills are home to a population of more than 11 million growing at 2.35% annually (World Bank 2014). The autochthonous Twa people number less than 1% of the total population, and while the exact number of Twa in Rwanda is not known, it is estimated to be between 33,000 and 35,000 (IWGIA 2015).

The Twa are former forest foragers and hunters who are one of the many Pygmy groups in equatorial Africa. Their ancestral homes were in the montane transitional forests surrounding Lake Kivu. Today they live throughout Rwanda, but are most concentrated in the Southern and Western Provinces and often live apart from non-Twa. Transitioning from a semi-nomadic, free-foraging lifestyle which allowed for opportunistic trade and relations with sedentary neighbors to one of forced relocation in village settings has brought about many challenges for the Twa. The main concern of this thesis is to understand and document these challenges as they continue to be felt in Rwanda today. As an autochthonous and stigmatized minority the Twa face unique
difficulties because of their identity and history in a hierarchical society. Although Rwanda has attempted to eliminate ethnic divisionism, the situation of the Twa remains precarious.

Problems of ethnicity and inequality in Rwanda persist despite multifaceted attempts by the government to eliminate both. Today many Twa face marginalization, poor health and living conditions, a loss of livelihood, and dislocation from traditional territories. They struggle to find their place in the new Rwanda and often have poor access to the very programs which aim to help them. There are noticeable differences in the lives and conditions of urban and rural Twa, though both face challenges of meeting basic needs. Many Twa in rural areas face inadequate housing, stigmatization, a lack of food security, difficulty attending school, and underemployment. Their urban counterparts face many similar challenges, but gain from having greater access to resources, increased employment opportunities, education, and more shared spheres of activity with their non-Twa neighbors.

As a result of the elimination of ethnic designations from public discourse, the Twa are now called by other names in Rwanda. They are sometimes called Potters, which refers to a livelihood common to this group. They are also called the Historically Marginalized People (HMP), which is their most common English designation in Rwanda and refers to their history as social outcasts. They also have names such as abasangwabutaka or abasigajwe inyuma n’amateka, which refer to their status as first-comers to the land or those left behind by history, respectively. Finally, Batwa is the Bantu name for this ethnic group. “Ba” means people in many Bantu languages and Batwa is the plural of Twa people. To align myself with scholarly resources and use the
term which most accurately reflects the group I am referring to I will use the term Twa, but all of the above names can be used interchangeably.

This thesis will explore the social life of Twa people in Rwanda by looking at their history as a forest people making the transition to citizen in contemporary Rwanda. I look at their place in Rwandan social structures over time and the evolving stigma and marginalization against them. While a great deal has been written on Rwandan history, ethnicity, politics, and the genocide, Twa voices are often absent. The great landmarks of scholarship on Rwanda often devote little space to the experiences of the Twa (see Newbury 1988; Prunier 1995; Uvin 1998; Des Forges 1999; Mamdani 2001; Vansina 2005; and others). It is my intention to give a voice to the experiences of Twa people while placing them in the historical and contemporary social context of Rwanda.

This chapter will begin with a vignette of a Twa woman, whom I will call Claudine, living in a rural village and struggling to meet her family’s basic needs each day (see Figure 1). Her story highlights a number of common problems faced by Twa people which will be discussed in the following section. I will then discuss my objectives, methods, and approaches to this research. Finally, I will give a brief outline of the literature to be reviewed in this thesis.

Encountering the Everyday – Struggles for the Twa

Claudine rises when the sun is just starting to peek out from behind the rolling green hills. Careful not to wake the three children sleeping next to her on the floor, she grabs her pagne and wraps it tightly around her waist. The moist dawn air is biting and she shivers under her thin t-shirt. She slips on her tattered sandals and steps outside the
Figure 1. Twa woman with pottery in her home.
Claudine’s single room mud-brick house she shares with her children. Thankfully there is just enough water left in the small yellow jerry can to wash her hands and face before beginning her day. Sandrine, her oldest daughter, will make the trek to the water pump near town to refill it when she wakes up.

In this diffuse light of dawn Claudine begins her journey to the swampy marshlands in the valley. The hour-long walk is cold and quiet. By the time she arrives the sun has risen above the thousand green hills of Rwanda and is beginning to warm the mountain air. She wades into the tall grass and begins digging quietly. Gathering clay is no easy task. Plunging into the muddy grey hole with her bare hands, she pulls up hunks of clay and sets them aside. Working quickly, she glances around to be sure no one has seen her. Taking clay from someone else’s land is stealing and getting caught would mean a fine that she cannot afford to pay. When Claudine has gathered all she can carry she pounds the clay together into one large mass. Her arms and feet are covered with a thick layer of drying mud. The front of her clothes are wet and splattered. Ashamed of her tattered clothes and unkempt appearance, she attempts to brush off the dirt, but it only smears across her skirt. “It is no wonder others avoid us!” she thinks to herself. Lifting the heavy clay onto her head, she begins the walk home.

After depositing the clay on the cool dirt floor of her house Claudine must leave again, this time to Jean-Baptiste’s farm on the next hill over. Jean-Baptiste has a sizeable piece of land where he grows beans, corn, cabbage, and potatoes. He sometimes hires day laborers during this time of year to help tend his large fields. Claudine knows if she can get there early enough she may have a chance to work until afternoon. It is hard work, but he pays enough to feed herself and her children for the day. She may even have
enough left over to buy a few pieces of charcoal. Today is her lucky day. Jean-Baptiste agrees to pay her five hundred francs for tending to his fields.

Several hours of hoeing fields in the midday sun leaves Claudine tired and hungry. Her calloused hands are aching, but she is thankful her family will eat today. She walks slowly to the small market in town with her day’s pay. Five hundred francs won’t buy much, but it will be enough to satisfy the bellies of her hungry children. She purchases three green bananas, four potatoes, and a small bag of charcoal from a woman at the roadside market. This exhausts her money, but she doesn’t mind. A daily meal is never guaranteed for Claudine and her family so she is pleased that her children will not go to bed hungry again tonight.

The sun is beginning to set as Claudine walks home. Alphonse, the old drunkard who lives in her village, shuffles to catch up to her. He begs her for money to buy food, slurring his words as he grabs his stomach. He is not wearing any shoes and the pungent smell of sweat and alcohol radiates from his body. Claudine knows any money this man gets goes straight to the bar for urwagwa, the local banana beer. She refuses him and quickens her pace. She has no more money and would not share it with him even if she did. Eventually he gives up and turns around to bother the next woman on the road. Claudine smiles at the thought of someone asking her for money. She has resorted to begging on more than one occasion and surely Alphonse knows how poor she is.

Upon returning home Claudine finds her two youngest children, Marcel and Jeanne, playing outside. Sandrine, ten years old, has left the house to fetch more water. Marcel and Jeanne jump up with excitement when they see their mother is carrying food. They rush into the house to get the family’s only cooking pot and grab the charcoal from
their mother and begin making a small fire outside. When Sandrine returns they wash the potatoes and begin cutting the food to be boiled. Claudine goes inside the dark house to search for the few sambaza she saved from last week. The children love these small, dried fish and she wishes she had more to give them.

As their only meal of the day is cooking, Claudine returns to the clay she brought home that morning. She pulls off a piece and begins shaping it into a small, round ball. As her sore hands mold the clay she feels lucky that she wasn’t caught for stealing. The land in the valley was purchased a few years ago, but the swampy area where the clay is found remains vacant. Still, she knows she could receive a fine for stealing, or even worse, be put in jail. The risk of getting caught stealing clay isn’t worth the reward of selling the cooking pots she is making, but she has few alternatives. Those few francs are the only thing to sustain her small family many days.

After eating, Claudine shapes three more pots and sets them aside to dry. With the introduction of metal ware and plastics few people buy these vessels anymore. Clay cooking pots (Figure 2) are for poor people like herself and selling things to poor people is hardly worthwhile, but selling them is her only hope of making a few hundred francs at the market. A few hundred francs means staving off hunger for one more day. She lays her exhausted body down on the floor next to tiny Jeanne, her youngest child. She dreams of sending her high-spirited daughter to school in the future, but for now one more day is all Claudine can hope for.
Claudine is a Twa woman living in the rural countryside of Rwanda. She left school at the age of nine so that she could help her mother at home. Her husband died a few years ago and she is left to care for her three children alone. Now twenty-seven, Claudine has few options to support her family. She struggles to earn enough to feed her children every day. She supplements the intermittent income she receives as a day laborer on nearby farms by making and selling traditional cooking pots at the local market a few days per month. She is paid only one hundred francs per pot, about fifteen cents. While the time and energy that goes into pottery making is surely not worth the meager price received for her craft, she continues this traditional practice anyway.
Precarity and Worse

I met many people like Claudine during my time in Rwanda. The precarity of Claudine’s situation and the slenderness of her resources is certainly tragic, but it could be much worse. In fact, it is much worse for many Twa people in Rwanda’s countryside. The distance from resources is often greater and more time is needed to access basic necessities. Some villages are more than an hour’s walk to a potable water source and several hours away from a supply of clay, making it impossible to work and procure clay on the same day. Forced relocation into village settings has further disadvantaged many Twa people by alienating them from the environments with which they are most familiar.

Claudine and her family are certainly vulnerable now, but their situation could deteriorate very quickly. One bout of malaria, one fine for stealing clay, or one injury could send Claudine’s teetering family over the edge. I encountered many families during my time in Rwanda who had already been pushed over that edge. Malnutrition, including kwashiorkor, is commonplace in some villages, as are parasites, alcoholism, and violence. Entire households may rely on begging to support large families who share small, inadequate homes. Income-generating opportunities are almost nonexistent in some villages and pottery-making remains a stigmatized profession. For now Claudine is lucky to be young, healthy, and able-bodied.

Claudine’s day highlights a number of problems faced by Twa people in Rwanda. Nearly all of the villages I visited were made up of large families living in poor and cramped conditions. Small, mud-brick government-built homes which measured approximately four by six meters often housed between five and ten people. Many houses had one wall dividing it into two rooms, but some had no interior walls at all. A lack of
clothing, shoes, bedding, and household items are most noticeable. Ragged clothing and shoes are an obvious discomfort, but it also brings forward another problem faced by the Twa – discrimination. Poor hygiene and an unkempt appearance perpetuate discrimination against the Twa on the basis of the idea that they are backward and unclean.

Marginalization

Ethnic stereotyping has been prevalent in Rwanda since precolonial times. Today, Twa people are often perceived by other Rwandans as being undeveloped, unintelligent, and animal-like. Begging is commonly associated with Twa people because of their history of poverty, but it is certainly not limited to just Twa. Food prices have increased in Rwanda over the past few years and sustaining a family costs more now than ever, but begging only increases the stigma against them. Several people in villages I visited expressed a need for basic materials, such as soap and wash basins to clean their clothes. They felt that this would help not only their appearance and hygiene, but also their self-confidence. They said they would be more likely to look for work and interact with non-Twa people if they had clean bodies and presentable clothes. Additionally, clean clothes and uniforms would help school children who are often teased for being smelly, dirty, and poor.

Pottery Making

The question of pottery-making is a complicated one. Twa people have been making and selling or trading pots for generations. Historically favoring immediate returns on labor, the Twa were able to make pottery in their leisure time in addition to hunting and collecting forest products for trade. Now, living in a capitalist market
economy where plastics and metal cookware are ubiquitous, clay pots are no longer desired. Only poor people continue to use these for cooking, and few are sold each month. Despite this fact, every single Twa community I visited had members who still made pottery.

As mentioned previously, getting clay is often a difficult and dangerous task. Pottery making is time consuming and requires additional materials, such as firewood or charcoal, to be completed. A single pot can take days to be ready for market because of the drying and firing processes. That pot can then be sold for 50-100 Rwandan Francs, equivalent to ten or fifteen cents. Unless several were sold in a day on a regular basis it would be nearly impossible to support an individual, let alone a family, on this income. Furthermore, the time and labor needed to produce these pots takes away from other potential income generating activities. So why, then, do people continue this practice? I received many answers to that question, all different and none fully explanatory. I suspect it is a combination of desperation for income and nostalgia for tradition and a time when life wasn’t so hard.

Education

None of Claudine’s three children attend school; unfortunately this situation is commonplace for Twa children. As a part of the rigorous development goals of Rwanda’s Vision 2020, primary education is free to all families. While this is a generous investment in Rwanda’s future, this goal is difficult to realize for many families. Uniforms, books, and school supplies are required to be purchased for each child and school children must be adequately fed to be able to perform in school. Requirements may be minimal in the first few years of primary school, but they increase as children get further along in their
education. Many adults I met left primary school between their fourth and sixth years. Uneducated or undereducated people are at a great disadvantage later in life when they are searching for employment, and most resort to cultivating for others.

