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# Women and Genocide in Africa

## Summary

Genocide, defined in international law as killings and related mass atrocities that are committed “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” has negatively impacted countless communities across Africa over the centuries. The resulting historical literature is strongest regarding those genocides that occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries due to a tendency to privilege written sources. Within this literature, African women’s experiences remain understudied compared to the experiences of men, despite widespread recognition that genocides often affect people differently according to their gender identity. However, in looking at the widely studied examples of colonial genocides in Belgian-occupied Congo (1885–1908) and German-occupied Namibia (1904–1908), and the subsequent genocides in Burundi (1972), Rwanda (1994), and Sudan (2003–2008), it becomes evident that perpetrators have targeted women in particular ways as part of their broader efforts to exterminate unwanted communities. While women are frequently killed alongside men during genocides, the literature on these case studies abounds with examples of sexual violence, particularly rape, that the perpetrators inflict upon women as part of their efforts to undermine the social vitality of their intended victims’ communities. Women’s experiences of genocide are often far more diverse than the literature’s singular focus on sexual violence suggests, however. The case of Rwanda demonstrates that women can also serve as combatants and perpetrators, while the case of Belgian-occupied Congo reveals that women can lead resistance movements in opposition to genocidal violence. Similarly, German-occupied Namibia and Rwanda demonstrate that women can serve important roles in rebuilding their communities and advocating for recognition and reparations in the post-genocide period. Scholars are beginning to pay greater attention to women’s diverse experiences of genocide, but there is a great deal of research to be

undertaken, particularly regarding how different facets of women's identities, such as class, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, among others, shape their experiences of genocide.

### **Keywords**

genocide, women, victims, survivors, perpetrators, combatants, bystanders, rescuers, activists, gender-based violence,

## **Introduction**

Women's experiences of genocide in Africa are **an** understudied phenomenon. While the concept of genocide is relatively young—first coined by Polish Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin in 1944—historians recognize that genocide has touched many African communities over the centuries. While genocides undoubtedly occurred between African communities before the 20th century, the more commonly studied genocides are those that have been the direct result of European nations' efforts to enslave and exploit the African peoples they sought to colonize in the first half of the 20th century, or those that occurred in the post-independence period that started in the 1960s. This article begins with a brief overview of genocide as a concept, before considering the literature related to two colonial genocides in Belgian-occupied Congo (1885–1908) and German-occupied Namibia (1904–1908), followed by three more recent examples of genocide in Burundi (1972), Rwanda (1994), and Sudan (2003–2008). While by no means an exhaustive list of the possible genocides that have occurred across Africa at different points in the continent's history, these case studies are among the most widely studied.

In their efforts to analyze these atrocities, most scholars have emphasized a gender dichotomy that separates the affected communities into men as combatants and perpetrators and women as victims and survivors—with particular emphasis placed on women's vulnerability to sexual violence. However, the second decade of the 21st century saw an

important shift in the literature toward rejecting this overly simplistic dichotomy, and emphasizing the diversity of women's actions in relation to genocide. In the process of discussing the literature on these case studies, this article argues that a more nuanced approach to understanding women's diverse roles and agency as regards genocidal violence in different African contexts is essential for enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how genocides take shape, how they negatively impact people's lives, and their long-term legacies for subsequent generations.

## Understanding Genocide

Lemkin's creation of the term genocide in 1944 emerged from his analysis of the mass atrocities perpetrated by the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis) across occupied Europe during World War II. In *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin considered these atrocities distinctly different from the violence that was prohibited by the contemporary Geneva and Hague Conventions, which together outlined the laws and customs according to which signatory nations were expected to conduct themselves in warfare (the breach of which constituted war crimes), and which provided some legal protection to non-combatants.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Lemkin introduced the term "genocide" to denote:

a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.<sup>2</sup>

Having established a viable social-scientific definition, Lemkin began lobbying the newly established United Nations (UN) to create an international legal prohibition. On December 11, 1946, UN Resolution 96(I) affirmed that genocide was a crime under international law and charged the UN Economic and Social Council with creating a draft convention.

The resulting convention was noticeably different from Lemkin's original definition of genocide. Most notably, to appease the concerns of powerful UN member states, the convention's authors "muted" the concept of what is commonly referred to as cultural genocide, or non-lethal efforts to obliterate a community's language and other markers of their cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> The authors were also pressured to exclude political and other kinds of social groups that were, at the time, perceived as impermanent. Ultimately, Article II of the 1948 United Nations "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" (UN Genocide Convention) defined genocide as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>4</sup>

The UN Genocide Convention entered into force on January 12, 1951, and in the process joined the ranks of two other, often overlapping, "atrocities crimes."<sup>5</sup> These were the aforementioned war-crimes prohibition, which was reinforced by the 1949 Geneva Conventions; and the new prohibition for crimes against humanity, established by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in 1945.<sup>6</sup> While the UN Genocide Convention could not be applied retroactively, an interdisciplinary community of scholars soon emerged

who were dedicated to the study of past and present genocides. Their willingness to analyze genocides from before 1951 was grounded in the knowledge that Lemkin had studied several earlier examples of mass atrocities that he felt would have met his criteria for genocide, such as the near-annihilation of the Ottoman Armenians between 1915 and 1922.

