



## UNDERSTANDING ATROCITIES: REMEMBERING, REPRESENTING, AND TEACHING GENOCIDE

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## Remembering Them All: Including and Excluding Atrocity Crime Victims

*Andrew R. Basso*

This chapter offers a critical genocide studies perspective on the construction of narratives and memories of victimization in atrocities.<sup>1</sup> It deconstructs exclusive memory constructions and offers critiques that challenge prevalent narratives regarding the Ottoman destruction of Christian minorities (Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians) from 1912 to 1925 and the victimization of Tutsis, Hutus, and Twa in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.<sup>2</sup> Traditional studies of these two crimes have focused on the two main victim groups involved—Armenians and Tutsis—and have typically failed to consider and analyze the experiences of all other victim groups involved, as well as the implications of these exclusions. Exclusionary memory campaigns, as will be demonstrated, can lead to incomplete, inaccurate, and isolated histories that are devoid of their larger contexts. Exclusionary memory campaigns can also contribute to current and future exploitations of isolated histories to undermine democratic governance.

Future scholarship must be critically aware of the problems with exclusionary histories and remedy them by utilizing a comparative-inclusive approach to atrocity studies on “other” victim groups. Inclusive approaches are a moral imperative, a necessity for holistic historical accuracy, and a tool for combatting attempts to politicize remembrance.<sup>3</sup> By identifying and remembering all victims of atrocity, it is possible to create rich historical narratives that recognize all victimization and give some semblance of equal justice to victims.

The comparative-inclusive approach presented in this chapter will demonstrate that privileging one victim group over others excludes important historical memories that can otherwise be used to construct insightful narratives, and allows for deliberate distortions of memories for personal political gain. In short, inclusive approaches avoid relegating lesser-known victim groups to oblivion, where they remain forever in the shadow of larger victim groups that can “claim a monopoly on public attention, ensuring that others will remain shrouded in obscurity.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Ottoman Genocide of Christian Minorities: Victim Memory Exclusion

During the last great caliph, the Ottoman Empire undertook a devastating project of social restructuring and almost rid itself of its Christian minority populations *in toto*. Three main victim groups—Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians—were killed in succession by two different regimes in two different time periods: the Young Turks (1912–1918) and the Kemalists (1919–1925),<sup>5</sup> led by the first president of modern-day Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. When analyzed together, the campaigns of destruction against Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians are connected in that the genocides represent a concerted effort to rid the Ottoman Empire of its Christian populations, thereby eliminating Christian influence from the Holy Land. While these crimes were framed as a battle of religions, there were many other factors that caused the Young Turks to conclude that genocide was the appropriate response for solving the empire’s problems.

### *Victimization of Christian Minorities: Shared Pathways to Destruction*

Christians’ socio-economic and political roles in the empire have been emphasized as key exacerbating factors contributing to their destruction.<sup>6</sup> Due to the intersection of international and domestic politics, as well as religious and ethnic differences over centuries, the imperial, authoritarian, and democratic leaders of the Ottoman Empire (later Turkey) blamed the empire’s problems on Christian minorities, who were framed as fifth columnists and separatists who could be scapegoated for all that was wrong with the declining empire.<sup>7</sup> But while religious difference can offer

face-value reasoning for why Christians were killed, this was at most an underlying factor, and as such is an insufficient explanation of the type of destruction Christian minorities faced. Christian minorities were collectively persecuted in large part due to the multitude of perceived injustices that Christians had inflicted upon the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Existing literatures offer varying contextual justifications for the destruction of the Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians by the Ottoman/Turkish perpetrators, but macro anti-Christian sentiments that link these individual accounts can offer more powerful explanations for why Christians were targeted for similar reasons and exterminated using similar methods. German historian Tessa Hofmann argues that the genocide of Aegean, Thracian, Pontic, and other Anatolian Greeks should be considered a “cumulative” genocide. Cumulative is utilized here in the sense that the genocide was perpetrated over the course of a decade and victims were killed in varying geographical locations depending on exogenous and endogenous socio-political factors.<sup>8</sup> The notion of a cumulative genocide offers a rich conceptual starting point for analyses of this genocide and is a propitious label to apply to the shared pathways of destruction Christian minorities experienced as a whole.

Before the genocide, Christians were marginalized as slaves or semi-freed peoples in the period leading up to the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Christian women were sold into harems, men and women forced into labour, and, for comparison’s sake, sometimes treated worse than Russian serfs. The non-slave, “freer” Christians were ostracized from many facets of the Ottoman socio-economic system, most notably the traditional agrarian sector. Christians did, however, find some affluence and capitalized on trade, small-business ownership, and banking, areas that were ultimately perceived by other Ottomans as contributing to the demise of the once-great empire.<sup>9</sup>

The empire’s economic decline had everything to do with previous poor planning choices, and the sultan’s answers to these problems. The Ottoman Empire was the “sick man of Europe” and the sultan knew that in order to compete with other European economies, the empire had to modernize and westernize its economy.<sup>10</sup> However, the modernization effort had unintended consequences, most notably the creation of tensions between the traditional Ottoman ways of life and the “modern” ways of Western Europe. The sultan called upon Western advisers to instruct the

Ottoman state on how to construct its new economy around the sectors that, coincidentally, Christians were forced into and dominated. This was wrongly interpreted by Ottoman citizens as Christians helping Christians, and intentionally excluding Muslims, in order to bring about the empire's downfall and its colonization by European powers.<sup>11</sup> This misinterpretation simultaneously ostracized the majority of Ottoman Muslims who held chauvinistic beliefs in the traditional Ottoman economy—the very policies that brought the empire to crisis—and led to widespread distrust in the modernization process.<sup>12</sup> Ironically, some Christian minorities prospered in the socio-economic roles to which they had been segregated with the new modern, Western economy.<sup>13</sup>