The struggles Claudine faces each day are clear. She is consistently challenged to find ways to make money to feed herself and her children. Her family lacks the means to buy basic necessities such as clothes and soap, but instead must focus on ways to procure food. Essential resources are located at a distance from her home and time is always needed to collect them. Long hours of hard work are all she can hope for to support her family, but this leaves little time for anything else and only generates enough income to last one day. Like many Twa, Claudine is caught between survival and stigma. Pottery making, a tattered appearance, and begging all contribute to the stigmatization of Twa people. However, chronic poverty, marginalization, and the disease threaten their survival.

Objectives

After making my first trip to Rwanda and visiting Twa communities, it became apparent that the lifeways I observed were different than non-Twa. The history of marginalization among the Twa was at the forefront of my thoughts during my fieldwork and I was interested in knowing how this history has shaped their contemporary social position. I wanted to know if ethnic discrimination still existed, and if so, to what degree. By comparing urban and rural Twa communities, I felt better able to better understand which factors contribute to social integration and quality of life. Finally, I aimed to
analyze the effects of post-genocide policies regarding development, ethnicity, and reconciliation on Twa communities.

To understand the complexities that have contributed to the contemporary situation of the Twa, I look at the history of social stratification in Rwanda. I will explore anthropological questions of ethnicity and cultural difference and their place in a postcolonial, post-conflict society. This thesis will examine the transition the Twa have made from forest-dwelling forager to Rwandan citizen as a stigmatized minority. Disdain and discrimination have been common problematic themes as the Twa exited the forests and settled on the peripheries of society. However, numerous strategies have been implemented to aid this community in the past twenty years and it is important to understand how they have affected Twa lives. This thesis will also examine and analyze those attempts to help the Twa escape severe poverty and integrate into Rwandan society.

My research concerns Rwanda’s legacy of ethnicity and its effect on people’s lives in a post-genocide context which has rejected their history of ethnic division and attempts to remove it from public discourse. Ethnicity has been eliminated from public discourse in the country and any talk of divisionism, especially based on ethnicity, has been made a crime punishable by law. However, the problems of ethnicity often endure and become more obvious when we look at the case of the Twa as an entire group marginalized, still, ultimately because of their ethnicity.

Because little has been written in Anglophone scholarship regarding the Twa, my intention has been to gain insight into everyday experiences as they relate to identity and social position. I sought to go beyond common explanations of ethnicity in Rwanda to understand how and why the Twa find themselves on the peripheries of modern
Rwandan society. In this endeavor, I hope to allow for an alternate perspective with a
group that has been underexplored in ethnography and anthropology. This research
benefits from a thorough examination of the social history of the Twa, and Pygmy people
more generally, as well as an in-depth understanding of precolonial Rwandan history.

Fieldwork in Rwanda’s “Land of a
Thousand Hills”

Methods

I conducted fieldwork for this thesis over the course of three visits to Rwanda.
The initial two visits were for approximately one month each, the first in December of
2011 and the second in December of 2012. The third trip was an eleven-month intensive
field study beginning in August 2013. Support for this was provided by the Institute of
International Education and the U.S. Student Fulbright Commission.

In each of these visits to Rwanda, methods used were semi-structured
interviews, participant observation, and collaborative filmmaking. In an effort to better
understand the complexity of circumstances, I separated urban and rural Twa
communities to compare and contrast the challenges they face. Additionally, I worked
with a Rwandan NGO dedicated to the Twa community called COPORWA
(Communaute des Potiers du Rwanda). Careful participation and observation with
COPORWA included formal and informal discussions, attending various workshops,
field projects, daily office duties, and creating and reviewing publications and reports,
among other things.

Interviews and conversations were conducted with authorities who have a
direct impact on or contact with Twa communities, including village chiefs and the
Senator representing the Twa community in parliament. Open-ended interviews and informal conversations with non-Twa Rwandans were conducted and noted in my field journal. Additionally, audio-visual equipment was used to film and record many interviews and settings for the purpose of making a documentary film. A majority of interviews with Twa people were conducted in Kinyarwanda and immediately translated into English with the help of a translator. Many of these interviews were recorded onto audio-visual equipment and have been revisited several times. Interviews with COPORWA staff, non-Twa Rwandans, and other officials were conducted in English or French. Some of these were recorded and those that were not were noted in my field journal.

Subjects

The primary subjects of this thesis are autochthonous Twa people residing in Rwanda. The term autochthonous represents those who are “born from the soil.” It refers to a status of authentic belonging and origination; those who are not introduced from somewhere else (Geschiere 2009). The Great Lakes Twa not only were the first inhabitants of the forests surrounding Lake Kivu, but also believe they originate from there. Their identity and history are directly tied to belonging to those forests. It is in this sense that I have chosen the word autochthonous over indigenous. Hewlett rightfully states that nearly all African ethnic groups meet the World Bank’s criteria for indigenous status because they are all indigenous to the continent (Hewlett 2014:xxi). This term does not account for the unique “first people” status that most Pygmy groups should be accorded.
The International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) translates the French term *autochtone* as “indigenous” in English, making no distinction between the two words. Indeed, both words invoke connotations of belonging, but also marginality and colonization by immigrants. While there may be some debate among anthropologists over these terms, their uses and definitions, and their accuracy for a given group, I will use the term autochthonous to refer to the Twa (for more on this debate see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Geschiere 2009; Gausset et al 2011).

Participant observation and data collection was conducted in the capital city of Kigali as well as several locations in the Southern and Western Provinces of Rwanda. Face-to-face interviews, both on and off camera, were conducted over the course of my three field visits. Names and locations of interlocutors have been changed to protect confidentiality when possible. Location anonymity was not possible or necessary in all cases. In these circumstances names were changed if needed any potentially sensitive material was omitted. Because audio-visual film was used in many interviews my interlocutors were aware of their image, voice, and responses possibly being made public.

The age of my interlocutors ranged from school-aged children to elderly people. A majority of these people openly identified as belonging to the Twa ethnic group, although some ethnic identities remained vague. The staff of COPORWA and various authority figures are also included in these interviews and act as secondary subjects. These identities were not kept confidential because the people interviewed were speaking on behalf of their position. All agreed to talk without anonymity and again any potentially sensitive information is omitted from this text.
Objectives

The poverty level in Rwanda has been steadily decreasing over the past several years with both local and international aid and interventions designed to eliminate extreme poverty and increase economic security at the individual level. Yet the Twa continue to constitute the most impoverished and vulnerable groups in the country, with poor access to state services and many discrepancies between them and the general population. Thus, there is a need to question why this group continues to suffer when so many others seem to be slowly climbing out of poverty.

My research questions were centered on the concept of Twa ethnicity and social integration. I wanted to understand the challenges this group faces and what factors they see as contributing to their current circumstances. In addition to inquiring about their history, I wanted to know how they could move toward greater integration and prosperity in contemporary Rwanda. My questions also focused on the Twa’s relationship with local and national government, so I asked about access to and use of government social services including health care, housing, and education.

More generally, this thesis draws from many selected strands of scholarship including, anthropology and African studies, and addresses topics of ethnicity, social stratification, foragers, and violence as they pertain to Rwanda and the Great Lakes region of Africa. Specific literature will be considered and reviewed in subsequent chapters as it pertains to each topic.
Thesis Outline

This introduction has provided a descriptive presentation of the challenges many Twa people face on a daily basis. It has also introduced readers to a community in Rwanda whom they may never have heard of. This first chapter has discussed my objectives, methods used, and the purpose of my study. This thesis hereafter is divided into chapters addressing important aspects of my study.

Chapter II provides an overview of the history of scholarship regarding Pygmies in anthropology. It also discusses other Western scholarship and perspectives on representations of Pygmy people. I then examine the precolonial history of Rwanda and its social organization over time. I look at the Twa’s experience leaving the forest and making a life in villages. Their experiences during the genocide are also discussed. When possible, information gathered during my fieldwork is used alongside textual sources.

In Chapter III I draw on scholarship regarding ethnicity. I analyze the history of stigma against the Twa as it relates to notions of esteem and disgust in precolonial Rwandan judgements. Contemporary comparisons and narratives about marginalization are presented based on my fieldwork. National unity and reconciliation policies and programs are then explored, followed by the recent laws banning ethnicity from public life. Finally, I will look at stigma and marginalization as anthropological concepts and how they were viewed during my fieldwork.

Chapter IV covers the topics of development and civil society through an explanation of my experiences conducting fieldwork in the urban center of Kigali. It introduces the reader to COPORWA, the local NGO I worked with, and I share my first experiences in Rwanda. Chapter IV also introduces the pottery cooperative in Kigali
where I spent a great deal of time. I then go on to discuss the political dimensions of
development plans for Kigali.

Chapter V covers important aspects of my rural fieldwork, namely housing
dilemmas and the topic of marriage. As I explore rural life in Rwanda and introduce the
reader to the villages and experiences of my fieldwork, I take a look at two common
problems as experienced by the rural poor. Political change is examined to understand
how changing narratives and representations of rural people have evolved over time.
Voices from rural fieldwork are present throughout the chapter to highlight the daily
challenges faced by many Twa.

This thesis concludes with Chapter VI, which discusses my findings based on
the urban and rural comparative ethnographic research I conducted. I also examine the
contribution I have hoped to make to scholarship regarding the Twa. Finally, I explore
possible directions for future research in this region and ways forward for Twa
communities.
CHAPTER II

CHALLENGES IN REPRESENTATION
AND THE RETELLING OF HISTORY

Pygmy Representation in Western Scholarship:
Historical Overview

In reviewing the history of Western scholarship regarding people known as Pygmies, we can see various common themes. Many bodies of work exhibit a lack of understanding, misrepresentation, and support of racial categorization among scholars and others who have come across Pygmy groups. People of small stature, who have long captured the imaginations of adventurers, colonials, and intellectuals alike, have been used as pawns in European attempts at imperial domination of other Africans during the colonial period. They were studied and mythologized, at times becoming the basis for speculation about human evolution and the “missing link.” Pygmies are now research subjects for anthropologists, biologists, geneticists, and others who seem just as fascinated with the exoticism that Pygmies previously represented.

In fact, people known as ‘African Pygmies’ come from several distinct ethnic groups found throughout the forests of central Africa. These groups can be found in many African nations, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kinshasa), Rwanda, Uganda, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Cameroon, Burundi, Central African Republic, and Gabon (Figures 3 and 4). Widely acknowledged to be the autochthonous inhabitants
Figure 3. Political map of Central Africa.

Source: University of Texas Libraries, Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/central_africa_pol_97.jpg)

of this equatorial region, today’s ethnic groups include the Twa, BaMbuti, Efe, Baka, BaKola, Bagyeli, and BaMbendjelle, among others (Ba means ‘people’ in many Bantu languages). Aside from their short stature, these groups are often known for their rich music and dance and exceptional hunting, tracking, and trapping skills.

African Pygmy groups have lived as foragers, fishermen, craftsmen, and sometimes agriculturalists in and around the Congo Basin for thousands of years. They are not isolated, as some have previously described, but have had contact with other agriculturalist groups for generations (see Grinker 1994). Glottochronological data indicates that beginning around 3000 BCE Bantu language groups began splitting, which
Figure 4. Pygmy groups in Central Africa.


suggests that populations began fanning out across the equatorial region (Vansina 1990:52-53). Evidence for this expansion and the resulting contact between Pygmies and Bantu people is strongest when we look at comparative linguistic data. Although most Pygmy groups now speak the dominant Bantu language in their area, specialized vocabularies relating to forest products or techniques were likely adopted by non-Pygmy people from already present Pygmy groups (Bahuchet 2012:31).

The Bantu expansion is one of the largest human migrations in history. As people moved throughout the equatorial region, they came across small-scale groups of foraging Pygmies. Sometimes these forest specialists were absorbed into outside societies or they were left to themselves, but considered a linked group (Bahuchet 2012:17). No
group experienced this contact in exactly the same way. In some cases, Pygmies became clients in relationships with kings and chiefs. In other cases, they became partners in trade among agriculturalists.

Today, many Pygmies in equatorial Africa face heavy marginalization and stigmatization. Well-intentioned and often Western-driven conservation efforts have displaced many Pygmy groups from their ancestral forests and they are left to make a living in ways they are not accustomed to among a society that may not want them. As an example, Pygmies are often hired as trackers and hunters for the illegal bush meat trade or aid loggers who are cutting down the very forests they once inhabited. Of course, these conditions do not apply to all Pygmy groups across the equatorial region. However, I think it is more common than not to find Pygmies struggling to assimilate into sedentary lifestyles and eking out a living at the margins of society.

I would like to note here that I personally dislike the use of the term ‘Pygmy’ to describe the many distinct groups noted above because I believe it is often seen as pejorative and demeaning. It does not account for the differences in language, history, mythology, or culture which can vary dramatically among these groups. Also, once the term “Pygmy” is used, it brings with it assumptions of primitiveness and exoticism. It lumps people together who may have little in common except geographical region or stature. The social construction of the term “Pygmy” has served to legitimate racial categories and produce a misrepresentation of a variety of human groups.