However, the historian Dominik Schaller notes that scholars have largely overlooked the extent to which Lemkin's ideas regarding genocide were shaped by his analysis of European colonial rule across Africa, on which he produced several unpublished manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> His work was influenced by pseudoscientific theories regarding the racial superiority of white Europeans, however, as well as ignorance regarding the complexity of African civilizations before colonization. Even as Lemkin recognized that European efforts to undermine the indigenous religious values and ways of life they encountered as part of their broader efforts to promote the spread of commerce, civilization, and Christianity were often enforced by unspeakable violence, he reserved his condemnation for German and Belgian colonial rule and was otherwise broadly supportive of colonization as necessary for "civilizing" the continent.<sup>8</sup> Despite the realization that colonial officials frequently used disproportionate violence—including mass killings—to punish civilians who resisted or angered them, Lemkin concluded that only two cases met his criteria for genocide: the atrocities perpetrated by the colonial administration of King Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo Free State (modern Democratic Republic of Congo) from 1885 to 1908, and those perpetrated by the military forces of Kaiser Wilhelm II in German South West Africa (modern Namibia) from 1904 to 1908. Indeed, Lemkin was unconcerned by the atrocities inflicted upon the Cape San Peoples in Dutch- and British-occupied South Africa from 1795 to 1828, for example, which has recently come under investigation as another possible example of a colonial genocide.<sup>9</sup> He saw the British, in particular, as more humane colonizers, though more recent historical scholarship has revealed the biases and errors in his position and has opened scholars' eyes to

the full spectrum of political violence—from the subtle everyday structural inequalities to the overt episodes of armed conflict—that frequently characterized life under colonial rule across Africa and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

## Colonial Genocides in Africa

### ***The Congolese People in the Congo Free State, 1885–1908***

One of the earliest examples of genocide in Africa considered by Lemkin is associated with the colonial administration of King Leopold II in the Congo Free State, due to the remarkable brutality with which bureaucrats and traders involved in the rubber and ivory trades forced Congolese people into slavery using torture and other inhumane methods. To secure the Congo, Leopold hired the British/American journalist Henry Morton Stanley and funded an expedition in 1879 with the goal of building upon the “successes” of Stanley’s earlier explorations, as well as those of the British missionary David Livingstone.<sup>11</sup> Under Stanley’s leadership the Belgians established lucrative trading stations along the Congo River, while Leopold lobbied America and western European nations to recognize Belgium’s claim to the region. Ultimately, conflict over who had the “right” to control trade in which parts of Africa, and particularly in the Congo River basin, prompted Germany to host the Berlin West Africa Conference from November 15, 1884, to February 26, 1885. Over less than four months, the vast majority of the continent—aside from Liberia and Ethiopia—was divided on paper into preliminary colonies with minimal regard for existing kingdoms or indigenous peoples’ ancestral lands, and without consultation with indigenous leaders. While the resulting “[General Act of the Berlin Conference on West Africa](#)” (February 26, 1885) did not formally assign the Congo basin to Belgium, Leopold’s public-relations campaign during the conference resulted in a symbolic victory whereby the dignitaries concluded that it was better to have the Congo controlled by “the king of a weak and little country such as Belgium, so as

to maximize the chances of having this area serve as a free-trade zone for the more developed countries.”<sup>12</sup>

In April 1885, the Belgian parliament passed a resolution that permitted Leopold to rule Belgium and the Congo Free State simultaneously. Leopold invested in an aggressive campaign of colonial accumulation to recover the money he had invested in the region by exploiting the colony’s natural resources. Leopold’s management of the rubber trade, in particular, has met with widespread condemnation and resulted in the first known use of the term “crimes against humanity.” During a visit to the Congo Free State in 1890 the African American historian George Washington Williams observed Leopold’s “cruel and unjust” treatment of the Congolese people and ongoing reliance on enslaved people “of all ages and both sexes.”<sup>13</sup> In an open letter to Leopold he argued that the government was “excessively cruel to its prisoners”—largely ordinary civilians who had been condemned on the “slightest pretext.” In a rare mention of Congolese women in the sources from that period, he noted that they were frequently imprisoned “for some imaginary crimes” and sentenced to seven years’ servitude during which the State hired them out “to the highest bidder” as “mistresses.” If women gave birth during their sentences, the children were regarded as property of the state. In a subsequent letter written to US Secretary of State, James Blaine, Williams concluded that “[t]he State of Congo is in no sense deserving of your confidence or support. It is actively engaging in the slave trade and is guilty of many crimes against humanity.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite Williams’s efforts to expose these atrocities, however, they continued unabated. Congolese men were the primary laborers in the rubber and ivory trades, and of an estimated ten million people who are believed to have died from the related murders, starvation, exhaustion, exposure, and associated opportunistic diseases, most of the victims were likely men.<sup>15</sup> Women were sometimes forced to work for the traders as well, and in other instances were held hostage by traders—and subject to rape, mutilation, and murder—until their

community met the required quotas for production.<sup>16</sup> Where people failed to meet their quotas, a common punishment was to cut off one or more of the person's hands. A 1904 report by the British diplomat Roger Casement alleged that, as a result of these atrocities, Congolese women had started taking measures to prevent pregnancies so that they would be able to flee at a moment's notice without having to carry small children, allowing them to avoid capture more effectively.<sup>17</sup>