To fund these modernization projects, the Ottoman state went into debt with the very nations that sent advisors—Western Christian nations. This debt resulted in Western countries, most notably Britain and France, controlling over 90 percent of the Ottoman banking system, handicapping the Ottoman state's ability to spend on social institutions that could ease the negative repercussions of economic decline, and address problems with individual citizens' financial endeavours.<sup>14</sup> The high level of economic control and the resulting stagnation of the Ottoman economy, and specifically Christian control over the crumbling empire, eventually became an emphasis of the Young Turks in creating the discriminatory and toxic conditions necessary for the blanket victimization of Christian minorities.<sup>15</sup>

Christian wars of independence in the Balkans reinforced and solidified the Ottoman belief that Christians were the underlying cause of the empire's demise. Four Balkan states—Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia—achieved independence from the empire between 1912 and 1913. The loss of these territories was not only detrimental to Ottoman prestige, but also meant that the empire had effectively lost all of its European holdings in the span of just two years. This fuelled the belief that Christian minorities within the empire could not be trusted as these subversive elements would seek independence from within.<sup>16</sup> The Ottoman fear that the great European powers desired to carve up the empire came true after the Great War (1914–1918), meaning that once again Christians were perceived as responsible for the dissolution of the empire.<sup>17</sup>

Compounding these issues was Christian minorities' protracted struggle for equal rights in the empire. As a caliphate, the empire systematically repressed non-Muslim minorities, and the *Tanzimat*, or reforms, of 1839

and 1876 were intended to overhaul Ottoman society so it could modernize and establish at least a semi-equality. The reforms, on paper, gave Christians rights and freedoms equal to Muslim citizens in an attempt to shift the empire away from an officially discriminatory religious state to a secular one that allowed free religious expression and practice. However, Christian rights were never fully realized, nor were the modern visions of the sultanate's and empire's advisers. The lack of policy implementation, enforcement, and societal acceptance ultimately doomed the *Tanzimat* and caused great social strife, again leading to a scapegoating of Christians as a problem group. Russia's involvement in securing the *Tanzimat* was particularly troubling for increasingly disaffected Ottoman citizens.<sup>18</sup>

These issues, coupled with the overall decline of the empire, gave Ottomans a feeling of helplessness and loss, and they sought a scapegoat that could be blamed for initiating these disastrous programs. The Young Turks' successful revolution of 1908 ushered in four years of relative peace, but an internal coup d'état spearheaded by Mehmed Talaat, Ismail Enver, and Ahmed Djemal led to a new ruling regime that embraced the anti-Christian dogmas of the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress—henceforth referred to as the Young Turks regime).<sup>19</sup> Rather than solely blaming the sultan for the empire's problems, the Young Turks then shifted all blame towards Christian minorities and turned their back on their own cosmopolitan ideals. Christians were then persecuted along religious lines due to devolving political and socio-economic circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Religious and ethnic difference alone, it should be noted, are insufficient variables for explaining this destruction; there has to be *more* than simple religious and ethnic difference in order to make war and atrocity possible.<sup>21</sup>

Even though Christians had participated in the Young Turks revolution from its inception to its end, when the Young Turks regime took power, Christians were targeted when the “Three Pashas” (Talaat, Enver, and Djemal) began ruling the empire with genocidal aims. The three men consolidated power amongst themselves and turned their backs on the cosmopolitan ideals of the previous Young Turks ideology.<sup>22</sup> They exploited religious difference and the socio-economic and political factors outlined above to collectively target and punish Christians in the empire as a whole for the demise of the once-great Ottoman Empire. The majority of Christian victims had absolutely no connection to the ostensible causes of their

persecution by the power-consolidating and scapegoating Young Turks regime. Rather, Christians were targeted because of historical and contemporary political and cultural anti-Christianism that exploited and skewed existing religious divisions based on the scapegoating of Christians as the primary cause of the decline of the empire. These actions culminated in an empire-wide jihad against Christians in November 1914.<sup>23</sup> Perception dominates and is the element most revealed when examining the shared victimization of Christians in the empire against the vitriolic and destructive Turkish nationalism of the Young Turks and Kemalist regimes.

The ideals of Pan-Ottomanism were transformed into Pan-Turkism, specifically the exclusion of Christians from this new vision for the empire, and the Young Turks' new propaganda machine organized itself around the discriminatory and dehumanizing anti-Christian messages of Ziya Gökalp and other ultra-nationalists and provocateurs.<sup>24</sup> Genocidal goals were developed and called for the expulsion or killing of Christians in the empire's borders to make the Ottoman Empire a region for Turks only. The Young Turks, and later Kemalists, worked according to a 5-to-10-percent principle which dictated that non-Muslims could only comprise between 5 and 10 percent of a locality's population; all non-Muslim groups exceeding this number had to either be destroyed or transferred to a different part of the empire.<sup>25</sup> This resulted in the killing of approximately 2.5 million Christians (1.5 million Armenians; 750,000 Greeks; and 250,000 Assyrians).<sup>26</sup> Christians were collectively punished for exogenous and endogenous political, economic, and socio-cultural pressures felt by Ottoman citizens. Despite the allure of blaming the killing on mere religious difference, this narrative is false.