Most often I think it is preferable to use designations which groups use themselves, such as Twa or Baka. When discussing “Pygmies” as a whole, I generally prefer to use the term ‘Forest People.’ However large-scale deforestation, changing life-
ways, and expulsion from traditional lands have made ‘forest people’ inaccurate as they no longer live in the forests. This would include the Twa, who are the topic of this thesis. In the absence of a suitable name for these groups, I will use the term ‘Pygmies’ to align myself with the sources I have drawn on.

Mythologizing Pygmies

“The pair were undoubtedly man and woman. In him was a mimicked dignity, as of Adam; in her the womanliness of a miniature Eve.”
Henry Morton Stanley, 1891

Early accounts of Pygmies can be found in ancient Egyptian records where small-statured people appear in courts as entertainers, reportedly brought from the headwaters of the Nile (Ballard 2006). In Homer’s epic poem, The Iliad, Pygmy men were engaged in a war with cranes (Homer ch. 3). Pygmies have resurfaced in Western literature several times after that, often as a source of legend and mystery.

Aristotle reported their presence in the African interior, and Herodotus, Ctesias, Ovid, and countless others rehearsed and embellished the Homeric scraps. These same fragments were duly received and respectfully repeated by mediaeval scholars, among them Saint Augustine, Albert Magnus and Isidore of Seville. European trade to the Bight of Benin in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries revived the dying embers of Pygmy reputation, and reports were documented of tiny men trading elephant tusks. (Ballard 2006:136)

English anatomist, Edward Tyson, reportedly analyzed the remains of a juvenile chimpanzee in 1699, believing they were a Pygmy man from the Congo (Ballard 2006). Studies like this furthered sensational fascinations with these “tiny men” who haunted the African forests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Because of their extreme physical differences in comparison with Europeans, Pygmies were often seen as non-human beings that represented to some “the missing link.” The earlier mythology
surrounding Pygmy groups created fertile ground for their status as primitive beings who were materially impoverished and thought to be lower on the evolutionary chain than modern humans. In fact, *The Birmingham Daily Mail* reported that a group of Pygmies on display in England were “the missing link between ape and man” (Ballard 2006:132).

Beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Europeans began exploring and colonizing the African mainland, the ‘Pygmy Paradigm’ was perpetuated even further (Klieman 2003:12-13). Often Pygmies were thought to be the surviving members of earlier stages of human evolution or remnants of pre-cultural humans. Evidence of the speculation surrounding Pygmies can be seen in many earlier works, some of which I will discuss here. Before doing so, it is important to understand the past uses of terms like ‘race’ in understanding the descriptions of Pygmy groups.

Race is a loaded term which has been used for nefarious reasons throughout the past. It has been used to separate and classify human beings, to designate some people as a different species, and to support European notions of superiority (Klieman 2003:13). That being said, it was also thought to be a valid scientific term for many years and was not always used for immoral purposes. My use of the term is only in the context of the scholarship which I am discussing. It is in the writings of nineteenth century anthropologists we sometimes find this term used as a way to distinguish one group, the so-called “smallest race of men” (Flower 1889).

From the late 1800s to the mid-1900s published material on the Pygmies focused on their absence of material culture, small stature, pre-cultural status, and other distinct physical attributes. Writers often conjured up images of the Heart of Darkness, the Dark Continent, or other unfavorable representations of Africa when discussing
Pygmy lives, territories, and morality. In the *Journal of the Royal African Society*, William Roome writes “They have lived for millennia in the eternal gloom of these primeval forests, and have sunk in character and physique almost as low as the wild animals themselves” (Roome 1936:266). Similarly English Captain Guy Burrows, describes Pygmies as “wandering wee Ishmaelites” and writes in his book, *Land of the Pygmies*:

> The low state of their mental development is shown by the following facts. They have no regard for time, nor have they any records or traditions of the past; no religion is known among them, not have they any fetish rites; they do not seek to know the future by occult means, as do their neighbors; in short, they are, to my thinking, the closest link with the original Darwinian anthropoid ape extant. - Burrows 1989

The use of Pygmies as a “sheet anchor for racial hierarchies and for putative sequences of human physical and social evolution” (Ballard 2006:133) served to further European domination of the African continent. By placing them at the bottom rung of the evolutionary ladder, colonial administrators were able to use them as a pre-cultural canvas by which they could compare the other African groups. This served to “prove” their top place in evolutionary terms by placing the masses of colonized people not at the bottom, but in between. A place from which they could move up or down, depending on their willingness to submit or assimilate under colonial rule.

Chris Ballard has aptly categorized the references to Pygmies into three categories: infantile, bestial, and primordial. “As denizens of a primeval forest, Pygmies are easily identified as themselves primordial, with their physical, cultural and social development either arrested through isolation or somehow inherent in their constitution”
(Ballard 2006:140). We can see evidence of this in the continuing fascination with the
Pygmy place in evolutionary terms.

Pygmies were reported to have keen senses of sight and smell and to be able
to appear and disappear into the forests. These attributes gave them an animal-like
quality, which was to be both feared and detested. Further, their small bodies gave them a
child-like appearance in the eyes of colonial administrators. Some Pygmies were taken to
Europe and put on display. They were dressed in children’s clothing and walked around
fairs. The infantile perception of Pygmies was not only due to their small stature, but also
the way Europeans understood their mental development. “They are mere children
mentally as well as physically…the unspoiled children of Nature” (Johnson 1932:62).

Beginning in the twentieth century, Pygmy people were removed from their
homeland and taken to Europe or America to be put on exhibit for the Western public.
Under the direction of anthropologists, the “hopes were to use these live exhibits of the
‘lowest known cultures’ to test and confirm the theoretical discoveries of the time laid
down by biologists like Darwin” (Kidd 2009:407). The most famous of these displays
was Ota Benga, the Mbuti man put on display at the World Fair in St. Louis in 1904.
After this he was taken to the Bronx Zoo to become a live display and was placed next to
an orangutan (Kidd 2009). Following is a news clip regarding Ota Benga’s captivity:

Ota Benga
From his native land of darkness,
To the country of the free
In the interest of science
And of broad humanity,
Brought wee little Ota Benga,
Dwarfed, benighted, without guile,
Scarcely more than ape or monkey,
Yet a man the while!
So, to tutor and enlighten –
Fit him for a nobler sphere –
Show him ways of truth and knowledge,
Teach the freedom we have here
In this land of foremost progress –
In this Wisdom’s ripest age –
We have placed him in high honour,
In a monkey’s cage!
‘Mid companions we provide him,
Apes, gorillas, chimpanzees,
He’s content! Wherefore decry them
When he seems at ease?
So he chatters and he jabbers
In his jargon, asking naught
But for “Money—money—money!”
Just as we have taught!
(M. E. Buhler, New York Times, 19 September 1906)

This particular clip, although not a part of anthropological scholarship,
satirically highlights the previously discussed perceptions of Pygmies during this time.

By calling him “wee” and attempting to teach him Western ways, we can see that
Pygmies were thought of as infantile and in need of guidance. Placing him in a monkey
cage and watching him “chatter” and “jabber,” rather than speak in his native tongue, is
evidence of Western perceptions of the bestiality of Pygmies. And finally, “scarcely more
than ape or monkey” attests to his status as a primordial and primitive non-human being.

The Pygmy Question

Pygmies can be identified by their short stature in comparison to surrounding
populations. Human populations with an average adult size of less than approximately 5
feet 1 inch are termed ‘pygmy’ (Rozzi and Sardi 2010). Other characteristics often cited
when referring to African Pygmies are an exceptionally round or broad head, lighter skin
than their non-Pygmy neighbors, “wooly” hair texture, light body hair, and mild
prognathism (Ballard 2006). Further, cultural body modifications make some Pygmy groups even more identifiable. This includes filing the teeth into points, tattooing, and scarification of the chest, abdomen, and arms.

The ‘Pygmy Question’ revolves around their origins and relationship to their non-Pygmy neighbors. Extensive research has been conducted by physical anthropologists and biologists on the short stature of Pygmies and the nature of their origins. Questions asked by early eighteenth and nineteenth century researchers were often related to the place of Pygmies in human evolution. Some have criticized these researchers for seeking out the smallest people of a group and selecting their subjects carefully to be sure that they meet the ‘Pygmy bar’ for size (Frankland 2001). This could be because, as Chris Ballard posits, “size is also linked to racial purity, the shorter the Pygmies…the purer their claim to the status of ‘ultimate Pygmy’” (Ballard 2006:138).

Several hypotheses have been put forth to explain Pygmies’ unusually short height, some of which I will briefly discuss here.

Luigi Cavalli-Sforza has hypothesized that the stature of Pygmies is an adaptation to the warm, humid forest environment in which they lived (Cavalli-Sforza 1986). He believes that there was a common Pygmy origin and subsequently Pygmy groups have diversified, but that the Mbuti Pygmies are a direct descendant from this common ancestor (Cavalli-Sforza 1986). Alternatively, Jared Diamond proposed that Pygmies’ short stature was an adaptation to the difficult terrain of dense forests and that being small would aid mobility (Diamond 1991). Another hypothesis of Pygmy morphology put forth by Robert Bailey et al. states that it is the lack of proper nutrition and resources which caused their small stature (Bailey et al. 1989). There is continual
debate about which, if any, of these hypotheses are correct and new suggestions are consistently put forth which generates further discussion.

A Cultural Approach

Colin Turnbull conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Mbuti pygmies in the mid-1950s and the resulting work was the first substantial documentation of Pygmy lifeways to be published. He recognized the lack of social and cultural scholarship regarding Pygmy groups in central Africa and wrote a sensitive, although somewhat romanticized, account of Mbuti mythology, lifeways, and experiences using the perspectives of the Pygmies themselves (Grinker 1994). Turnbull acknowledges “a steady regression in factual knowledge of the area from the time of our earliest Egyptian sources right up to the beginning of the present [twentieth] century, at the turn of which our ignorance of African Pygmies was just about complete, even to disbelief in their very existence” (1965:146).

A great deal has been said about the Pygmy groups of central Africa. They may be over-studied in fact, and have long been the darlings of anthropologists. In much of the above-discussed literature and also more which has not been included, the voices of Pygmies themselves are often absent. While a great deal of anthropological research and publications about Pygmies are about their origins, morphology, and adaptations, additional perspectives are coming forward. Many non-governmental organizations, such as The Forest Peoples Programme, Minority Rights Group, Survival International, and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs are now working to protect the
rights of Pygmy people and also share their experiences as often marginalized or abused groups.

My aim here is not to engage with the scientific debates of Pygmy origins or promote human rights campaigns. Rather, I offer a brief and non-exhaustive description of the ways in which scholars and others have engaged with Pygmy people. As I have shown, the dominant Western imagination has sought to put Pygmies in a place apart from ourselves, as a distinct “other.” Western academics have produced and reproduced the discourse surrounding Pygmies and have been afforded the opportunity to control this discourse. Anthropological discourses surrounding the “other” have often furthered our position as accomplices to colonialism, domination, and subjugation. As Christopher Kidd appropriately stated:

To Forest Peoples as primordial, bestial and infantile, the producers of the “Idea of the ‘Pygmy” identified themselves as reasoned, cultured and mature. Importantly, not only were the majority of these producers predominantly members of the West, but more significantly they were all in positions of dominance within the discourses they constructed and promoted. Kidd 2009:414

A Path in the Forest: Twa History

“Whoever did not converse with his father will never know what his grandfather knew.”

-Interview with Twa man, 2014

The tiny mountain polity of Rwanda is somewhat unique in Africa. It is located high in the Albertine Rift, completely landlocked, and is about the size of Maryland. This central-eastern region of Africa is a cultural shatter-belt of sorts. The Twa are widely recognized as the autochthonous inhabitants of the region and have occupied the montane and transitional forests surrounding Lake Kivu for thousands of years. With
continuous migration in the region, agriculturalists came to this area to cultivate
Rwanda’s fertile volcanic soils. Pastoralists brought their cattle and found that Rwanda
was not plagued by the disease transmitting tsetse fly. The land that is now called
Rwanda hosted these three groups for hundreds of years before European colonizers
arrived. A common language, called Kinyarwanda, is spoken among all three groups.

The ancestral territory of the Great Lakes Twa people are in the forests
surrounding Lake Kivu in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of
Congo (DRC). They have no known history of migration and are widely accepted as the
autochthonous people of this region (Lewis 2000:5-6). The Twa appear in mythical
narratives of other groups, held important status for chieftaincy and fertility rituals, and
acted as mediums of the forest spirits (Lewis 2006:3). They have lived in these forests for
thousands of years as hunter-gatherers and specialized foragers who relied on the forest
for both subsistence and identity.

The pre-colonial kingdom of Rwanda was organized by hierarchical patron-
client relationships among the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. Rwandan social structure was an
ethnic triad that allowed an elite group of Tutsi to rule and most Twa to occupy the
lowest class, while the rest fell somewhere in between (Taylor 2004: 361). The Twa were
also known to be expert soldiers, hunters, and trackers and were renowned for their
performing arts in the royal courts.