Casement had ample opportunity to witness these atrocities and interview survivors across the Congo Free State, as he had worked both for Leopold's African International Association and, later, for the British Foreign Office there (a post he assumed in 1901). Casement's report added credibility to a growing community of contemporary activists who established the Congo Reform Association to pressure the international community to end Leopold's reign in the Congo. As a result of their advocacy, Leopold was forced to give the Congo to the Belgian state in 1908, at which point it became a Belgian colony. This transformation did little to improve the lives of the Congolese people, however. The political scientist Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja has argued that subsequent colonial regime "was just as oppressive, albeit in a less brutal manner."<sup>18</sup> The historian Nancy Hunt Rose has written extensively about the "imperial violence" that continued under Belgian colonization, and in the process narrates the life of a Congolese woman, Maria N'koi.<sup>19</sup> Also known as Leopard Maria, by 1915 she had become an important resistance leader who caused the Belgian colonial administration substantial concern. She encouraged her followers to refuse taxation, withhold labor, and even engage in armed conflict with the Belgians, prompting them to arrest her. Rose's nuanced analysis of oral traditions and written archival materials related to N'Koi's life reveal the potential for Congolese women to act as spiritual and political leaders in their own right—a theme that is unexplored by most literature on the atrocities.

Lemkin's analysis of the Congo Free State led him to conclude that the atrocities constituted an "unambiguous genocide" in which an estimated 75 percent of the indigenous population was annihilated, though he wrongly blamed "native militias" who were allegedly employed by the Belgian traders for murdering and enslaving their own people.<sup>20</sup> More recent studies place primary criminal responsibility for the atrocities on Leopold and his colonial administration, while acknowledging the role that Congolese collaborators played in their implementation. Among those experts who use a broad social-scientific definition of genocide, these atrocities are widely recognized as an early example of colonial genocide.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars, however, have characterized the atrocities as crimes against humanity on the grounds that they do not meet the legal criteria for genocide as outlined in the UN Genocide Convention—specifically, the requirement of genocidal intent whereby the perpetrators attempt to annihilate, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. These scholars accurately note that Leopold and his collaborators did not intend to exterminate their victims' communities, as doing so would have undermined their ability to profit from their labor in the rubber and ivory trades. The journalist Adam Hochschild argues that Leopold's colonial administration viewed the deaths of millions of Congolese people as "incidental," rather than intentional.<sup>22</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja agrees that the terms of the UN Genocide Convention cannot apply, and argues that the atrocities "caused a death toll of Holocaust proportions" that would more accurately fit the criteria for crimes against humanity.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Herero and Nama of Namibia, 1904–1908***

Scholars and activists have had greater success in demonstrating that the atrocities that the German military perpetrated against the Herero and Nama peoples of German South West Africa fit the UN Genocide Convention's criteria for genocide. Germany was an active participant in the scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference allowed the country to establish German South West Africa—a region then inhabited by an estimated 80,000 Herero and 20,000 Nama in the south, and 250,000 Ovambo in the north. During a series of early-

19th-century trade wars the Herero had shifted from hunter-gatherers and subsistence agriculturists to pastoralists famous for cattle-breeding, who held power in the south.<sup>24</sup> With the establishment of the Cape Colony in South Africa, Christian missionaries had begun working in the region, and so many Herero, Nama, and Ovambo were already familiar with European ways of life. For these reasons, the Germans hoped German South West Africa would remain peaceful. The colony's first governor, Theodor Leutwein, established a system of indirect rule that relied on cooperation from indigenous leaders. Where this was not forthcoming, Leutwein pitted indigenous leaders against each other, draining their resources such that they required German support to defeat their enemies.

When a rinderpest epidemic killed an estimated 90 percent of the Herero's cattle in 1897, Leutwein made further advances in the region. Many Herero were left vulnerable to starvation and malaria, and were forced to sell their ancestral lands to survive. They became laborers—often poorly paid—to German settlers, many of whom regarded themselves as racially superior and treated the Herero abominably.<sup>25</sup> In a rare study of Herero women during this period, the genocide scholar Elisa von Joeden-Forgey asserts that the epidemic resulted in intensification of contact between the Herero and the German settlers.<sup>26</sup> While Herero women enjoyed significant social power in Herero society and could hold positions of political prominence at that time, Herero communities also adhered to gendered division of labor whereby men had primary responsibility for raising and trading cattle, and women worked primarily in the home, and in producing and trading other commodities. As a result, young Herero women increasingly took up work in German homes to support their families, leading to both consensual and coerced sexual relationships with German men. As Herero women began to acknowledge the sexual violence they endured in German homes, Herero men complained to Leutwein. He seemed more concerned by the rising rate of marriages between German men and women from prominent Herero families, which prompted him to ban mixed marriages. This did little to assuage the Herero's growing concerns about the violation of Herero women, however. Von Joeden-Forgey argues this was a significant factor in the outbreak of armed resistance among the Herero to German colonization.<sup>27</sup>