### *Linking Narratives: Towards Macro Perspectives on Memories of Genocide*

A problematic element of the memories of genocide against Christian minorities is that studies of the Armenian genocide have almost exclusively claimed the history of persecution and genocide. While these studies are certainly correct in arguing that Armenians were victimized on a wide scale, a focus on Armenian victimization excludes the larger context which saw anti-Christian sentiments and actions directed against *all* of the empire's Christians, not one group specifically. Little attention is paid to Greek and Assyrian victims in these literatures and these groups have

not had penetrating studies of their experiences conducted on a systematic scale comparable to English-language scholarship on the Armenian genocide.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps most important is the recognition that the victimization process applies to all of these persecuted groups, and that isolated individualized pathologies of destruction fall short of cumulative understandings of genocide and memory. A cumulative comparative-inclusive perspective offers holistic and macro understandings of victimization processes better than isolated narratives. The dominant political and cultural shifts to targeting Christian minorities for extermination were the main driving factors in the genocidal efforts of the Young Turks regime. These shifts were later carried on by the Kemalist regime, which once again initiated and expanded anti-Christian violence.<sup>28</sup>

Comparative-inclusive, macro analyses of the victim groups provide insight into geopolitical effects on shared victimization and genocidal processes. Generally (when all Christian minority groups are included), the genocide can be said to have taken place from 1912 to 1925. The peculiarities of perpetration as a whole, however, reveal that the Young Turks and Kemalist regimes were cognizant of and calculating towards potential and real national enemies in both the Great War and the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923), and this deeply affected the time periods and areas in which Christians were killed. More Assyrians were killed in 1925 by the Turks and Kurds following Kurdish independence revolts and subsequent Turkish repression and control.<sup>29</sup>

Kurds were treated with Janus-faced Ottoman policies during this time. Predominantly Muslim, Kurds were simultaneously perpetrators of genocide against Christian minorities and victims of displacements and massacres at the hands of the Young Turks and Kemalists. Over 700,000 Kurds were forcibly displaced during the Great War, and approximately 350,000 were killed via direct and indirect methods that were also utilized against Christian minorities.<sup>30</sup> Kurds as victims and perpetrators at the same time is an important historical challenge to be examined in future scholarship and may have profound implications for understanding the roles of individuals and groups in atrocities as a whole.

A cumulative look at the genocide of Christian minorities, though, reveals that Aegean Greeks, residing along the littoral western coast of the empire, were the first victims of genocidal processes between 1912 and 1916, and again from 1919 to 1923. Assyrians, living in the heartland of the



empire, were victimized from 1914 to 1918 and 1919 to 1925; Armenians, living primarily in major cities and heartland areas, from 1915 to 1923; and the Pontic Greeks, residing along the Black Sea coastline, from 1916 to 1918 and 1919 to 1923.<sup>31</sup> One of the striking elements of the genocide of Christian minorities is that there was no continuous killing of individual victim groups throughout the years 1912 and 1925. Instead, the killing occurred in waves, a genocide progressing from the Aegean coastline to the interior and back again with different groups killed at different times in different places by many types of perpetrators—be they special death squads, brigands, or military personnel.<sup>32</sup> When the Young Turks and Kemalist regimes' policies and victims are analyzed cumulatively, two things become clear: the intended extermination and displacement of all Christian minorities, and the fact that these groups were killed in distinct intervals and not all at the same time.

By the time genocidal policies were fully implemented in the Ottoman Empire, the *genocidaires* had considerable experience in implementing extreme solutions against Christians and other minority populations, fueling their campaign of destruction.<sup>33</sup> The genocide against Christians did not fully start until approximately 1912, when Greeks along the Aegean littoral areas were deported either to Greece and Southern Europe, or were sent to the interior of the empire, where they were killed by indirect methods. Indirect killing methods included, but were not limited to, starvation, dehydration, death by exhaustion, disease, and exposure.<sup>34</sup> These are highly cost-effective forms of killing and require few resources to perpetrate, and constitute elements of what Helen Fein has called “genocide by attrition.”<sup>35</sup> The destruction of Christian populations by displacement and indirect killing methods would constitute a “displacement atrocity.”<sup>36</sup>

One geopolitical factor concerning the Greeks as a whole was the varying intensity of violence utilized by perpetrators. The political pressures that the forced displacement of Aegean Greeks placed on Greece was no doubt the impetus for German encouragement of the Turks to stop the displacements, with which the Turks complied.<sup>37</sup> The political and military ties between Germany and the Ottomans during the Great War certainly necessitated keeping Greece neutral. If Greece entered the war against the Central Powers, a new battlefront would have opened up and would have undermined the efforts of the alliance on the western and eastern fronts, as well as destabilize the Ottoman Empire's relative security from attack

due to its geographic location. It was because of the war that the genocidal policies of the Young Turks and later Kemalist regimes were tailored to distinct geopolitical situations and implemented cumulatively.<sup>38</sup> In the early genocidal period, the military position of the Central Powers was far from consolidated and the war was far from decided.<sup>39</sup> It was only later in the war and during the postwar period that the Aegean Greeks suffered massive casualties, far beyond the displacement of the early years, perhaps as it became more viable, militarily and politically, to kill them. In this way, stopping the violence against Aegean Greeks can be considered a military decision, demonstrating that genocidal policies often have military strategy intertwined with perpetration beyond the use of soldiers as killers. That said, the later Kemalist regime reinitiated the violence to the same degree as the Armenian and Pontic Greek deportations.

The Assyrian genocide began in 1914 and lasted until 1925, after which survivors of the death marches languished in refugee camps, a stateless people whose plight was internationally known.<sup>40</sup> Approximately 50 percent of the population was killed by indirect and direct means. Like other Christian groups, the final intent of Ottoman/Turkish policies was death or assimilation into primarily Turkic habitations.<sup>41</sup> The years and geographic location of persecution coincided with war. While this correlation does not prove causation, the unique varying regional presence or threat of war in all cases of destruction of Christian minorities does signal a link between war and the presence of genocide in geographical regions within the empire. Assyrians were targeted during the Great War, the British Mesopotamian campaign, and the Russian incursion into Turkey, presumably in part to clear potential combat zones of Christians who might sympathize with the British or Russian causes.<sup>42</sup> After the war, Assyrians were left to die in refugee camps or were killed by Turkish forces, both regular and irregular, into the 1920s, when the Turks began focusing on the eastern and western fronts against Greece.<sup>43</sup> While the Assyrians did offer military resistance, their geographical location, like that of the Armenians, meant that no outside force could aid them, save for the British and Russians. The correlation between Ottoman killing campaigns and the British in Mesopotamia and Gallipoli and the Russians in Pontus and the Caucuses may have been more significant factors in deciding when to kill the Assyrians at the local and national levels than has been recognized previously.