To begin, I offer a translated account of the peopling of Rwanda by a Twa
man in the Eastern Province during my fieldwork:

In the history of this country, it had three Rwandan children. Some were born
cultivating, others were born raising livestock. And then there were also those who
were born to do the hunting. Those who were born doing the work of hunting are
the people who used to be called Batwas… they were hunters and they were hunting for the king. Animals who had value, for example elephants, their tusks would go to the king and then the rest they could eat it. That is how they were living. Also, they were the people who were supposed to entertain the king. People change names, but they were called A-ba-twa. Which means the ones who are favored (by the king)… they were working for the kingdom and entertaining. They were the people who were waking up the king in the morning with their dancing and singing. That is their history… when there was hunger the king would take his weapons and go with his Batwas to hunt. After hunting they could come and feed people who were called ingarese, people who didn’t have anything to eat. So all the food would go to the kingdom so that all people could eat. Everywhere the Twa were in Rwanda, they were the king’s children… Then everything kept changing until we got to the life we have now. (Interview with Twa man, 2014)

The Twa were stewards reliant on the forest for subsistence, medicine and identity for hundreds, if not thousands, of years (Dowie 2009: 67). Immigrant cow herders and cultivators acquisitive subsistence practices gradually pushed them into the forests so land could be cleared to support their larger populations. Aside from the wood it provided, the forest was an impediment to people’s need for large spaces of cleared land for crops and cattle (Taylor 2011: 184). In response to massive deforestation in the nineteenth century the Twa were forced to diversify their economic activities, often favoring immediate returns on labor (Lewis 2000:5). A strategy of conflict avoidance was most common among Twa forest dwellers who used their mobility to avoid domination or clashes with their neighbors (Lewis 2000: 8). They became increasingly dependent on others for food and land (Lewis 2006:3). Making and selling pottery became a common livelihood for Twa women, and this was how they came to be known as the Potters.

From Forest to Village: the Colonial Period

European entrance into Rwanda did not begin until 1894 when German Count von Gotzen reached the Rwandan royal courts. Colonial rule was established in 1898 by
the Germans who worked closely with Tutsi elites to impose indirect rule (Newbury 1988: 53). In 1900 Christian missionaries established stations in Rwanda for the purpose of converting chiefs and kings (Longman 2010). Belgium gained control of Rwanda under the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 and continued favoring Tutsis in the administration of the now Belgian colony. The colonial period lasted from 1918-1962 when the Hutu Revolution installed a new president and Rwanda and Burundi became officially separate countries. While a great deal has been written about the history of Rwanda during this time, especially as it pertains to ethnicity, there is often little mention of the Twa (see Newbury 1988 for a detailed account of Rwandan history from 1860-1960).

Under colonial rule, Rwanda was one of the first places in Africa to implement policies for environmental protection. As early as the 1920s national parks began to be created by the Belgians (Huggins 2009: 6). Two of the parks whose creation has been detrimental to the Twa are Nyungwe National Park and Volcanoes National Park. The Volcanoes Protected Zone was designated in 1925 with the aim of protecting its biodiversity, especially the mountain gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*) which inhabit this area of north western Rwanda. It was split into two parks in 1960, the Virunga National Park belonging to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. The Nyungwe Natural Forest in southwest Rwanda has been a reserve since 1933 (Kalimba 2001:51). This high mountain forest holds much of the country’s water reserve and a remarkable amount of floral and faunal diversity. To protect the biodiversity and natural resources of these parks, the Twa were eventually expelled from the forests without compensation or other means of subsistence (IWGIA 2015) (Figure 5).
Not long after Rwanda’s independence in 1962, the responsibility of protecting the parks became a ministerial duty. In 1973 the Rwanda Office of Tourism and National Parks (ORTPN) was created with the objectives of protecting natural resources and promoting research and tourism (Kalimba 2001: 57). Subsequently, hunting, trapping, tree cutting, or any other activities thought to threaten ecosystems in

Figure 5. Rwanda’s National Parks.

the forests were explicitly forbidden. Gradually the Twa were removed from the forests in the name of conservation and pushed onto the margins of modernizing Rwanda. The misrepresentation of the forest as a wilderness has driven reckless conservation efforts, resulting in the forced eviction of the Twa from their ancestral homelands. To see the forest as a pristine environment in need of protection from humans was a critical mistake on the parts of well-intentioned and mostly Western conservationists (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Distribution of Batwa communities.

Senator Zephyrin Kalimba, who represents the Twa in Rwandan parliament, explained these events in an interview during my fieldwork:

In 1973 when they started removing Batwa from the forest there was no help from the government. It is like removing a fish from water and putting him on a mountain. Many of them died and many fled to Congo and Uganda. That is why we have few of them in Rwanda. The first government didn’t help them much but they tried to give them houses. They (the Twa) didn’t take them. They didn’t get any land as others did because they were just coming from the forest. (Interview with Z. Kalimba 2014)

From Independence to Genocide

In addition to the creation of national parks, other large-scale projects contributed to deforestation and decreasing land access for the Twa. Increasing population pressure promoted large, industrial agricultural projects; development of infrastructure; and designated military zones, which were often located in the forest (Lewis 2006:3). Forced to turn to other means of subsistence, the Twa became day laborers and craftspeople, primarily potters. These low income jobs did not always provide security for Twa families, but they did provide a dependable income. Most clay vessels made by Twa, especially in rural areas, are intended for cooking or storing water. The introduction of jerricans and other plastic items in the 1970s significantly contributed to the destruction of the Twa’s craft economy (Lewis 2006:4). Abuse and exploitation of Twa people was commonplace from the time of the Peasant Revolution in the early 1960s up to the end of the Habyarimana regime in 1994.

In the months leading up to the genocide, Twa communities were occasionally targeted for violence. Lewis and Knight report that between October 1993 and March 1994 eleven Twa villages were attacked (1995:59). The tensions between Hutu, who
were left in power at the time of independence, and Tutsi affected Twa communities because of the historical relationships between Twa and the Tutsi kings. Many Twa fled Rwanda when the violence started.

Twa tended to not get involved in any organized manner in the ethnic or political conflicts leading up to the genocide. After the Arusha Accords, a multi-party peace agreement aimed at ending the civil war, were signed in 1990, the Presidential party attempted to gain supporters by offering food and drinks, work, and political protection to specific communities (Lewis 2006:8). These incentives attracted some Twa to the party, but many more Twa were victimized by Interahamwe militias and other perpetrators during the genocide. Some reports indicate that Twa were forced to man roadblocks and kill people or be killed themselves or rape women in order to humiliate them even further (Lewis 2006; African Rights 1994; Lewis and Knight 1995).

Approximately 10,000 Twa lives were lost during the genocide. While this may seem insignificant when looking at nearly one million lives lost during the genocide, it means that the Twa community lost approximately thirty percent of their total population (Lewis 2006; Thomson 2009). When those who fled during the war returned, they often found their homes destroyed. Many Twa men were imprisoned after the genocide and accused of being part of the Interahamwe. Because of pervasive poverty among many Twa families and continued discrimination while in prison, having family members who could sustain a prisoner was not common. Jerome Lewis (2006) simply states “the chances for Twa inmates to survive long-term incarceration are not high” (15). Lewis and Knight (1995) describe several stories recounted to them of Twa, including
women and children, being executed by Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) soldiers after the genocide.

While some Twa may rightfully be implicated as genocide perpetrators, most were not complicit in the violence and were victimized alongside ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus. This community suffered doubly, first as victims in the genocide and then as often wrongfully accused perpetrators after the war. Those who survived were not allowed to participate in reconciliation efforts, including *ingando* reeducation camps or *gacaca* traditional courts (Thomson 2009). Many Twa struggled to understand why such injustices befell them since they have never held any political power in Rwanda. Ethnic discrimination is often the basis of understanding their unjust circumstances.

The aim of my research has not been related to the genocide intentionally because there is a great deal of excellent published work on this topic already and this is a very sensitive subject when already targeting one ethnic group. However, the exclusion of Twa experiences during the genocide has created an uneven environment for reconciliation. The following are experiences relayed to me during my fieldwork.

I lost my family in 1993. The war was in Byumba at that time. All of my family died, most of them when we were fleeing. I survived with my two brothers who were very young then. I raised them by myself because I was the oldest. I had to flee with them to Congo and we stayed there until 1996. That’s when I had my first daughter because I had my husband there. Then we had to come back to Rwanda and I found that all of my family was dead. (Interview with Twa woman, Kigali 2014)

“I was born here in 1956 in this village. I was married, but my husband died in 1980. We had eight children. All of them died. My life changed much when I lost my husband and children because now I don’t have anyone to help me. I don’t have help, there is no such thing. Now it is everyone for themselves. Before, people used to love each other, but now there is no love at all. No love at all. I don’t have any problems with my neighbors, its only lack of love. (Interview with Twa woman, Kibumba 2014)
CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING ETHNICITY

IN RWANDA

A History of Twa Ethnicity

European anthropologist Frederik Barth defines an ethnic group as biologically self-perpetuating, sharing cultural values and forms, constituting a field of communication and interaction, and having a membership which self-identifies and is identified by others as distinguishable (Barth 1969:11). Some scholars of Rwanda have argued that the boundaries of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa groups were permeable and understood better as social classes based on socioeconomic status rather than ethnic groups (Lemarchand 1966; Chretien 1985; Newbury 1988; Prunier 1995). Others, including many Rwandans, saw Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identity as ethnically distinct groups which have divided power unequally since precolonial times. The violence that has occurred in Rwanda from the 1950s through the genocide in 1994 demonstrates the seriousness by which people see ethnicity, not social class, at the forefront of social relations.

I think it is important to understand Twa distinction as ethnically, as well as socioeconomically based because the concept of ethnicity has been a reality for Rwandans for many decades. While permeable group boundaries based on socioeconomic status were likely possible for Hutu and Tutsi in precolonial or colonial
times, I do not believe this was equally true for Twa. Those given land, wives, cattle, or otherwise favored by the king remained Twa in a majority of cases.

Precolonal Rwanda was a highly centralized, complex kingdom made up of a succession of Tutsi kings dating back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is said that the first king, Kigwa (“fallen” in Kinyarwanda), descended from the heavens and that his successor, Gihanga (“creator”), founded the first empire (Vansina 2004:10). After that, a long list of dynastic successions is remembered primarily through oral tradition up until colonization in the late nineteenth century. The social stratification of precolonial Rwanda has been debated by numerous historians, anthropologists, colonizers, and scholars with varying levels of consensus (see C. Newbury 1988, 1998; D. Newbury 1992, 2009; Vansina 2004; Prunier 1995; Jefremovas 1997; Lemarchand 1995; Mamdani 2002, 2014; and others).

Most often, a functionalist model of hierarchical political organization is presented when discussing Rwandan history. This model posits that “traditional” Rwandan social structure sees the minority Tutsi holding all positions of power and prestige, controlling sources of wealth, and acting as patrons in ubuhake cattle patron/client relationships (Newbury 1988:3). The majority Hutu agriculturalists were often exploited and dependent upon Tutsis as clients under ubuhake. It has been hypothesized that the persisting inequality of these relationships was to manifest in future violence between Hutus and Tutsis. The Twa were incorporated into the socio-political structure of the kingdom, but only held low status positions (Adamczyk 2011:181). Generally this model presents the Twa as insignificant forest dwellers or attendants of the
royal courts. This ahistorical and static model of Rwandan social structure has been a common way to explain the widespread violence between Hutus and Tutsis.

   Ethnicity is often systematized in dualistic terms with Tutsis and Hutus in perpetual opposition to one another (Taylor 2004). Relatively little has been written at all about the Twa in Anglophone scholarship. They often only account for a footnote or are mentioned briefly in the introduction and then dismissed from the text. Their experiences and positions in society during pre-, peri-, and post- colonial times are rarely explored. Perhaps this is because the Twa make up less than one percent of the population and have little social and political power, or because they did not participate or suffer in the genocide to the same degree as the other two groups. Their small numbers and subordinate position in society may make them easy to overlook, however, their place in the development of Rwandan social systems and identities should be considered and are in fact very significant in symbolic terms when we look at aesthetic judgements, cultural differentiation, and ethnogenic processes.

   The ethnogenesis of the Twa is characterized by aesthetic judgments and avoidance practices. Avoidance practices, called kunena Batwa, rejected intermarriage, cohabitation and commensality with the Twa (Taylor 2011: 183). Christopher Taylor reports that eating and drinking utensils would not be shared with a Twa during his fieldwork in the 1980’s and this sentiment was again echoed in a film produced by COPORWA in 2009. Sexual liberties were often taken with Twa women, but intermarriage was extremely rare, even if she became pregnant (Kalimba 2001: 54; Dowie 2009: 71). Perpetually seen as wild, polluting, and gluttonous, the Twa’s ethnogenic process was one of consistent social exclusion.
According to Christopher Taylor “The long-term history and reproduction of hierarchy in Rwanda was closely connected to the process of ethnogenesis, and this process depended upon cultural distinctions in which aesthetic judgments of esteem and disgust figured prominently (Taylor 2004:354). The Twa were forest dwellers, once thought to be the most primitive people in Africa, whose close connection to the natural world put them at the negative pole of this dichotomy. Heuristically, this illustrates the pre-colonial judgments which devalued all that was intimately associated with nature (Taylor 2011). For the Twa that meant elements like clay, mud, the forest, and animality. They had no land or domesticated animals and did not cultivate crops. They were viewed as a part of nature rather than in control of it, a position which held little reverence among the Tutsi pastoralists and Hutu cultivators. The Twa also had no food restrictions which disgusted the other two groups, particularly because they had no opposition to eating mutton, a meat the other two groups would not eat (Taylor 2011: 193). Regarded as expert hunters and fierce warriors, the Twa were both abhorred and feared.