The resulting tensions reached breaking point on January 12, 1904, when the Paramount Chief of the Herero, Samuel Maherero, organized a meeting in Okahandja, prompting a German officer to raise the alarm that they were planning a war against the German settlers. The subsequent violence was “rather spontaneous,” but the Herero ultimately killed 123 German men, prompting Kaiser Wilhelm II to send military reinforcements to the colony under the command of General Lothar von Trotha.<sup>28</sup> Von Trotha regarded the conflict as a “race war” and argued that the only way to ensure a German victory would be to act with “gross terror and even with cruelty.”<sup>29</sup> He launched his military campaign at Waterberg on August 11, where the Herero had agreed to meet with Leutwein to negotiate peace. The military surrounded the Herero people and proceeded to massacre them, forcing the survivors into the Omaheke desert, which the German military then sealed off to ensure they would die of dehydration. In response, Nama fighters led by chief Hendrik Witbooi—many of whom had previously fought for the Germans—decided to fight alongside the Herero. On October 2 von Trotha escalated the violence by issuing his infamous “genocide order,” which informed German troops that “Any Herero found within the German borders with or without a gun, without cattle, will be shot. I shall no longer receive any women or children. I will drive them back to their people or shoot them.”<sup>30</sup> The genocide order resulted in three years of massacres of Herero and Nama people, and is frequently cited in the literature on these atrocities as evidence of von Trotha’s genocidal intent. Similarly damning is the realization that this order, combined with German propaganda that the Herero and Nama were raping and mutilating German women and that Herero women were “castrating Amazons,” meant that entire Herero communities were often massacred as part of what von Joeden-Forgey terms a “gender-neutral policy of murder.”<sup>31</sup>

However, the genocide order undermined the interests of German settlers, who needed the Herero to work as laborers on their farms. For this reason, as the war drew to a close in

1907 Chancellor von Bülow issued an order to establish concentration camps—overseen by German missionaries—in which to house the survivors. The death rates in these camps were staggering: Herero men of fighting age were typically separated, tried by court-martial, and executed, while those who remained were subjected to hard labor and often died from exhaustion, malnutrition, or opportunistic diseases, among other forms of neglect.<sup>32</sup> Women and girls remained vulnerable to sexual violence at the hands of the camp guards and settlers, with rape reaching “catastrophic proportions.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, the missionaries deemed the camps a success as they were able to convert large numbers of Herero and Nama to Christianity, and, in the process, help them to rebuild some semblance of a life. Within months, the German colonial administration’s goal of producing a homogeneous labor force amenable to their interests had been more or less accomplished, and the camps were closed in January 1908, marking the official end of the genocide. By this point, an estimated 80,000 Herero and 10,000 Nama had been murdered by von Trotha’s military or died from causes directly related to the conflict, dramatically altering the balance of power and social fabric in German South West Africa.<sup>34</sup> The number of women who endured sexual slavery, rape, and other forms of sexual violence remains unknown but was undoubtedly high according to witness accounts—particularly those documented by the British in their 1918 *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany*—and given the culture of impunity that surrounded German settlers and officials in their dealings with indigenous communities.<sup>35</sup>

While women do not feature prominently in the literature on the genocide in German South West Africa, women descendants of the Herero and Nama survivors have been actively involved in fighting for international recognition of these atrocities as genocide. For example, Esther Muinjangu, Director of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation, and Ida Hoffmann, Chair of the Nama Genocide Committee and a member of Namibian parliament, have been

vocal advocates for their communities, calling on the German government to apologize and make reparations for the atrocities, including the return of skulls taken by German scientists from murdered and deceased Herero and Nama victims as part of “a fallacious attempt to demonstrate the superiority of white Europeans.”<sup>36</sup>

## Modern Genocides

### *Burundi, 1972*

In addition to these two examples of colonial genocides, several genocides have occurred in Africa since the entry into force of the UN Genocide Convention in 1951. One of the first examples is the 1972 genocide in Burundi, a small east African nation composed of three ethnic communities: the hunter-gather Twa minority, the predominantly pastoralist Tutsi minority, and the agriculturalist Hutu majority. According to the region’s oral traditions, these categories were once fluid—at least where the Hutu and Tutsi were concerned—and primarily indicated a person’s socio-economic status. The nation’s kings could be of Hutu or Tutsi heritage, with “princes of blood” exercising real power over civilians’ lives.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the monarchy operated according to a complex social and political hierarchy built around princely factions or clans that included people from all three socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>38</sup>