After halting campaigns against the Aegean Greeks, the Ottomans shifted the machinery of death towards the Anatolian Armenians who could not be saved by foreign powers due to their physical isolation. The official Armenian commemoration of the beginning of the genocide is 24 April 1915, when leading Armenian intellectuals and community leaders were arrested and killed in Constantinople. However, as early as 25 February 1915, Armenian men were being drafted into the *amele taburları*, the brutal Ottoman forced-labour battalions where death rates were typically over 90 percent.<sup>44</sup> Even in 1914, Aegean and Pontic Greeks were drafted into the *amele taburları* and were being killed using various indirect methods: exposure, exhaustion, starvation, dehydration, and disease.<sup>45</sup> The recruitment of Armenians was the next step for the *genocidaires* and, in addition to indirect deaths, the members of the *amele taburları* were subjected to torture, mutilations, and murder. The *genocidaires* again tailored their plans to geopolitics, utilizing forced labour to carry supplies for the military, freeing Muslim Ottomans to fight.<sup>46</sup> This simultaneously allowed the perpetrating regimes to continue to situate and justify the killing and poor treatment of Christians in terms of an “us” versus “them” mentality (i.e., Muslims versus Christians). War, therefore, galvanized internal Ottoman beliefs about Christians attempting to impose themselves on the empire.

The *amele taburları* were but one element of the genocide. The primary means of perpetration were the deportation caravans of Christian victims from all over the empire. The caravans were comprised of Christians who were forced to march while being systematically deprived of water, food, clothing, shelter, and medical care by the perpetrators. Deportation was utilized to facilitate faster deaths among victims with little cost to the perpetrators, either in terms of bullets or the psychological strain of directly killing individuals.<sup>47</sup> The remaining populations were sent from their place of residence to Der Zor in the Syrian Desert, and the death rate for these columns typically ranged from 80 to 90 percent.<sup>48</sup> The columns were escorted by the Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa (Special Organization) and Çetes (mostly organized brigands), and individual victims were often assaulted during deportation, including physical mutilation, psychological torture, and rape.<sup>49</sup> Women and girls were sometimes sold into harems, used as personal sexual slaves, or assimilated into Muslim households. Some of the most outrageous and degrading actions were inflicted upon Armenians during these deportations.<sup>50</sup>

The majority of the killing of Armenians occurred between 1915 and 1916, while violence and forced assimilations continued until 1923.<sup>51</sup> In 1916, however, the perpetrators turned their focus to the Pontic Greeks. Former American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, noted that any documented cases of violence against the Armenians could just as easily have been written about what was done to the Pontic Greeks.<sup>52</sup> The Pontic Greeks were forced to march over 800 kilometres from the Black Sea to Der Zor, and were subjected to the same kinds of brutality as the Armenians, which is one of the lost stories of this genocide. Pontians, and other groups, were sometimes taken onto the Black Sea in maritime craft and drowned en masse.<sup>53</sup> Pontians were killed from 1916 until 1918, the end of the Great War, and again from 1919 to 1923, during the Kemalist regime and the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922). The second phase of killing can be understood as a structural legacy of the Young Turks regime; it was carried on by Kemal's uniquely Turkic and anti-Christian nationalism, which ignited genocide once again in Pontus. Pontic Greek collaboration with Russian forces during the Great War was used as a justification to collectively punish the group, as was the case with other Christian collaborators.<sup>54</sup> The initial deportations were stopped by the end of the First World War, at which point all states wanted to avoid future conflicts with others, but were again initiated when the empire's improved politico-military situation made it possible (i.e., the Greco-Turkish War). Perhaps this is one reason why the killing of Greeks stopped in 1918–1919, but Armenians, who did not have a nation-state of their own to threaten the Ottoman Empire (and with diminished Russian political and military support after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917), continued to be killed along with Assyrians.

While Kemal denounced the crimes of the Young Turks regime, and the empire participated in the Turkish courts-martial (1919–1920) to punish leading perpetrators, the underlying hatred of Christian minorities was fanned again under Kemal.<sup>55</sup> The courts-martial turned into a political and legal blunder, and perpetrators avoided facing justice for their actions.<sup>56</sup> Ironically, Kemal, who denounced the Young Turks' crimes, instituted the exact same policies against Christian minorities, such as labour battalions, forced marches, violent brutality, and sexual slavery, all of which climaxed with the Great Fire of Smyrna (1922). The Turkish-Greek population transfers of 1923 rid the empire of most of its

Christians while the continued violence against Assyrians completed over fourteen years of genocide.<sup>57</sup>

### *Beyond Isolated Victimization; Towards Collective Narratives*

Alexander Hinton notes that the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, and the Rwandan genocide form the initial triad and first generation of genocide studies, while the Greek and Assyrian cases lay on the periphery as a fourth generation.<sup>58</sup> One contribution of this chapter is to link these generations of genocide studies to form more holistic accounts of similar cases. Beyond these links, three key historical patterns are striking when all groups are analyzed together. First, Christians were targeted when exogenous factors like war made it either necessary or more politically feasible to commit atrocities against them, most notably coinciding with the Great War as well as the Turkish War of Independence (specifically the Greco-Turkish War). Second, despite the realpolitik of Kemal's regime, which paid lip service to liberal cosmopolitan values, the regime had every intention of finishing the killing that the Young Turks had begun. Endogenous political forces also affected the genocidal policy of both the Young Turks and Kemal regimes. Finally, the cumulative character of the Ottoman's genocide of Christian minorities demonstrates once again that genocide can at times be an ever-unfolding process, rather than a single cataclysmic event in one designated year.<sup>59</sup>

While all the decisions for the killing practices may not have been planned from the beginning, the perpetrators followed a methodical and systematic blueprint for the destruction of Christian communities. Victims were starved to death in the desert, killed via exhaustion in labour battalions, and some were sold into slavery—tactics that are clear evidence of genocide against Christian minorities. The genocide took years to decimate the Ottoman Christian population but the results were cumulative—fourteen years of displacement and death leading to a near complete extermination of Christians and their influence in the empire. The correlation of genocidal processes with war in the Ottoman Empire is also an important research question that requires further scholarship to establish a solid link. A comparative-inclusive, macro lens cannot replace memories of the individual victim groups. It can, however, augment current knowledge and offer a more comprehensive collection of narratives of the genocidal processes involved. A macro lens can both reveal the complexities

involved in genocides that target multiple victim groups and also create holistic narratives that take all experiences into account for the linking of memories so victims do not experience a second genocide—that of the memory of their victimization.