Christopher Taylor has argued that it was these pre-colonial judgments that were the basis for future discord in Rwanda. He writes “placing primary causal weight on social rather than cultural factors, we misconstrue how Rwanda’s pre-colonial opposition of disgust vs. esteem provided fertile grounds for later European biological determinism” (Taylor 2011:183). The ethnic triad of precolonial Rwanda allowed one group, the Tutsi, to hold the highest status and rule the kingdom. They occupied the positive pole of alterity and many of their practices and preferences are at the center of what was considered esteemed.
Beginning with the Germans’ indirect rule in 1907 and continuing onward through most of the colonial period, the ‘Hamitic Hypothesis’ was used to justify Tutsi superiority. This hypothesis claimed that the Tutsi were the descendants of Caucasoid Hamites from Ethiopia (Chretien 2003; Vansina 2004; Adamczyk 2011). Tutsi nobles were ruling when Europeans arrived to see a highly organized and stratified kingdom, and Europeans kept them in power until nearly the end of the colonial period. The Twa have always occupied the lowest class. They were systematically discriminated against and were the first of Rwanda’s three ethnic groups to suffer social exclusion and ethnic stigmatization.

**A Re-Imagined Past and Re-Engineered Future**

The post-genocide government has rejected the precolonial legacy of ethnic division in Rwanda and blames colonial powers for ethnic discord which led to mass violence (Freedman, et al: 2011). This re-imagined past has been promoted to Rwandan citizens in the forms of revised history taught in schools, ingando reeducation camps, and new laws against divisionism and genocide ideology. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was created by the RPF in 1999 and since then this commission has introduced legislation to promote a non-ethnic Rwanda. In 2001 a law against “divisionism” was instated which criminalized most public references to ethnic identity. Discourse surrounding the genocide turned to that of victims or survivors and genocidaires or perpetrators (Waldorf 2009:104).

In 2008 the language of the constitution was changed because the government feels that it is important to highlight the status of Tutsis as victims in the genocide. The
Rwandan Genocide of 1994 has also been recast as “the Genocide Against the Tutsi,” and as of the time of my last visit in 2014 public memorial sites and references have been changed to reflect this. However, ethnic references are still banned from public discourse, especially if they differ from the state approved narrative of events. Laws against genocide ideology and divisionism are sometimes criticized for being used to stifle political opponents, those who disagree with policy, or who oppose the current government. Indeed, CARE International, Trocaire, Norwegian Peoples Aid, the BBC, the Voice of America, and several academics have already been accused of having “genocidal ideologies” for speaking out against government officials or policy and many have since been banned from entering the country (Waldorf 2011:48).

The re-imagined history of Rwanda posits that Rwanda was a harmonious and unified society in which people lived in peace together (Adamczyk 2011:179). Ethnic categorization was imposed by outside forces, namely European colonizers, and this is what created the basis for future dissonance among Hutu and Tutsi. This possibly complicated the reconciliation process by revising history and silencing some voices. The Rwandan government states that it “does not recognize the rights of special categories of the population given the factors that led to the 1994 genocide” (Thomson 2009:315).

Eliminating Ethnicity from Public Life

The deemphasizing of the history of ethnicity in Rwanda and the inability to use the terms “Twa” or “indigenous people” has far reaching implications. Although this is a complicated and multi-faceted issue, negative effects on Twa people are evident. First, this means that there is a lack of disaggregated data specific to the Twa community
which makes any kind of targeted interventions or analyses almost impossible. Second, they remain underrepresented in key decision-making forums, particularly at district levels and below. Finally, no recognition of autochthonous status or indigenous identity is allowed, which leaves the Twa without the ability to make land claims, gain compensation for lost territories, or enjoy the protection of basic rights.

Nonetheless, the Twa have a distinct cultural identity. Although they speak the dominant Bantu language, they likely did have their own language at one point (Klieman 2003:xviii). They had a unique vocabulary for words relating to the forest and different speech intonations (Vansina 2004). They have their own songs and dances which made a rich and significant contribution to the cultural history and identity of Rwanda. They have a sense of their own identity as a forest people who were famous for their hunting skills. Without their name, they lose a large part of their identity and a deeply rooted connection to the past. However, this identity is also colored by their experiences of marginalization and injustice. The combination of these things has created a social cohesion among some communities as a kind of barrier to the outside forces that have inflicted so much violence against them. Others have endured generations of stigma, suffering, and displacement that have created conditions of neglect, abuse, dependency, and social disintegration.

By avoiding ethnic terms, a focus is placed on distorted or inaccurate non-ethnic justifications for discrimination, such as a lack of intelligence, education, cleanliness, or limited capabilities which can make it easier to blame the Twa for their own problems. The current political system has asserted that references to ethnicity must be outlawed in order to prevent a recurrence of mass violence. This has made it
increasingly difficult for NGOs to justify their work with the Twa, who are not always adequately helped by social services. It also makes it difficult for agencies to help them. For example, Minority Rights Group was banned from providing a workshop to Twa women on human rights because it was seen as “divisionist” for only targeting Twa women (Thomson 2008:314).

Stigma and Marginalization

Marginalization and stigma are issues I questioned heavily during my yearlong fieldwork in Rwanda, but this is not a place of easy answers. In fact, targeting one ethnic group for my research was questionable. Historically, the answers to questions of marginalization among the Twa seemed clear: as forest foragers, they were disparaged as an entire group. Socially sanctioned avoidance practices applied to all Twa, as ethnicity and status was foremost in social relations.

Stigma has been defined as a process based on the social construction of identity (Goffman 1963). It requires the presence of social categorizations and status relationships. Goffman posits that stigmatized people have a “discredited” status or undesired differentness (Goffman 1963). Stigma is perceived as something inherent in the person and focuses us on the individual, whereas “discrimination” turns our attention to those who have done the discriminating (Link and Phelan 2001:366). Moving beyond the individual, Kleinman and Hall-Clifford propose that stigmatized status affects lives differently in local contexts (Kleinman and Hall-Clifford 2009). Indeed, for the Twa stigma has meant that they are collectively seen as undesirably different, and therefore stereotyped as less intelligent, civilized, and capable than their Hutu and Tutsi neighbors.
The verb *kuba umutwa* (to be like a Twa) is used to insult others and reflects the Twa’s stigmatized status (Adamczyk 2011:181).

Stereotypes are often linked to discrimination and are widespread in societies with substantial power differences (Eriksen 2010: 29). The asymmetrical ethnic relations in precolonial Rwanda were a prime breeding ground for ethnic stigma. Eriksen has postulated that ethnic identification that is considered inferior is often also under-communicated, which leaves those who are stigmatized gradually trying to adopt the dominant group’s cultural traits (Eriksen 2010: 35-36). This is true for the Twa who, although not always by choice, have adopted a sedentary, agricultural lifestyle currently severed from subsistence and identity related to the forest or its products.

Today a national identity is favored over ethnicity. A formal cash economy with wage labor has replaced the patron-client system. Twa people are no longer able to forage in the forests. Many Twa make pottery, cultivate as day laborers on other people’s land, or sometimes resort to begging. Many are clearly poor and constitute the most vulnerable group in the country. Despite no longer being called Twa, they still face marginalization and stigma. Does this mean the causes are now economic rather than ethnic? The following quotes highlight the complexity of one of the central inquiries of my ethnographic research among the Twa in Rwanda. What are the causes of marginalization and stigma? Are they more prevalent in some areas compared to others?

I used to work for the Ministry of Transportation. I had a good job; I could care for my wife and children. We had a house. I was married for many years. We had four children. After I lost my job, my wife took the children and went to her family home. When I went after her to bring her back she said no, she could not be married to a Mutwa. We got a divorce. Why do *you* think she left me? (Interview with Twa man, Kigali 2013)
In Kigali we share everything, but for example when I go visit my remaining family in Byumba or Mutara sometimes I hear that marginalization happens. Here if it’s food, we share. If it’s Fanta, we share with the same straw. When there is a wedding people invite us. There is no marginalization here, we are all one now. But when I was young there was marginalization in the place I grew up. For example, going to school we were carrying water and if a student got thirsty they would not drink a Twa’s water. Also, if we got thirsty from carrying our pots no one could let you use their straw. So marginalization existed. You can see I am not young, so it existed then and keeps ending slowly, slowly. (Interview with Twa woman, Kigali 2014)

Sometimes you look at yourself and get shy to go where others are because you cannot even get money to buy soap and take a shower and clean your clothes. That’s even why people say we are marginalized… We cannot go out where other people can see us because of how we look, so we prefer to stay at home. For example, if I go to visit someone he may welcome me like any other person, but the challenge we face is that we wonder if we cannot buy soap can we even visit someone? Then you just marginalize yourself because of how poor you are. (Interview with Twa man, Kibumba 2014)
COPORWA

COPORWA was founded in 1995 in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. Initially, it was called CAURWA, *Communaute des Autochtones Rwandais*, or “Community of the Rwandan Autochthons” in English. This organization was the first of its kind in Rwanda and continues to be the only Rwandan organization dedicated to the Twa community. As the government rebuilt after the genocide and new laws were drafted regarding genocide ideology, divisionism, and ethnicity, it was determined that the name CAURWA was problematic. The constitution put forth in 2003 made it illegal to specify, favor, or emphasize any one ethnicity. In 2004 the Rwandan government refused to grant legal status to the organization and threatened to dismantle CAURWA if they did not change their name (Thomson 2009:319).

The name CAURWA was deemed unconstitutional because it identified the Twa as *abasangwabutaka*, or Rwanda’s first inhabitants. The government felt that this undermined unity and reconciliation efforts and broke laws against divisionism (Vinding 2005: 478). Article 33 of the Rwandan constitution states the “propagation of ethnic, regional, racial or discrimination or any other form of division shall be punishable by law.” It was under this framework that CAURWA was eventually forced to change its
name and stop all mention of “Twa” in its statutes. The new name, COPORWA, was agreed upon, making reference to the Twa’s common profession of pottery making.

Fieldwork

When I arrived in Rwanda for the first time in 2011, I didn’t know much about the Twa people. I was a first-year Masters student with general interests in sub-Saharan Africa and human rights. I traveled to Rwanda with an international group of young professionals to participate in a workshop on human rights with Rwandan students. During this time I worked with a local NGO called COPORWA. COPORWA is short for *Communaute des Potiers du Rwanda*, or in English “the community of Potters of Rwanda.” The Potters, as I understood them at the time, were a small and vulnerable minority population known for making traditional pottery. Because ethnic designations have been outlawed in Rwanda, I was initially unaware that the Twa are considered a Pygmy group.

As noted in chapter three, and reflected in much scholarship as well, I understood Rwanda to have a dual ethnic system in which Hutu and Tutsi were in opposition. Twa people were rarely mentioned in the few pieces that I had read about Rwanda prior to my departure. I was unaware of the unspoken marginalization and stigma the Twa faced or the depth and history of discrimination against them. I had spent a great deal of my time as an undergraduate familiarizing myself with the relationships between ethnicity, livelihood, politics, and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. What I didn’t know, and what I hoped to find out, was how the Twa fit into my understanding of Rwanda.
I spent a full week in COPORWA’s main office in Kigali talking with staff members, reading and editing reports, and visiting field sites in the city. The stated mission on their website is to “promote the respect of rights and the social and economic integration of the Potter’s community within Rwandan society through education, culture, improvement in income, and defense of human rights” (accessed 3/10/16). They are a non-profit, non-governmental organization run by a general assembly made up of mostly non-Twa people. The office is organized into four departments: human rights, education, culture, and sustainable livelihood. Each of these departments has both office and field staff of varying levels who work throughout the country. Twa people are often hired as field staff to assist with projects and act as liaisons between their home communities and COPORWA.

During that initial visit I met COPORWA’s Director, Zephyrin Kalimba. He was a thoughtful and serious man who was knowledgeable and sensitive to the plight of less fortunate Twa people in Rwanda. He was a wealth of information on the history of the Twa and their unique culture. As a Twa man himself, Mr. Kalimba showed passion and sympathy for the crises of his community. Over the course of my three visits to Rwanda, Mr. Kalimba and I developed an amicable working relationship and I came to value his honesty when speaking about sensitive subjects.