During the Berlin Conference, Burundi and Rwanda were assigned to become part of German East Africa. As colonial officials and missionaries arrived, their initial impressions of the society they encountered were largely positive: given the advanced political hierarchy, they saw little reason to interfere with Burundian politics, and chose a strategy of indirect rule that relied upon Burundian officials to enforce German policies in the region. However, a popular European theory known as the “Hamitic hypothesis” prompted German officials to regard the Tutsi as racially superior to the Hutu.<sup>39</sup> Believing the Tutsi to be the semi-Caucasian descendants of the biblical figure Ham, due to their supposedly lighter skin, fine features, and heightened intelligence, the German colonial administration granted the Tutsi privileges in education and the government that were denied to their allegedly “true African”

Hutu and Twa compatriots.<sup>40</sup> This laid the foundation for a gradual shift in Burundian social identities whereby these categories came to be regarded as a form of racialized ethnicity.

During World War I, Belgium invaded and took over the colony, renaming it Ruanda-Urundi. From this point forward, the people of Burundi experienced a much harsher form of colonization in which the Tutsi were given even greater privileges compared to their Hutu and Twa compatriots, and identity cards were introduced that included people's ethnicity as either Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, which people inherited from their fathers. The power and wealth of the Tutsi increased, and in the process the Hutu majority grew resentful toward those they perceived to be complicit in their oppression.

Ruanda-Urundi won its independence on July 1, 1962, separating into two nations: modern Burundi and Rwanda. Burundi's transition to independence as a constitutional monarchy was initially peaceful, but ultimately resulted in political and ethnic divisions. Overt violence began in 1965 with an attempt by a cohort of Hutu military officials to assassinate King Mwambutsa Bangiricenge, who was evacuated to Europe to recover from his injuries. Bangiricenge's flight created a power vacuum that his youngest son, Prince Charles Ndizeye, attempted to fill under the regnal name of Ntare V.<sup>41</sup> His time in power was short, however. A military coup on November 28, 1966, led by President Michel Micombero installed a dictatorship dominated by Tutsi politicians and military officers from the south, known as the Groupe de Bururi, who established the Republic of Burundi. In an effort to shore up their insecure regime, they began targeting Tutsi elites from other regions and social backgrounds whom they feared still supported Ntare. Tensions peaked when Ntare returned to the country in March 1972 and was arrested. Hutu militias initiated an uprising against Tutsi officials affiliated with the Micombero regime, and the army began inciting Hutu civilians to "act as intelligence agents" for the state.<sup>42</sup> As the violence escalated, Hutu insurgents massacred Tutsi civilians in Bururi, the province from which the Groupe de Bururi

originated, as well as any Hutu who refused to join their cause. The historian René Lemarchand estimates that between 800 and 1,200 civilians died during this period of violence—most of them Tutsi, but prominent Hutu politicians were also targeted. A government “white paper” released in June 1972 alleged that this violence was responsible for 50,000 casualties across the country.<sup>43</sup>

In response, the Micombero regime declared martial law on May 1, 1972, and engaged in what has since come to be referred to as “selective genocide” against the Hutu majority.<sup>44</sup> Micombero sent his army to regain control of the south and arrest prominent Hutu political and military officials across the nation. He declared a military victory one week later, but simultaneously urged the public to “hunt down the python in the grass,” resulting in widespread massacres of Hutu men, women, and children throughout Burundi and forcing thousands of Hutu to seek refuge in Rwanda.<sup>45</sup> Lemarchand notes that by August 1972 the perpetrators—including the military and the Tutsi civilians who supported their genocidal plan—had effectively exterminated educated Hutu of all ages, resulting in an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 civilian deaths, including the assassination of Ntare. In the process the Micombero regime ensured that all possible threats to its power were eliminated.

The literature on the 1972 genocide in Burundi offers little information about how Burundian women’s lives were affected during this violence, other than to note that they were frequently killed alongside men once the violence had escalated beyond attacks on Hutu political and military officials, and forced to endure rape at the hands of state and non-state actors. This silence is in part due to contemporary Burundian gender norms, which encourage women to be quiet, modest, and maternal, and regard attacks on women as an offense to the head of their family, “akin to taking or vandalizing a man’s property without any real fear of reprisal or legal punishment.”<sup>46</sup> Additionally, oral traditions associated with the early days of the monarchy suggest women have historically been prohibited from holding positions of

political power due to their alleged inability to keep secrets.<sup>47</sup> An important exception to this statement is the position of the Queen Mother, who served as co-regent to the king until he reached his age of majority, though the power associated with this position declined with European colonization in the region. However, the journalist Agnes Nindorera notes that there is great potential for Burundian women to become important stakeholders and leaders in grassroots efforts to promote peace and political stability at the community level through their involvement in Ubushingantahe (defined as “integrity”) councils.<sup>48</sup> By mobilizing around their status as the carriers of Burundian culture and their primary responsibility to raise well-mannered children, she argues that they can fulfill an important role in teaching Burundian youth about the dangers of ethnic and political divisionism and, in the process, establish a foundation for a more peaceful future.