## The Rwandan Genocide: Omitting Victims for Political Gains

The story of the Rwandan genocide represents a move from an inclusive to an exclusive memory construction. Rwandan president Paul Kagame is an enigma: a democratic leader, yet with shades of authoritarianism in his political repertoire. He saved hundreds of thousands of lives when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) swept into Rwanda in mid-1994 and stopped the Hutu extremist-perpetrated Rwandan genocide—one hundred days of slaughter of primarily Tutsis. Approximately 800,000 Rwandans were killed by thousands of their fellow citizens, while another 250,000 were raped; 4 million were left internally displaced, and 2.3 million became refugees.<sup>60</sup> However, more than twenty years after the genocide, the Rwandan government is in the process of shifting the memory from the “Rwandan genocide” to the “Rwandan genocide *against the Tutsi*,” which excludes other victim groups and suggests that the memory of atrocity is being obfuscated for contemporary political purposes.

### *One Hundred Days*

The genocide began on the night of 6 April 1994, when President Juvénal Habyarimana’s aircraft was shot down while on the final approach to Kigali. This triggered a frenzied and patterned response from the Presidential Guard and Hutu extremists, who established roadblocks and checkpoints around the capital to search for Tutsis, assassinated critical moderate political and civic actors and voices in Rwanda, and began an orgy of violence that eventually killed approximately 30 percent of the Rwandan Twa population, between ten and one hundred thousand Hutus, and the vast majority of Rwandan Tutsis.<sup>61</sup> The variation in the number of Hutu victims ranges so greatly because of a lack of credible and unbiased accounts. Studies of this sort are politically untenable in Rwanda at present. The variation is also indicative of the limited state of research on Hutu and Twa genocide

victims. Tutsis were immediately either killed, raped, or tortured in the most barbaric ways. Hutus who had the physical appearance of a stereotypical Tutsi, a contrived caricature spread by Hutu hate propaganda, were also killed, as were moderate Hutus who worked with or were allies of the so-called *inyenzi* (“cockroaches,” an extremist slur for Tutsis).<sup>62</sup>

The violence spread from Kigali to the countryside, and the Hutu extremist *Interahamwe* (“those who fight together”) and *Impuzamugambi* (“those who have the same goal”) paramilitaries incited and perpetrated genocide nationwide.<sup>63</sup> The extremists’ vulgarisms were spread by radio organizations and graphic cartoons in order to dehumanize their victim groups.<sup>64</sup> There are scores of massacre sites in Rwanda, but some of the most disturbing are in churches, where Tutsis and others sought refuge from their Hutu extremist killers but found only destruction.<sup>65</sup> Tutsis were hunted down in papyrus marshes and cities by roving bands of predominantly Hutu killers. Many Tutsis were raped, mutilated, and tortured before being killed or left to bleed out on the emerald green hills of Rwanda.<sup>66</sup> The victims of this genocide were primarily Tutsis—but Hutu moderates and Twa were murdered en masse using similarly ferocious and brutally direct killing methods.<sup>67</sup>

The killing was eventually stopped by the RPF, led by Kagame, who is sometimes referred to as the “Napoleon of Africa” for his tactical and strategic prowess as a military and political commander.<sup>68</sup> There is no doubt that Kagame ended the genocide with his invasion from Uganda. However, while the RPF’s victory in Rwanda stopped the genocide, it also simultaneously compelled many Hutus to flee over the border to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC), which further destabilized that already unstable country, renewing the brutal civil war and leading to international armed conflict. Kagame’s orders and actions in the 1996–1997 Rwandan invasion of the DRC are the subject of particularly pointed criticism, especially the mass murder of approximately two hundred thousand Hutu refugees. While the Rwandan government claims those killed were only Hutu extremists and *genocidaires*, less biased sources argue that many were civilians—a serious breach of the laws of armed conflict.<sup>69</sup> In Rwanda, a new democratic government was installed with Pasteur Bizimungu serving as president from 1994 to 2000, a period in which Kagame was nonetheless the *de facto* ruler. In 2000, Kagame was elected president and has twice been re-elected due to his unrivalled popularity.<sup>70</sup>

Rwanda engaged in a sweeping program of transitional justice, employing traditional Gacaca courts to place over a million alleged perpetrators on trial; it has also readily participated in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), allowing for some sixty prominent leaders of the genocide to be tried in Arusha, Tanzania. Beyond this, a national Rwandan ethnic unity program has been launched that seeks to break down ethnic differences between Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa, and in their place promote a single Rwandan identity.<sup>71</sup>

### *Exclusive Memory Construction*

The Rwandan government's insistence on adding the words "against the Tutsi" to "Rwandan genocide" may, in the long run, undermine the reconciliatory efforts fostered by Rwandans and international organizations. Internationally, "against the Tutsi" was not mentioned regularly until the early 2010s, and it is entirely absent from most international documents and resolutions. The ICTR's mandate and many United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions refer to "genocide in Rwanda" or the "Rwandan genocide" without specifying ethnicity. The ethnic modifier was promoted by the Rwandan government for years and was first formally mentioned in UNSC Resolution 2136 on 30 January 2014. The text of the resolution reads, "genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others who opposed the genocide were also killed."<sup>72</sup> The Rwandan government has accentuated "against the Tutsi" and lauded its inclusion, willfully ignoring the other victims mentioned in the resolution. Strangely, the resolution itself did not specifically focus on Rwanda—it was a renewal of an arms embargo in the DRC, and "against the Tutsi" was only mentioned once. Official international documentation includes the other victim groups and there is a legitimacy issue beyond problems of historical accuracy. Clearly, all victims of atrocity deserve historical recognition. As for legitimacy, the Rwandan government is towing a thin ethos by claiming international recognition of "against the Tutsi," even though the ethnic modifier was only tangentially mentioned in an arms embargo resolution, *not even pertaining to Rwanda*. Without question, the genocide was perpetrated in large part against the Tutsi. More troublesome is how the memory of moderate Hutu and Twa victims is either being distorted or eliminated by the government.