Iterambere Cooperative

The cooperative I will call Iterambere (see Figure 7) is loosely affiliated with COPORWA and is located in the capital city of Kigali. It employs 53 people, all Twa except for three or four. Of all sizes, planters, ceramic water filters, small figurines in the
shapes of animals, and ceremonial vessels are all made here. They also sell a variety of flowers and plants. The employees of this cooperative have many cows and calves, a few chickens, and two sheep. It is a successful cooperative which has a steady flow of clientele most of the year and occasionally sees groups of foreigners. All of the employees seem to benefit financially from their work.

The prosperity of this cooperative, in comparison to other pottery selling endeavors, can be attributed to a few things. Its location in the capital city is probably the most significant, as there are many more people with money and desire for their products. The second is its large plot of land. They keep more than 20 cows here, some belonging to members of the cooperative, some are cared for by paid ‘cowboys,’ generating
additional income. In the lowest part of the valley, just past where the cows graze, is a swampy area. While this area is not suitable for crops or cows, it provides an essential material to the cooperative: clay. The good fortune of having clay so close at hand cannot be understated. Of all the Twa villages I have visited in the country over the course of three visits, this is the only place which has easily accessible clay. Adding to the success of this cooperative is the diversity of their products. In rural areas the majority of vessels made are small cooking pots, but this cooperative maximizes on the urban demand for large outdoor pots and planters.

I returned to the cooperative alone in the first month of my long stay in Rwanda. Although they knew of my affiliation with COPORWA, I usually came by myself or with a translator. The people working here are used to having visitors from other countries, although I do not think they have participated in much research. After asking if a long-term research relationship was possible, the business manager of the cooperative replied with the common response of “nta kibazo,” no problem. This cooperative came to be a second home and I made lasting relationships with many of the members.

My first few visits to the cooperative were spent wandering around, petting baby cows, playing with children, and awkwardly trying to make small talk with people as they worked. My affection for young animals, willingness to sit directly on the ground, and mispronounced Kinyarwanda made me somewhat perplexing, albeit entertaining. I didn’t mind, for me erring on the side of humor rather than offense was desirable and I gained the affection of many women and children as a result.
As my visits got more regular and lengthy I was eventually asked to come to the cooperative twice per week to help the employees with their English language skills. I was relieved to have a more formal schedule, a way to build relationships, and a chance to observe the cooperatives dynamics. A couple of the younger members spoke coherent conversational English, but for the most part we all got by on a mix of Kinyarwanda, French, and English to communicate. I showed up faithfully twice a week and taught them basic conversational English and began coming more often for additional visits. They walked me through the entire process of pottery making (see Figure 8 for an example of pottery made here), from collecting clay to decorating the fired pot, and let me film anywhere I wanted at the cooperative in exchange for teaching English and giving them printed pictures of themselves.

Figure 8. Women making planter pots at Iterambere cooperative.
Nation Building

Several months of participant observation at this cooperative gave me invaluable experience as well as a great deal of information. The differences in urban and rural life in Rwanda were remarkable when I examined daily challenges and the prospects each group imagined for the future. While life is certainly challenging for many Twa people in Kigali, it appears to be less precarious than that of their rural counterparts. Perhaps this is why rural to urban migration is so common in Rwanda. In the years after the genocide, Rwanda’s urban population growth rate was a remarkable 18% (UNPD 2009). That growth has slowed since 2010 and is now at 6.2%, but the lure of the city cannot be overstated (UN Data 2016).

Kigali

Today Rwanda is an up and coming force of development, modernization, and security in Africa. In the capital city of Kigali, there are few signs of the complete destruction which took place during the genocide only twenty-two years ago. Pervasive instability wracked Rwanda for a few years after the genocide, but Kigali is now hailed as one of the safest cities in Africa. Acts of violence rarely occur in public spaces. Two single grenade attacks happened in public markets during my first two months in the Rwanda in 2013, but for the most part Kigali is very secure. The streets are exceptionally clean, public spaces are well manicured, and physical assaults are almost never heard of.

Soldiers armed with AK-47s are present on most street corners in Kigali from sundown to sunup. Shopping malls, large stores, and urban markets are patrolled by police officers or security guards. Metal detectors and personal searches are present at each entrance of most of these venues. Paved roads are patrolled by traffic police, and
although driving conditions do not resemble that of urban America, Kigali is much safer than many other large African cities.

However, urban policing does not sufficiently explain security in the anomalous city of Kigali compared to other large African cities (Smith and Goodfellow 2013). In July 1994, Kigali was a wasteland of bodies, dogs, and completely destroyed infrastructure. Approximately 700,000 old caseload returnees (those who fled in the early conflicts of 1959-1964 or were born in exile) came back to Rwanda beginning in July of 1994 and most settled in Kigali (Newbury 2005:277). In the weeks that followed the liberation of Kigali by the RPA (Rwandan Patriotic Army), genocide survivors and returning refugees repopulated the city, often occupying random empty houses (Goodfellow and Smith 2013: 3188). Returnees who spoke English were particularly well suited to interact with the flood of international relief and aid organizations who set up in the country. English speaking Rwandans mainly came from Uganda and were often affiliated with the RPA. The RPA consolidated their power into political domination, forming what is now known as the Rwandan Political Front (RPF) political party, which has ruled the country ever since.

The political domination of the RPF has had many immediate and beneficial results for much of Rwanda, but it remains to be seen what their control will mean for the long term. In 2000, when Paul Kagame became president, a new flag, national anthem, and seal were inaugurated, which signified complete take-over (Reyntjens 2013: xviii). Since then, the RPF has put forth a new constitution which limits freedom of speech and civil society activities, and more recently has made it possible for the President to run for a third term.
CHAPTER V

RURAL LIFE, HOUSING, AND MARRIAGE

The difficulties of rural life are amplified for Twa people where problems such as access to resources, land scarcity, and strict housing policies make life increasingly uncertain. Rural-dwelling Rwandans are a demographic majority at over 70% of the population, but constitute a political periphery. Recent government initiatives aimed at re-engineering the landscape of rural Rwanda have impacted Twa communities. Their history of marginalization, familiarity with specific environments and lifeways, and destabilizing poverty make them a special case. However, due to the banning of ethnic designations and inability to single them out as a special group, all Rwandans are subject to the same policies and programs with no special consideration of circumstances.

The Village of Kwicyondo

I made my first trip to Rwanda in 2011. This was the first time I would visit a rural Twa village. The long drive from Kigali to Kibuye was an exhausting three-hour route with twists and turns on narrow mountain roads. From Kibuye we traveled along an equally windy, but much narrower, dirt road filled with potholes. This time we had to go slowly to negotiate space with oncoming cars, trucks, and lorries. Overwhelmed and scared that our van might slide off the dusty road and down the steep hillside, I hung onto
the window tightly. Nearly an hour later we reached a non-descript road lined with small homes that were surrounded by brush fences. I didn’t know what was happening, but everyone exited the van so I followed suit. I was traveling with two representatives of COPORWA named Josephine and Clavier, two other Rwandans, two Americans, and one Chinese woman. We were heading to a small Twa village which I will call Kwicyondo (Figure 9). We left the van and the driver on this small road and began hiking across the hillsides. We reached Kwicyondo about 45 minutes later. Nothing could have prepared me for this experience.

Figure 9. Village of Kwicyondo.
We came upon a small village of about ten houses near the top of a tall hill. The village was located just below what was left of the tree line and offered a spectacular view of the lush valley and terraced hills below. The shoddy houses were made from mud daub and various sizes of sticks tied together with twine. There were holes in the walls and birds nested on the exposed frame. These small homes had no windows and in place of a door was an old, tattered piece of cloth tied to the doorframe. Corrugated tin covered the houses, but the small latrine up the hill was without any roof. Chickens walked in and out of the houses freely and I wondered what else may try to enter at night. Children in dirty and ill-fitting clothes played outside while a group of adults were engaged in what sounded like a very heated conversation.

One of our two COPORWA companions, Josephine, was born and raised in a village much like this one, but had managed to become one of six Twa people to attend university in the entire country at the time. She was interning with COPORWA and would later be hired as their office assistant. She saw a small child of about five or six years old and asked him if he was a Twa. “No, I am human,” he replied.

As we entered the village people stopped what they were doing and stared, calling to others to come see the visitors. People began to gather near one house in the center of the village and I was immediately surrounded by curious children (Figure 10). As we sat down on the hard ground three children immediately jumped on my lap and several more sat as close to me as was possible. They stroked my hair and arms, giggling as they compared our skin colors. Chattering away and looking to me for a response I tried to tell them that I didn’t speak Kinyarwanda. “Muzungu, muzungu!” (muzungu means white person or foreigner) they kept repeating. I knew what it meant and I smiled.
The children seemed so delighted with our presence it was difficult to concentrate on the serious conversation the villagers were having with members of COPORWA.

The residents of Kwicyondo described challenges they faced on a daily basis. They had to walk an hour each way to a swamp to collect water because local officials would not allow any rain water collection or install a well pump. Additionally, when authorities were collecting data from this village many members were placed on the second economic tier of the healthcare system, called Abatindi (very poor), forcing them to pay 200 RWF (about $0.33) each time they saw a doctor. Because this specific community only makes about 200r RWF per month per adult from selling pottery, this
mis-categorization was unreasonable and unnecessary. Had they been placed on the first tier, called *Abatindi nyakujya* (extremely poor), they would have access to free medical care, which would greatly benefit them. Other members had no insurance at all because they could not afford to provide a picture of themselves, which was necessary for the insurance card.

Not only was the entire community suffering from a visible lack of general hygiene, but many were undernourished and had symptoms of kwashiorkor. This was confirmed when I learned that they only ate every other day. Some residents mentioned that alcoholism was a problem in the village and often times any money earned would be spent on beer or *waragi* (a locally made gin-like liquor).

A majority of the children in the village did not attend school despite the fact the primary education is free to all Rwandans. There were many reasons for this, but most common was parents’ inability to pay for uniforms and school supplies. Both parents and children also complained that Twa children were treated badly at their school by students and teachers. They were bullied for being dirty and poor, and seen as less smart than their peers.

Housing Dilemmas in Rural Rwanda

The challenges of daily life in Kwicyondo are numerous and overlapping. Access to land is, by far, the most significant challenge that people face in Rwanda, not just the Twa. While scarcity of land, a lack of income-generating activities, and countless legal regulations plague all of Rwanda, the rural areas are especially precarious and vulnerable. Before the genocide some Twa owned land, but after everyone fled the
violence many returned home to find others living on their land. This was a common occurrence, not specific to the Twa, but because their land may have been passed down through generations and didn’t have a formal title of ownership, they lost a great deal of it.

Kwicyondo is a relatively new village made up of mostly Twa inhabitants. The houses I encountered there were hardly sufficient for families to live in (see Figure 11). They were made of mud daub and sticks, with holes, no interior walls, floors,

Figure 11. House in Kwicyondo.
windows or doors. They looked nothing like the government built homes in the towns and other villages. Residents said they only got these homes about seven months ago, after having slept outside for five months when their *nyakatsi* (thatched roofs) were destroyed during the *Bye-Bye Nyakatsi* initiative. The corrugated tin roofs were put on about four months prior to my arrival. The latrine still had no roof when I was there, which often caused problems in the rainy season.

In comparison to the houses discussed above, government-sponsored homes in Kigali, some occupied by Twa, and many in the rural areas as well were very different (see Figure 12). They were neat little rectangular constructions with clay brick walls

*Figure 12. Government built house in rural Rwanda.*
which were then sprayed with stucco and had corrugated tin roofs to fit over the top. They had doors and windows to keep out animals and bugs and also had cement floors. They looked nothing like the homes in Kwicyondo. When I asked why their homes were different, Josephine explained that the main problem with discrimination comes from local-level officials. The funds being given by the state were not reaching local Twa communities. Materials or funds may be diverted elsewhere or siphoned off at the district or sector level, therefore never reaching the intended beneficiaries.

Beginning in 1997 the Rwandan government began an aggressive resettlement program, known as *Imidugudu* (the plural of village) to deal with the flood of returning refugees after years of conflict and genocide (van Leeuwen 2001). This program intended to bring people together into organized village settings rather than allowing homes to be scattered across the landscape. The government insisted that this would make it easier to deliver services to the population, would improve reconciliation outcomes, and would allow for better land use planning (van Leeuwen 2001: 631). Continued rebel activity in the years following the genocide also created a rationale for the need to increase security and protect the population.

Due to the immense need for shelter, the UNHCR strongly supported the *Imidugudu* program. A number of NGOs working in the country got behind the program as well, despite the fact that forced relocation and villagization programs had failed in other parts of East Africa around the same time. To what degree their support came from intense pressure from the Rwandan government, their desire to continue working in the country, or their wish to gain a part of the $120 million in subcontracted funds from the UNHCR remains unknown (Hilhorst and van Leeuwen 1999).
According to Hilhorst and van Leeuwen (1999) the *Imidugudu* program was criticized for many reasons. This “blueprint development” plan was enacted across the country without regard for regional diversity. Participation in the program was compulsory in many areas and non-participation fined, despite statements from the government that participation was voluntary. Disorganized planning resulted in some villages being built without basic necessities or on infertile land, preventing people from growing kitchen gardens. Furthermore, they argue, no alternatives to the *Imidugudu* program were ever even considered.