Unfortunately, under Hutu President Pierre Nkurunziza widespread political oppression has further destabilized the nation. In 2015, Nkurunziza insisted on defying Burundi’s constitution by running for re-election to a third term, to which the nation’s political opposition responded by organizing a failed coup. In the coup’s aftermath Nkurunziza’s security and intelligence services have, working alongside a youth militia known as the Imbonerakure, used assassinations, forced disappearances, illegal detention, torture, and rape to eliminate the nation’s political opposition.<sup>49</sup> This crackdown has inspired widespread fear and insecurity, and dramatically limited the research that can be undertaken in Burundi. This has further undermined study of the 1972 genocide, which to date has been significantly limited by a lack of gender analysis by scholars, as well as a tendency for subsequent periods of ethnic and political violence in 1993 and 2015, as well as genocide and related mass atrocities in Rwanda, to overshadow it.

## ***Rwanda, 1994***

The research on neighboring Rwanda, however, while not without its limitations, offers an important model for considering the interplay between gender and genocide at various stages of conflict. Rwanda's early history is intertwined with that of Burundi. Its people, too, were predominantly Hutu agriculturalists, with a pastoralist Tutsi minority and a small hunter-gatherer Twa minority. However, in early Rwandan history people identified primarily according to clans and lineages, among other important facets of their identity. That said, the kingdom of Rwanda was dominated by the powerful Abanyiginya clan, from which the nation's kings since at least the 16th century all descended. Monarchical power was visibly concentrated in the hands of Tutsi elites, who amassed cattle as evidence of their status and wealth. During the reign of King Rwabugiri toward the end of the 19th century, the monarchy invested in an exploitative practice known as *ubureetwa*—a controversial system through which Hutu provided labor and loyalty in exchange for access to land controlled by the chiefs and other court notables.<sup>50</sup> This practice, combined with a much older practice known as *ubuhake*, whereby a wealthy patron gave a man a cow in exchange for his labor and loyalty, provided a foundation for significant and lasting socio-economic tensions between Tutsi elites and their non-elite compatriots. While *ubuhake* was far less exploitative, its existing in tandem with widespread implementation of *ubureetwa* resulted in the monarchy's policies during this period being regarded as a source of oppression in the lives of ordinary Rwandans, particularly the Hutu.<sup>51</sup>

Rwabugiri's unexpected death in 1895 led to a period of remarkable political violence. The following year his son and chosen successor, Rutarindwa, was overthrown by his adopted Queen Mother, Nyirayuhi Kanjogera, who wanted to empower her biological son, Musinga. Following Rutarindwa's death, Kanjogera and her supporters—most of whom were members of the powerful Abega clan—murdered or exiled anyone who maintained loyalty to him.<sup>52</sup> As a result, when Rwanda was incorporated into German East Africa in 1895, German colonial administrators encountered an insecure court that, while not entirely friendly to German interests, feared internal political divisions, as well as incursions from Belgians based in the neighboring Congo Free State, and was eager for German protection.

As in the case of Burundi, the Germans were impressed by Rwanda's advanced social and political hierarchy, which they once again misinterpreted according the pseudoscientific Hamitic hypothesis. As part of their policy of indirect rule they again invested in the Tutsi

political elites as the perceived natural rulers of Rwanda.<sup>53</sup> When the Belgians invaded in 1916 and established Ruanda-Urundi, they continued to privilege the Tutsi at the expense of their Hutu and Twa compatriots. With the introduction of identity cards in the early 1930s, they further institutionalized the categories of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as distinct markers of a person's racial and ethnic identity, allowing them to take on increased social salience for Rwandans.

As the international community pressured Belgium to facilitate Ruanda-Urundi's transition to independence in the 1950s, a cohort of missionary-educated Hutu elites began to push for significant political reform, culminating in the dissolution of the Rwandan monarchy. Recognizing that the balance of power in Rwanda was going to shift dramatically, and wanting to encourage a positive relationship with the emergent democracy, the colonial administration shifted its support to the Hutu majority. As multiple political parties took shape, they began to divide along ethnic lines with most Tutsi elites supporting the creation of a constitutional monarchy, and the Hutu majority advocating for a transition to a presidential republic. Ethnic tensions then peaked in 1959 following the unexpected death of King Rudahigwa, followed by the accession of his half-brother, King Ndahindurwa, who was assigned by court ritualists without prior consultation with the Belgian colonial administration. In response, the administration decided to step up their plans for Rwandan independence and organized communal elections.<sup>54</sup> A group of youth affiliated with the Union Nationale Rwandaise—the party of the Tutsi monarchists—attacked a popular Hutu politician named Dominique Mbonyumutwa, prompting members of his party, the Parti du Mouvement de L'emancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU), to attack Tutsi chiefs and other elites in their strongholds across Rwanda. This unrest marked the start of the Hutu Revolution, and prompted many Tutsi monarchists and their supporters, including the newly appointed King Ndahindurwa, to flee Rwanda. In the subsequent elections PARMEHUTU won a substantial

victory and established a provisional government that led the nation to independence on July 1, 1962.<sup>55</sup>