Known for his rich and penetrating studies on the Rwandan genocide, Scott Straus notes that killing Tutsis at first required the elimination of political and social opponents of the Hutu Power movement.<sup>73</sup> The first days of the genocide were clearly planned and many moderate Hutus, including the progressive and moderate Hutu prime minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, were systematically hunted down and slaughtered by the extremists.<sup>74</sup> The extremists required a mass fear campaign to silence opposition voices; the task of killing Tutsis was significantly streamlined as virtually no Hutu opponents to the killing still lived or were willing to risk death by expressing opposition. Pacifying internal ethnic resistance to killing Tutsis was a critical linchpin of the genocidal plan in Rwanda.<sup>75</sup> Like Tutsis, these moderate Hutus had to be killed—there was no room for opposition in the Hutu Power ideology as opposition would undermine toxified and hateful messages of ethnic homogeneity and togetherness in killing operations. All Hutus were commanded to undertake their duties as Hutus and enact their roles as killers of the *inyenzi* in order to secure Rwanda as a place for Hutus. Dissident voices, especially among the Hutu, were not tolerated.

Perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide acted for many different reasons, ranging from personal gain to personality type, particularly the true believers identified by Eric Hoffer.<sup>76</sup> But not all Hutus were killers, nor did all of them support the killing. Many moderate Hutus were resisters, saviours, victims, and perhaps sometimes, forced killers.<sup>77</sup> Hutu involvement in the genocide is deeply complex, understudied, and requires research that is difficult to conduct given the current political situation in Rwanda. There were a variety of roles these individuals played and simply reducing the memory of the genocide to Tutsi victim and Hutu perpetrator, as the title “against the Tutsi” suggests, belies Hutus’ complex memories and narratives as both individuals and an ethnic group.

The Twa are another largely forgotten victim group. The *genocidaires* often killed the indigenous Twa because of a legacy of discrimination dating from the colonial period, and because of the generalized hostility of Hutu Power to non-Hutus.<sup>78</sup> Hutu extremists committed numerous village massacres of the Twa throughout Rwanda.<sup>79</sup> While some did join the extremists, Twa were almost exclusively victims. They were “saved” by the RPF invasion, but the RPF, like the extremists, also committed individual and village massacres of the Twa.<sup>80</sup> Approximately one-third of the Twa fled during the genocide, one-third were killed, and one-third remained

in Rwanda, where they continue to experience socio-economic and political marginalization. The Twa have been almost wholly excluded from the memory of the Rwandan genocide.<sup>81</sup> Their socio-political exclusion in Rwanda continues to be a stain on national and international reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, and serves as an indictment of the divisive politics of the post-genocide regime that has refused to remedy this situation.

The Rwandan genocide was a national experience and all individual Rwandans participated in varying roles, be they victims, perpetrators, bystanders, or, perhaps, a combination of multiple roles. Many Rwandan groups were killed during the genocide—Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa alike. Narrowing the memory to solely Tutsi victims is selective history and also supports troubling changes in Rwanda’s political culture and its attitudes toward the memory of the genocide. The memory the Rwandan government wants to construct is that of Tutsi victim and Hutu perpetrator, while at the same time spearheading a national program de-ethnicizing the population. Amidst this backdrop, “against the Tutsi” can be viewed as a deliberate obfuscation of memory for domestic political purposes.

### *Kagame’s Rwanda: An Emerging Semi-Authoritarian Democracy*

Marina Ottaway’s concept of semi-authoritarianism is best applied to the current situation in Rwanda. Ottaway argued that there are many regimes in the world that have democratic institutions, but which engage in authoritarian practices intended to maintain the appearance of a democracy without exposing elite actors to the risks posed by free democratic elections. Regimes insulate themselves by tampering with voter rolls, engaging in clientelism, proscribing political candidates, monopolizing media outputs and public opinion, subtly harassing opposition, exploiting asymmetric power structures, and exercising control over state agencies and patronage networks to create undemocratic electoral fields.<sup>82</sup> Rwanda, to its credit, has engaged in democratizing activities, but underlying authoritarian principles are still at work among the most elite actors in Rwanda, most notably President Kagame.

Kagame’s exclusion of Hutu and Twa victims from the memory of the Rwandan genocide manifests itself in three ways: in the Gacaca court system, through the persecution of dissidents, and through the development

of a Kagame personality cult. The refusal to include all victims has profound political consequences in each of these areas—all of which benefit the Kagame administration. The administration's control over many facets of Rwandan life has troubling implications for the future of Rwanda's democracy, the prospects for peace, and also for the historical record and memory of all victims of atrocity.