Several years after the *Imidugudu* program was enacted, the government of Rwanda began an additional housing policy. In 2010 *Bye-Bye Nyakatsi* was introduced with the intention of eradicating all thatched roofing made from leaves and replacing it with corrugated tin. The extremely image-conscious government and diaspora felt that these huts were not projecting the image of modernity that they desired, saying they resembled bird’s nests (Gaugler 2013). This program disproportionately affected Twa and other vulnerable populations because thatched roof huts were commonplace for poor communities.

The forced relocations resulted in hardships, fear, and sometimes rejection from some Twa. In Kwicyondo one woman recounted how, during the process of *imidugudu*, authorities tried to force her and other Twa families to leave their *nyakatsi* to live in the roadside town where the government had built houses. They refused to go because they thought that their Hutu and Tutsi neighbors were trying to lure them there to kill them in “a new sort of genocide.” They fled to the top of the hillside and chose to
remain there. Eventually, the homes described above were constructed for this community on the hill.

The social disintegration caused by crippling poverty and marginalization had created a chaotic and seemingly hopeless situation in Kwicyondo. The attempts at a collective ascension for all Rwandans promoted by the national government were not realized at this local level. In fact, this community is where I found the most severe neglect of Twa people. Their homes were subpar, they had no access to water and most, if not all, were suffering from chronic malnutrition. Unable to successfully access services such as healthcare and education, the people in this village found it very difficult to transcend their current circumstances.

The Village of Kibumba

I found the village of Kibumba at the suggestion of a trusted friend who worked at a nearby district office. I chose it not only for its many Twa residents, but also for its small size, distance from Kigali, and its accessibility by public transportation. I had traveled throughout the country and visited several villages; I felt that Kibumba was adequately representative of life outside the city. Rwanda is a very small country and few places are more than a few hours bus ride from Kigali. If you can get to a paved road, you can probably get to the capital. This certainly wasn’t the most remote village I had been to, but it was far enough that the city wasn’t the focus of daily life.

During the day the village is occupied by the jobless, women with small children, and the elderly. It is a poor village, evident by the dirt floors in the houses and the number of people who occupy each of these small homes. Approximately 100 people
live in this village. Most of them are Twa. An old woman approaches me with her oversized walking stick, clearly intoxicated and smelling of banana beer. “Muzungu give me money,” she demands. “I am hungry, give me food.”

Sadly, she is probably telling the truth. She is slowly starving. She is likely the oldest person in the village, far too old to work. She lives in a small house with another old woman (see Figure 13), neither of them have living children. Because these women cannot work, they have no money to buy food. Reliant on their neighbors to share food with them, a sufficient daily meal is not regular or guaranteed. “Before people cared for each other,” one woman explained to me “but now it is everyone for themselves.”

“Before” holds much meaning in Rwanda. It is the single, solemn word used to refer to

**Figure 13.** Elderly Twa women.
the time before the genocide of 1994. So much has changed since then. For the Twa, “before” could refer to one of many in a long line of disposessions.

Before, Kibumba was one of the poorest areas in the South. Crippling poverty, starvation, and unemployment were commonplace. A recent road project has brought some jobs and money into the area, but for years Kibumba struggled. Eighteen families live in these 10 small houses, of which some house just a couple of people and some have more than 10.

My arrival in the village caused a stir. I mentioned that I was affiliated with COPORWA, and was immediately met with frustration and questions about their lack of support. The truth was, I wasn’t really working with COPORWA. I was supposed to be and I was trying to, as they were the affiliate institution listed on my Fulbright and research clearance documents. At this point I had received little useful assistance from them in facilitating my field research so I had decided to do it on my own. I only mentioned them in an attempt alleviate the concerns of the local chief, who was promptly notified of my arrival by an unknown villager. I calmly listened to their complaints, secretly agreeing with their frustrations at the lack of follow through to COPORWA’s commitments. The villagers told me that COPORWA had been there only once two or three years ago. They had brought a couple of unknown muzungus with them and said that they would return to begin working with them to form a cooperative and offer training. They never came back and no one in the village had heard from COPORWA since.

On our first visit the chief hurried us through the village and suggested we come back another time when he wasn’t so busy. I wouldn’t find out until later that local
authorities had been notified of our arrival and were en route. He was trying to protect us and himself and minimize any issues the authorities may have with my presence. While I had obtained all of the appropriate research clearance materials I was often still met with suspicion by local authorities. Since I wasn’t supposed to mention Twa people specifically it was very difficult to explain my project and what I was doing in each village.

I wandered around the village with my translator on the many days we visited Kibumba. We made a point to visit every house, asking basic questions about who lived there. The umudugudu chief (village chief) followed us, staying close and assuring people that we were allowed be there and they were free to talk to us. Initially I was relieved to have his help, but I could soon see that it affected how open people were willing to be with me.

The village chief, who I will call John, was aware of and attentive to the needs of the Twa community members he supervised. This was not common in many of the other rural places I visited where village chiefs neglected or abused Twa community members. He had been elected chief several times since 1994. There are more than 1000 people in the area he manages and living conditions have greatly improved since the genocide. He explained to my translator and I that before the genocide people in this area could not afford food and were literally starving to death. There was much arable land, but people were not cultivating effectively. After 1994 trainings on agricultural techniques were provided and now people are able to grow and sell various crops.

Eighteen Twa families live in Kibumba and 3 more live in another village nearby. John said after the genocide mostly survivors were targeted for special help, but
now the Twa families are being helped because of their severe poverty and lack of integration into the larger community. A Korean NGO has set up down the road to teach adult literacy, another NGO has established a cooperative to farm rice in the valley swamp, and there are smaller pineapple and bee projects in the area as well. Additionally, this area was chosen as one of the poorest in the district for a modernized road project. This has brought jobs and income to the village and some Twa families benefit from the project, but most continue to cultivate on other people’s land to make a living. Despite government projects and interventions, the help from NGOs, and access to free social services the Twa families in Kibumba still struggle with chronic poverty. John explains his perspective:

The problem the families have in common is they have no land to cultivate. They are still poor, but they want to work if they can get land. Even getting money cultivating for others is not enough; it’s just for one day. And when they get sick they cannot get money and that is when they sometimes send their kids to beg from others or the authorities. Another challenge they face is that even if they start going to school they don’t benefit like others… So many times they don’t finish school. [It is] mainly because of the poverty of their parents and also their mentalities which [are] still not settled for them to understand the importance of studying. (Interview with chief of Kibumba 2014)

Twa residents of Kibumba explained their predicaments as well.

When I wake I go try to get some work from my neighbors, that’s the only way I can get something to eat. I also sometimes go get clay for pottery but it doesn’t help me much so I need to get jobs from my neighbors, especially cultivating for them. In reality I can say that we don’t have anything at all, not even a small farm, so for me when I can see that my kids have got something to eat for the day and my neighbors aren’t complaining that they went to their farm to look for food, it makes me happy.

We work hard every day, but we do not get anything from it. We are living a very bad life. Sometimes we think of something which can develop us, but we cannot find it.
There is no need to keep making pottery because you get only 100 or 150 RWF. It is just a little to help you not dying from hunger. Pottery making has gone away from here because rice is cultivated in the swamp now and we cannot get clay from it. Not everyone has the chance of cultivating rice and still we haven’t got any profit from the rice.

These days we do not get buyers for our pots. People buy metal pots everywhere. It’s just mainly us who still uses these pots. If things go well I can sell maybe ten pots in a month. Then they will say I am rich because I can get 1000 RWF from those pots. If we don’t have buyers then the kids can spend the night without eating.

Marriage, Media, and the Representation of Rural Rwanda

Over the course of four years of conducting research on and fieldwork in Rwanda, I have observed a quiet air of disdain toward rural life among urban Rwandans, which is sometimes mimicked in media. This sentiment may be a byproduct of the positioning of the political center, which aims, rather forcefully, to transform Rwanda into a modernized, middle-income country, and which devalues traditional peasant lifeways. Stereotypes of rural people and the values of the political center are sometimes reflected in public spaces despite the stated attempt to equalize society and eliminate ethnicity from public discourse.

Representations of rural life in Rwanda have evolved with political transitions and increasing migration to urban centers. The elite-peasant relationship in a given regime greatly influences discourse and policy surrounding rural development. After Rwanda’s independence in 1962 the country was ruled by Hutu elites who maintained strong connections with their rural areas of origin (Ansoms 2009). Presidents Kayibanda (who served from 1962-1973) and Habyarimana (who served from 1973-1994), from the central and northern regions respectively, favored these places. President Habyarimana
often expressed his shared identity with the peasant classes in political speeches. Peasant farmers were characterized as the strength of the economy and the ideal Rwandan citizen.

**Rural Rhetoric**

There has been a great shift in rhetoric and value since the genocide. The largely Tutsi-led government is made up of many returned refugees who have little or no relation to the countryside or subsistence farming. They often grew up in neighboring countries and now reside in urban centers (Ansoms 2009). This difference in identity and attitude toward the peasantry has signified a policy change which no longer sees farmers as the backbone of Rwanda and its economy, but as a hindrance to modernization and economic growth. As a result, the rural sector is being “re-engineered” to fit the current development agenda, and rural people are blamed for having “the wrong peasant mentality” (Ansoms 2009). Misconceptions of rural people being lazy, uneducated, underdeveloped, or not wanting to work are prevalent in urban centers. Mentality was often cited as the reason Twa people remained in poverty and lacked education during my fieldwork as well. As Ansoms quotes (2009) Kagame as saying in his 2000 inaugural speech: “We would like to urgently appeal to all Rwandese people to work. As the Bible says, ‘he who does not work should not eat.’ ”

Rural to urban migration is common, especially among youth, because the obligations of adulthood are often impossible to meet in the countryside and peasant lifeways are no longer seen as the ideal. Those younger people who remain are subject to rigorous and unsparing rural policies imposed by the central government, and face a great potential for public failure and humiliation as a result of the inability to transition into adulthood. Marriage is a topic of special current concern because the percentage of
married people is decreasing (NISR 2012) and young adults are finding it increasingly
difficult to meet the financial obligations of courtship and marriage.

**Marriage**

Marriage is of utmost importance because it is the single event which
demarcates the boundary between youth and adulthood. Manhood and womanhood are
completely reliant on the ability of male youth to meet the financial obligations of
marriage. The first of those challenges is for young men to provide housing for a future
wife and children (Sommers and Uvin 2011). This requires the collection of materials to
build a home according to government standards. These unsparing standards require
houses to be built in *imidugudu*, have at least two rooms, and be constructed of acceptable
materials (Sommers 2012:25-27). The housing requirement alone presents enough of a
challenge to prepare for marriage, but additional financial obligations of courting and
bride-price payment make it impossible to be married for a majority of rural youth.

Practical responses such as *gukocora* by poor villagers to serious problems can
generate derision and satire from other Rwandans. Decisive and inflexible social and
cultural mandates leave little hope for poor rural youth, but it is the restrictive government
protocols which hinder adulthood the most. Marriage is not legal in Rwanda until the age
of twenty-one. However, if a woman is not married by the age of twenty-four or twenty-
five the prospect of becoming a social outcast and an embarrassment to her family
increases significantly (Sommers 2012:194).

When asked about the challenges of marriage by a journalist from *TV1*, rural
youth expressed their thoughts about the process of finding a wife in a segment called
*Ntibashaka Gushaka*, which translates to “they don’t want to look for” (a wife) or “they
don’t want to get married.” Some said that they would not try to get a wife, that they don’t even have enough money to take care of themselves, and that dating is too expensive because the girl expects money from the boy.

With the kind of job that I have I can’t afford to look for a wife. Actually I’m not even going to try. Some are thinking that maybe this will change the culture and women will be the ones to buy and pay for things to get a husband.

The journalist responds here by asking if he would then become the woman of the house, generating laughter from the men listening in on the interview. A short time later the journalist explains that “sometimes this is an excuse for people where you can find a man in his 40s who keeps calling himself a boy.”

The threat of failed masculinity has far reaching consequences, especially for female youth. If male youth cannot meet the requirements for marriage, both young men and women are stuck in the liminal phase of what Sommers calls “waithood” (Sommers 2012). According to Sommers’ research for his 2012 book, Stuck, informal marriages were becoming the norm in rural areas and traditional marriages were less common (Sommers 2012:77).

In examining these media outlets we can see that The New Times ignores rural realities in favor of promoting the elitist, upper-class, urban views of the political center. Relatively new TV station TV1 presents rural life sometimes mockingly and with a hint of satire. Sometimes bizarre or outrageous stories are featured and often serve to highlight the “backward,” disorganized, and unmodern nature of rural people and their beliefs. One such instance featured a woman in a rural village who claimed to have birthed a toad as a result of witchcraft, which she kept in a bucket in her home. Stories such as these bring forth other common stereotypes of rural people as superstitious and ignorant.
Traditionally, marriage takes place after the man and his family have asked permission to marry from the woman’s family and presented them with an acceptable bride-price. During courtship, men are often expected to give the woman small amounts of money for personal use and can be asked to help a family member of the girl. If he refuses, she may not continue the relationship.