The new president, a Hutu named Grégoire Kayibanda, was charged with restoring peace and stability to Rwanda. However, a militant group of Tutsi monarchists in Burundi organized a series of small armed incursions in Rwanda that posed a threat to his regime's security and legitimacy. Kayibanda used these incursions as an excuse to imprison Tutsi and Hutu political moderates and incite anti-Tutsi violence, resulting in the massacre of an estimated 10,000 civilians, most of them Tutsi, and prompting an additional 130,000–300,000 Tutsi refugees to flee Rwanda.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Kayibanda used these incursions as an excuse to introduce an ethnic quota system that limited Tutsi involvement in Rwanda's government, military, and other institutions, and to prevent refugees from exercising their right to return to Rwanda.

These abuses of power failed to shore up the Kayibanda regime long-term, however. By the early 1970s Kayibanda was widely condemned as a corrupt and authoritarian leader whose favoritism toward his home base in southern Rwanda had provoked widespread disapproval, particularly among northern Rwandans. Further complicating matters, the 1972 genocide in Burundi sent waves of Hutu refugees into Rwanda, bringing with them stories of the atrocities they endured at the hands of Tutsi military officials and civilians. In response, the Kayibanda regime created a public-safety commission to enforce the ethnic quota, removing Tutsi students from schools and the national university and triggering another wave of anti-Tutsi violence.<sup>57</sup> Amid this backdrop of ethnic and political violence, Kayibanda's Army Chief of Staff, a Hutu from northern Rwanda named Juvénal Habyarimana, orchestrated a so-called "bloodless coup" aimed at restoring "ethnic and regional equilibrium."<sup>58</sup> While initially welcomed by the public, Habyarimana's regime ultimately fell victim to the same excesses as its predecessor, though with regional favoritism now

benefitting northern Hutu—particularly those affiliated with the powerful clan of Habyarimana’s wife, Agathe Kanziga.<sup>59</sup>

As the nation succumbed to an economic crisis in the late 1980s, the steady diplomatic efforts of Tutsi refugees based in Uganda and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region of Africa to force Habyarimana to allow them to return to Rwanda finally reached a breaking point. The refugees formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which launched an armed invasion of northern Rwanda on October 1, 1990, supported by the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni. The invasion triggered a civil war between Habyarimana’s forces and the military arm of the RPF, the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA). As RPA troops engaged in guerrilla warfare in the north, waves of Hutu refugees fled to southern Rwanda, bringing with them stories of the atrocities they had allegedly endured. The international community pushed Habyarimana to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict, and invested in peace talks (held in Arusha, Tanzania) aimed at negotiating a power-sharing agreement between Habyarimana and the RPF. The political crisis radicalized a small cohort of “Hutu Power” extremists known as the Clan de Madame, in reference to Kanziga, who as early as December 1990 began spreading propaganda aimed at inciting anti-RPF and anti-Tutsi violence.<sup>60</sup> As the peace talks advanced, however, they redoubled their efforts, investing in the infamous Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) to better spread propaganda, and empowering the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi youth militias to train Hutu youth to defend their communities against the RPF.

As the Arusha peace talks concluded, the UN established the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) to oversee the power-sharing agreement. This further radicalized the Hutu Power extremists and prompted the Interahamwe to begin preparing its troops to not only defend their communities against the RPF, but also massacre local political moderates and Tutsi civilians.<sup>61</sup> As UNAMIR struggled to oversee the implementation of the Arusha

Peace Agreement, a plane carrying Habyarimana and the president of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down as it attempted to land in Kigali on April 6, 1994. Within hours, RTLM presenters began telling the public that the RPF was responsible for Habyarimana's assassination—a conclusion that remains much debated—and called upon the Hutu to avenge their president. The Presidential Guard began setting up roadblocks around the national capital, Kigali, and executing political moderates who were opposed to the Hutu Power extremists' ambitions. One of their first victims was Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the moderate Hutu politician who was slated to succeed Habyarimana and whose efforts to end the ethnic quota system had rendered her particularly unpopular with the Hutu Power extremists. Uwilingiyimana was murdered on April 7, alongside the ten Belgian UNAMIR soldiers who had been charged with her protection, and two days later an interim government was established that was composed entirely of Hutu Power extremists. Having seized control of the government, they were free to incite anti-Tutsi violence across areas of Rwanda that were not yet under RPF control.<sup>62</sup>