The Gacaca court system has tried tens of thousands of cases in connection with the Rwandan genocide, but there has been a staged quality to these efforts at reconciliation. Instead of operating as unifying institutions, the Gacaca courts have been silently crystallizing ethnic differences in Rwanda by enforcing ethnically proscribed roles. Recent research indicates that the courts are imposing the Kagame administration's memory—"Hutus are perpetrators" and "Tutsis are survivors"—despite the supposed plans for an ethnically homogenous Rwanda.<sup>83</sup> While Rwandans are supposed to move forward together, Gacaca may act as an anchor and prevent reconciliation, in essence creating a Rwanda for Tutsis and a Rwanda for Hutus that is separate and unequal (and definitely excludes the Twa). Gacaca courts were originally voluntary to attend, but the Kagame administration soon made attendance "obligatory—if not by law, then in practice."<sup>84</sup> Research on the satisfaction of participants in Gacaca courts suggests that they have serious flaws. Rwanda is split along ethnic lines and simply commanding difference away from the top down will not attain lasting reconciliation. At the same time, this approach instructs Rwandans to endorse ethnic difference. Gacaca's entrenching of ethnicity can be seen as an extension of the "against the Tutsi" modification and the ideas behind the modifier are implemented by local officials in the Gacaca system.

A strong criticism levelled against Gacaca is that the hearings are more like a theatrical production.<sup>85</sup> Typically, there is a Hutu perpetrator on trial, with Tutsi survivors, and other Hutus, testifying against them. A sentence is levelled against the Hutu on trial, and reconciliation between perpetrator and victim occurs, whether it is genuine, forced, or insincere.<sup>86</sup> This is a scripted judicial hearing that occurs repeatedly. Ultimately, Gacaca's effectiveness is questionable and far from fully reliable. It has definitely prosecuted thousands of perpetrators—those who incited, supported, and executed genocide—but Gacaca may not be providing genuine reconciliation nor actual legal justice. The "against the Tutsi" modifier manifests itself in the idea of a "Hutu perpetrator" and the fact that only Hutu crimes

are prosecuted; RPF crimes against Hutus and Twa are left unpunished and undiscussed, leaving reconciliation in the aftermath of genocide and its immediate consequences incomplete.<sup>87</sup> Gacaca has also been criticized from a legal perspective with regards to a person's right to due process and legal counsel, and from a human rights perspective for being an illegitimate representation of justice.<sup>88</sup> If Gacaca is just theatre, and Rwandans are either directly or indirectly forced to attend this form of reconciliation, what then is its purpose if not to solidify governmental ideas while offering limited justice and reconciliation? Gacaca, it should be noted, has been vigorously implemented by the Kagame regime.

Forced reconciliation may prosecute inordinate numbers of perpetrators. Perpetrator accounts note that individual killers admit to killing many Tutsis, Hutus, and/or Twa in 1994.<sup>89</sup> There were approximately 800,000 victims in 1994, and there have been approximately 361,590 perpetrators found guilty in the Gacaca system. This number, however, may not be mathematically sound because individual killers have admitted to killing more Rwandans than they can count, signalling that Gacaca courts have espoused an inaccurate victim-to-killer ratio.<sup>90</sup> In this case there may not be enough victims for the number of killers prosecuted, and so this problem requires more research. The Gacaca system may be wrongly prosecuting Hutus because they are conceptualized as "Hutu perpetrators," as is the implied rhetoric under Kagame. Straus's original estimation of 150,000 hardline perpetrators conducting most of the killing may be accurate, but the constructed memory of all Hutus as perpetrators is false. The "against the Tutsi" aspect of memory surfaces in the Gacaca system as Hutus are assumed to be guilty, tried and judged, and are commanded to be subservient to the governmental memory *du jour*. Justice in Rwanda is highly politicized and does not necessarily deliver truth. Instead, it delivers verdicts. The government's rhetoric that *all Hutus are perpetrators*, and therefore share a collective ethnic guilt for genocide, is a simplistic memory formation that undermines the government's ethnic unity campaign and has the potential to reinforce ethnic fault lines and the divisions undermining future peace.

There are also legitimate and serious questions about the ability of Rwandan citizens to express themselves freely, and about the government's receptivity to dissenting points of view.<sup>91</sup> Kagame's administration has a tenebrous history of silencing critics and opponents of the regime, and

of causing them to disappear, similar to former Latin American military juntas.<sup>92</sup> While Rwanda is often hailed by other African states and the international community as having made a successful transition from a genocidal to a democratic state, there are questions regarding whether this transformation is authentic.

Physical and psychological attacks on political opponents in both Rwanda and other countries are one mechanism the Rwandan government utilizes to silence dissent. Exiled general Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, who publicly objected to Kagame's dictatorial tendencies, was recently the target of a failed assassination attempt in South Africa.<sup>93</sup> Mounting evidence suggests that the Kagame administration is running an assassination program against dissenters and critics and is willing to do so both at home and abroad.<sup>94</sup> Theogene Rudasingwa, the former Rwandan ambassador to the United States, and now exiled to that country, claimed that, "if you differ strongly with Kagame and make your views known from the inside, you will be made to pay the price, and very often that price is your life."<sup>95</sup> Augustine Iyamuremye was publically denounced for voicing modest criticism of Gacaca and faced being stripped of his role as a senator because of it.<sup>96</sup> Paul Rusesabagina, the hotel manager at the Hôtel des Mille Collines in Kigali who saved over twelve hundred Tutsis and Hutus, has also been exiled for his criticisms of the Rwandan government. Kagame iconoclastically claimed that Rusesabagina was "a manufactured hero" made in the West, and that real heroes are made domestically.<sup>97</sup> Rusesabagina is planning on running for president of Rwanda in response to Kagame's semi-authoritarianism.<sup>98</sup> For non-Rwandans, the Kagame government is just as much a threat to freedom of expression, research, and journalism. Kagame's administration has been criticized for its crackdown on dissenting points of view and the government apparatus that controls foreign researchers in Rwanda has the power to reject proposals it deems unfit.<sup>99</sup> The state of research on Hutu moderates and Twa is underdeveloped and needs to be extended for historical accuracy and to preserve the memories of all Rwandans—though it will take the Rwandan government to approve research projects dealing with Hutu and Twa experiences during and after the genocide to make these studies possible.