In general when a man is looking for a girlfriend he has to give her money. Otherwise she won’t date him. I don’t know how women are behaving these days. Sometimes you approach a lady and she thinks you are not serious and takes you as ‘pirate’ (meaning something fake, often used to describe phones and other electronics from China). (Niyibizi 2014)

One such solution to the problem of marriage is colloquially called *gukocora*, from the Kinyarwanda verb “to hit” or “to nail.” This is a consensual union which takes place informally between partners without official obligations or nuptial ceremonies. *Gukocora* allows the couple to marry based on individual agreement without payments of bride-price and may or may not be a legal union. Registration of marriage documents at the district office incurs a fee which presents another obstacle preventing traditional marriages.

In another segment broadcast by TV1, the topic of *gukocora* was explored in a small town in northern Rwanda. Following is a portion of the interviews translated into English:

Woman #1: “When you are lucky you get married at the sector, then you live together. But me too, they ‘hit’ me.”

Man #1: “Yeah, that is what is done these days. When you find yourself without any means, you ‘hit.’”

Journalist: “To go up, to put yourself into someone else’s level, to increase your status...these are the things which bring people to have expensive weddings and weddings they cannot even afford. People living here, this gave them a good lesson
in not putting themselves in a high position to which they do not belong, so they started *gukocora.*”

The above-cited TV1 broadcast alternates between interviews with rural residents and clips of what appear to be very expensive, fancy weddings. The journalist’s assertion that these people should not try to elevate their status is indicative of the sentiment that people must accept their lot in life as unchangeable (Sommers and Uvin 2011).

Contrast this interview with an article published on November 13, 2015 in *The New Times,* Rwanda’s leading English language newspaper, regarding weddings. The article, “Why Financial Stress Should Not Ruin Your Dream Wedding,” discusses attitudes toward expensive weddings, and the differences in urban and rural attitudes toward weddings are apparent. Following are some urban respondents’ opinions:

> Our wedding cost us only one million francs (about $1300 USD). We invited a few people, the reception was at our family home, and basically everything was simple.

> My husband and I always wanted to have the wedding of our dreams, one where we could astound our guests and make them happy. We spent over RWF 8million (approximately $10,400 USD) but it was worth it. We had the time of our lives.

> One million francs is ten times more than most rural Rwandans make in an entire year. Over half of rural Rwandans are considered poor (earning 250 RWF per adult per day, $0.33 USD) and of those 36.8% are extremely poor (less than 175 RWF per adult per day, $0.23 USD) (Government of Rwanda 2007). The idea of spending millions of francs on a wedding illustrates the vast chasm between urban and rural realities. Although some authorities are now discouraging spending exorbitant amounts of money on weddings, a high value is placed on traditional wedding procedures.
This is easily framed as a divide between urban and rural realities, but it also reflects class divisions. The urban-based political elite, who have the greatest power and influence in shaping public culture and value, do not have intimate associations with rural lifeways. Indeed, many societies with large, agrarian peasant populations struggle to assimilate them into capitalist development paradigms and ever-changing global market economies. These majority populations often become the “grit in the prosperity machine,” an obsolete surplus population the metropole must find ways to deal within order to move forward (Loker 1999). What distinguishes the Twa from the Rwandan peasantry is their history of forest foraging and ethnic exclusion.

Sentiments regarding peasant mentality are echoed in urban-based media, which although characterized as having freedom by government officials, are still heavily influenced by elite opinions. Devaluing peasant lifeways has helped to fuel the increase in urban migration among youth. However, this migration has not translated into poverty reduction or the ability to meet marriage obligations. Notions of acceptability and esteem are refracted in the media by way of illuminating that which is objectionable. The stringent nature of Rwandan culture has not allowed rural inhabitants to find creative ways to adapt to current circumstances without condescension from those better off.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that the precarious situation of the Twa in Rwanda is the result of a long line of disposessions, marginalization, and aspects of contemporary revisions of history which have excluded Twa identity and voices. As population pressure continues to worsen the problems of deforestation, access to land, and increased competition for resources, the Twa find themselves in circumstances of increased suffering. Hungry, undereducated, often without basic means, and excluded from decision-making processes which affect their lives, they endure insecurity and vulnerability.

Post-genocide development programs such as *Imidugudu* and *Bye-Bye Nyakatsi* have challenged the Twa in an attempt to assimilate into modernizing Rwandan society. Intentions to alleviate severe poverty at the national level have not always translated into benefits for Twa communities at local levels. This seems to be the result of two things. First, the mismanagement of resources, lack of prioritizing, and discrimination at local levels has stymied pro-poor development aimed at alleviating the problems faced by so many Twa. Second, disorganized and distrustful communities of Twa who misuse resources have made it extremely difficult to target them for meaningful assistance.
Villages suffering from severe and chronic poverty have seen the breakdown of family and community ties. Disorganized and chaotic, people in these villages are often unable to make much use of the help that is offered to them. Conditions of neglect, alcohol abuse, and dependency are likely symptoms of generations of poverty, stigma, and suffering. Material and monetary assistance and other efforts are often used ineffectively and end up being wasted or mismanaged by Twa communities. This is not only the result of disorganization, but also alcohol abuse, gender inequality, and a tendency to favor only short-term planning.

Rwanda has implemented several other laws and programs since the genocide in an attempt to unify and develop a once deeply divided society. The government has promoted a national identity not based on ethnicity, and a history which focuses on a unified people and blames outside influences for dividing Rwandans. Rigorous development programs aimed at re-engineering rural society and transforming Rwanda into a middle-income country have been carried out. The combination of these things has lessened outright discrimination against the Twa, but ethnic stigma persists.

Urban and Rural Life

In comparing the lives of urban and rural Twa I found many discrepancies between the two populations. Twa living in Kigali had greater access to employment opportunities and benefitted from more shared spheres of activity with non-Twa. Living in Kigali, the densely populated urban center of Rwanda, seems to diminish any obvious signs of discrimination against the Twa. Nearly all members of the pottery cooperative in Kigali reported that the Twa were no longer marginalized and were treated like everyone
else. They said they were invited to weddings and other events, shared food and drinks, and were treated the same as non-Twa people. Many who had experienced marginalization or stigma growing up in rural areas indicated that living in the capital under the post-genocide government has alleviated these problems.

Twa living in rural areas seem to suffer to a greater degree as a result of their distance from resources, lack of income generating activities, and higher degree of marginalization. A majority of my interlocutors reported that their only source of income was from day labor on nearby farms or from the few pots they were able to sell at the market. Those who still made pottery had to travel great distances to gather necessary materials and took time away from other work to make the pots. The income from both of these ventures was insufficient to support a family for more than one day or possibly even just one meal.

Grinding poverty among rural Twa contributed heavily to their perception of marginalization. Hunger, shame, and the inability to present a clean appearance furthered feelings of stigmatization. Although most rural interlocutors were unwilling to elaborate on feelings toward local officials or government authorities they hinted at dissatisfaction with the social services provided to them. Many were unable to make use of many of the programs aimed at helping them. For example, the Girinka program provides one cow to poor families, but since most Twa do not own land and cannot afford proper food for the cow they were unable to keep it. Several families reported selling their cow as soon as they got it because they did not have sufficient resources to make use of the animal.

Additionally, housing programs such as Imidugudu placed many family’s homes on infertile land and without adequate amenities, such as a well pump. With
limited means of generating income the ability to grow small amounts of food for household consumption is paramount. Having a “kitchen garden” is both common practice among rural inhabitants and is also promoted by the government as a means to maintain healthy families. The inability to do so contributes to hunger and nutrition-related illnesses. Furthermore, building houses without providing a water source close by makes it more difficult to keep people and items clean and takes additional time to locate and use water sources which may be at a distance.

Ethnicity

The elimination of ethnicity from public discourse in Rwanda has had both positive and negative consequences for the Twa. On one hand, it has helped to prevent outright discrimination against them. This includes not sharing food, drinks, or eating utensils, not including Twa in social events such as weddings, and living together in mixed communities. By removing ethnic labels many Twa I talked to were able to make use of a national identity and were expressive about their support for the government policy. These feelings seemed to be more prevalent among urban Twa. I suspect that this is in part because they share more time, space, and activities with non-Twa.

On the other hand, eliminating the ability for Twa to identify as Twa or as an autochthonous population denies them their distinctiveness. The Twa have a unique cultural identity and tradition. They have their own songs and dances which were a rich and significant contribution to the cultural history of Rwanda. They have a sense of their own identity as a forest people who were famous for their hunting and entertaining skills.
By denying their name, they are denied this identity and a deeply rooted connection to the past.

The replacement of the name “Twa” with *Abasigajwe Inyuma N’amateka* (those left behind by history), *Abasangwabutaka* (first people of the land), or Historically Marginalized People does little to ameliorate this. *Abasangwabutaka* is the preferred name out of these three, but it risks accusations of divisionism. *Abasigajwe Inyuma N’amateka* and Historically Marginalized People have negative connotations and reflect heavily their underprivileged status in society.

**Civic and Political Life**

Although services and support may not always reach Twa communities as intended, I believe that there is a great will on the part of the national government to bring the Twa out of poverty and incorporate them into modernizing Rwandan society. If this doesn’t translate into success it is in part because so many Twa communities remain invisible. Often isolated and with a tendency to stay to themselves, many rural Twa do not receive the help they may need. Additionally, discrimination that does exist is often found in rural areas and can occur at local levels of government. These are the authorities who are supposed to make sure services reach vulnerable communities.

Rwanda’s fast-tracked development and modernization plans have made it more difficult for Twa to keep up with programs and policies. For this community, moving away from subsistence agriculture before they ever were able to really embrace it seems like an abrupt and harsh change. Often without land or means to grow and sell crops, the Twa have not participated in agriculture to the same degree as many other
Rwandans. Now, with the governments attempt to move away from subsistence agriculture Twa people struggle to find sufficient livelihoods to support themselves.

Representation
Differences in urban and rural Twa communities are a yet another reflection of the urban-rural divide in larger society discussed in Chapter 5. The inability or unwillingness of urban elites to give value to rural peasants furthers the marginalization of rural Twa, and can become pariahs among an undesirable majority. Although a small minority population, many Twa are a part of the larger rural majority who rely on subsistence agriculture to survive. Stereotypes of rural people as backward or uncultured are amplified when we look at rural Twa.

Going Forward
In researching and writing this thesis I endeavored to bring forth a history and perspective of people seldom visited in Rwandan scholarship and studies. Although certainly not exhaustive, I hope this work has made a significant contribution to literature on Twa communities and their experiences in contemporary Rwanda. I have synthesized many excellent works of scholarship on the Great Lakes region, Pygmy peoples, Rwandan history, and development studies to bring together an exploration of Twa ethnicity and social status in Rwanda.

As previously mentioned, little has been written about the Twa, especially in English. Those interested must rely a great deal on reports written by members of large international organizations, such as the Forest Peoples Programme or Minority Rights Group. One goal of this thesis was to contribute to the scant amount of anthropological
scholarship regarding Twa in Rwanda. I have shown that the history of ethnicity, stigma, and marginalization in Rwanda have continued to contribute to the social position of Twa people today. In common with many Pygmy groups in the region, the Twa were and continue to be in some cases, thought of as less than human, uncivilized, and dangerous. These stereotypes persist in contemporary Rwanda despite the elimination of ethnicity from public life.

Seen by many as exemplary in post-conflict development and an anchor of stability in the region, Rwanda is a hotspot for NGOs, development assistance, and research. The elimination of ethnicity has brought many benefits, but has also complicated the work of many of these organizations. For the Twa this elimination has meant a greater degree of ethnic anonymity in some cases, but it has not always translated into improved social status. Contemporary development programs have attracted a great deal of research. However, very little of this research has been centered on the impacts to Twa communities. I hope my research has brought forth some of the benefits and difficulties of these policies and programs.

The Twa have made remarkable contributions to the long-term history and cultural traditions of the region and deserve recognition and appreciation. Going forward, I hope to engage in further research regarding traditions and knowledge the Twa maintained before leaving the forest. I also hope to continue to explore the implications of the laws which eliminated ethnicity in Rwanda. Maintaining identities can be important for minority communities, especially those that are indigenous, and I am eager to see how Twa people fare in the new Rwanda.
On my first visit to Rwanda I met the Minister of Gender and Family, Aloise Inyumba. She discussed many post-genocide development policies and her hopes for the future of her country. In explaining the Rwandan approach to the future she said this: “In America your country is your motherland. You have forefathers. But in Rwanda, our country is our baby.” It is with this sentiment I have learned that although scholars of Rwanda may be quick to judge the path forward this country has chosen, we must believe that Rwandans will do their best to nurture and grow the country and hope that the best intentions prevail.
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