Domestic censorship also manifests itself in Rwandan election results. Post-genocide Rwanda has consistent voter turnout numbers upwards of 96 percent, and Paul Kagame won 95.05 percent and 93.08 percent of the

vote in 2003 and 2010, respectively.<sup>100</sup> These numbers seem unrealistic for any competitive democracy with multiple parties; they resemble instead those of authoritarian countries.<sup>101</sup> They suggest political interference, and both of Kagame's elections were marred by systemic voter harassment and electoral gerrymandering.<sup>102</sup> Beyond these issues, recently Kagame has almost singlehandedly rewritten the Rwandan Constitution to extend the number of terms a president may run for office. Due to these changes, as of 2016 it is possible for Kagame to remain president (if he wins all elections) until the year 2034, hardly the hallmark of a successful liberal-democratic transition.<sup>103</sup> While the constitutional change has upset Western donors, most notably the United States, the coming years will tell if this change disrupts international donations to Rwanda.

None of the political repression in Rwanda, however, would be palatable if it were not for the modifier "against the Tutsi" and Kagame's cult of personality. The following logic flow poses serious threats to peace in Rwanda: if it is solely the Rwandan genocide *against the Tutsi*, then the Tutsis are the only "true" victims afforded space in this memory. If the Tutsi are the only victims, then the entity that stopped the genocide (the RPF) must be the saviour of the Tutsis, with Kagame as the embodiment of this achievement. Kagame, then, is the saviour of the Tutsi and can utilize this newfound socio-political capital to gain goodwill, both domestically and internationally. If Kagame is considered the saviour of the Tutsi, then his policies and actions are legitimized by the skewed memory of the genocide. This, then, allows for the increasingly messianic Kagame to insulate himself and institute policies he deems necessary to his administration's survival, bypassing the democratic process without being questioned because he is perceived as always doing right by Rwanda.<sup>104</sup> This assumption is percolating through many levels of government and society, deeply affecting policy and its outcomes. Speaking against the saviour of the Tutsi is illegitimate, leading to a silencing of voices in addition to the other repressions Kagame has instituted.

The subtle change in memory to make the Tutsi an exclusive victim group, while neglecting the Hutu and Twa as victims, appears to be a deliberate strategy of the Kagame government to solidify its mythology and expand domestic and external political power. The government's memory policies solidify ethnic difference, despite the national unity program. Kagame's semi-authoritarian tendencies are troubling as he is creating

intransigent memory roles for Tutsis, Hutus, and Twa that only serve to harden ethnic differences. Abusing this memory is a form of revisionist history and may undermine reconciliation. The exclusive memories reveal the fragility of victim remembrance and how elite actors can emphasize some historical truths and omit others. These memories also highlight the fact that this process is subtle, manifests itself in many small cultural fissures, and has profound impacts on policy and policy outcomes as the selective use of history changes the political-cultural lens through which events, ideas, and policies are viewed and understood.

The difference between freedom and repression can be slight. Freedom is the ability to speak and express oneself openly. Repression is the ability to speak and express oneself *only after engaging in self-censorship for fear of repercussions*. While the modifier “against the Tutsi” did not create the political issues discussed in this section, it is a tool by which the Kagame administration exercises its will to dominate Rwandan politics. Rwanda is an emerging example of how victim groups can be exclusive with memories, and how elite political actors from a victim group can deliberately distort memories for their own semi-authoritarian political gains.

## Inclusive and Exclusive Memories of Atrocity Victims

The two cases examined offer perspectives on how a comparative-inclusive approach to memory can move towards more grounded macro conclusions. These conclusions can also be a tool to combat exclusive memorialization campaigns. The most important contributions are the stories of the “other” victim groups and how these experiences can augment existing or developing narratives about atrocities. When all victim groups are analyzed together, more holistic and accurate understandings of atrocities themselves are made possible. All of the various groups’ experiences add to our knowledge about the planning and perpetration of crimes. Beyond this, accuracy and inclusivity in historical studies may aid in preventing the formation of a collective memory that is intentionally confusing, and used for political ends.

Innocent or intended structural denial or exclusive constructions of memory can lead to the establishment of political institutions that reinforce these problems. These exclusive institutions may lead to individualized and isolated histories, and possibly to discrimination and structural violence

against omitted victims. For Christian minorities, the severe lack of memory coordination is troubling and perhaps undermines efforts calling for Turkish recognition of past crimes, though Armenia recently recognized the victimization of Greeks and Assyrians, which may bring memories of shared victimization processes to the fore.<sup>105</sup> Coordinated memories from multiple groups calling for the recognition of a single memory using a macro perspective—the genocide of Christian minorities as a whole—may carry deeper political clout than individual recognition efforts from isolated victim groups. In Rwanda, it is clear that Kagame intends to construct memories that only have room for Tutsis, and this action most certainly lays the groundwork for discrimination and isolation of Hutus and Twa. Despite Kagame’s efforts to create stability and to consolidate and centralize his power, he may, ironically, destabilize Rwanda’s fragile ethnic peace. This would undermine democratizing efforts in the near future and threaten the country’s future stability.

The two cases discussed in this chapter are representative of the in-depth and holistic analyses that a comparative-inclusive approach can offer genocide scholars. An inclusive lens for studying atrocity can lead to macro conclusions that accentuate shared victimization experiences. It can also aid in undermining deliberate distortions of collective memory. Comparative-inclusive studies augment the case studies of individual victim groups and the conclusions they offer. Comparative studies can and will produce complex and layered narratives that include all victim groups in analyses rather than privileging one group over the others. As atrocity scholars, we owe it to all victim groups to research, understand, and share these experiences so the memories of rights violations do not die; comparative research will aid us in remembering them all. Scholars should be wary of exclusive writings by asking who they include, how these studies combine to affect memories of atrocity, and the impacts of our constructed memories on historical narratives and contemporary issues. By challenging and understanding the boundaries of genocide studies, and asking what the implications of research are, we engage in a timely and critical move forward within the field.



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