Over the next three months Hutu civilians were encouraged to join the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi in massacring an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and their supporters—as the perceived support base for the RPF in Rwanda—at roadblocks as they fled, in the churches and schools where they sought refuge, and in the forests and swamps where they tried to hide. The Hutu Power extremists and their collaborators massacred men, women, and children alike, and also frequently subjected women to rape and other forms of sexual violence due to the prevalent myth that the Tutsi had, throughout history, used their women's allegedly superior beauty—another legacy of the Hamitic hypothesis—to enslave and manipulate Hutu men.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the Hutu Power extremists encouraged their supporters to view Tutsi women as threats. The first of the “Hutu Ten Commandments,” published in Kangura in December 1990, explicitly referred to Tutsi women as traitors who “work for the

interest of their Tutsi ethnic group,” while the second and third commandments highlighted the suitability of Hutu women as wives and mothers, and called upon them to “bring your husbands, brothers, and sons back to reason.”<sup>64</sup> For these reasons, once the genocide began, the Hutu Power extremists frequently encouraged their supporters to inflict sexual violence upon Tutsi women. An estimated 250,000 to 500,000 women were raped during the genocide, resulting in the births of an estimated 2,000 to 5,000 children, many of whom were subsequently rejected by their communities as “little Interahamwe.”<sup>65</sup> The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda subsequently recognized the Hutu Power extremists’ use of rape in this context as inherently genocidal.<sup>66</sup> It has been widely studied, and its victims commemorated, as part of broader efforts to understand the brutality that girls and women were subjected to during the genocide.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the widespread sexual violence, the 1994 Rwandan genocide is notable for the surprisingly high degree of participation and complicity in the atrocities among Hutu women. Out of an estimated 140,000 perpetrators, approximately 2,000 to 3,000 women were imprisoned and tried for crimes ranging from the murder, torture, and mutilation of Tutsi civilians, to informing on people who were hiding or looting victims’ homes.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, while the patriarchal nature of Rwandan society—at least since the start of the colonial period—meant that few women occupied positions of political power by 1994, Agathe Kanziga and a handful of other elite women, such as the infamous Minister of Family and Women’s Affairs, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, and the RTLM journalist Valerie Bemeriki, played critical roles in inciting genocidal violence.<sup>69</sup>

Not all Rwandan Hutu chose to participate in the violence, however. There are a few notable examples of Hutu women who rescued people—often at great risk to themselves and their families. One such example is Sula Karuhimbi, an elder from Musamo in southern Rwanda. The local community believed Karuhimbi was possessed by the spirit of Nyabingi,

who is frequently described as a former queen from the north who during her life had exercised extraordinary spiritual power. Karuhimbi told the Interahamwe that if they violated the sanctuary of her home, where she was hiding dozens of people, Nyabingi would punish them.<sup>70</sup> Other women acted in less overt ways, helping to hide Tutsi civilians in their homes, businesses, and farms or otherwise resisting the violence that overwhelmed their communities. In some instances Rwandans rescued Tutsi they knew did not pose a threat, even as they participated in or supported the massacre of Tutsi who were strangers.<sup>71</sup>

Since the genocide Rwanda has been celebrated for its promotion of gender equality and women in politics at the national level. Recognizing that women-headed households were exceptionally common in the post-genocide period, a small cohort of women genocide survivors began asserting their rights within Rwanda—an endeavor that the victorious RPF supported as part of its broader development platform for the nation.<sup>72</sup> The political scientist Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel has mapped the remarkable successes that these women—most of whom come from elite backgrounds—have experienced, evidenced most recently in the 2013 parliamentary elections in which women candidates secured 64 percent of the available seats.<sup>73</sup> She has also detailed the many challenges they continue to face: most notably, formulating and implementing policies that can meet the diverse needs of rural Rwandan women. Similarly, the political scientist Marie Berry has noted the dangers of patriarchal backlash against women's gains in Rwanda where they are perceived as emasculating or displacing men, which can be especially pronounced in rural contexts.<sup>74</sup>

### ***Sudan, 2003–2008***

A final case study of importance for understanding women's experiences surrounding genocide across Africa emerges from the Darfur region in western Sudan. Once home to the Tunjur Empire, the region has, historically, been composed of approximately forty different ethnic groups. Most of the region's inhabitants converted to Islam with the 17th-century rise of the Fur Sultanate—once the state's most powerful political entity—which established

Arabic as the language of religious life, scholarship, and law. In the process, intermarriage and inter-ethnic cooperation became common as the region became an “African kingdom that embraced Arabs as valued equals.”<sup>75</sup>

The Sultanate’s independence was short-lived, however. In the mid-19th century the region was annexed to the Ottoman Empire, provoking political upheaval as indigenous leaders fought to restore the region’s independence. Their efforts were complicated by British ambitions in the region: the British established joint sovereignty with Egypt in 1899 and, in the process, established the borders of Sudan.<sup>76</sup> The Darfur region was permitted to maintain some autonomy until the start of World War I, at which point it was absorbed into the British Empire. British colonial administrators opted to rule through existing chiefs, validating a system of tribe-based land rights that favored Egypt, Khartoum, and southern Sudan. As a result, according to the genocide scholars Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, Darfur and its people were neglected, “their landowning class reduced to penury,” and their contributions to Sudan’s past written out of official history.<sup>77</sup> In the years that followed the nation was further divided along religious lines, with the north maintaining a strong Islamic leadership that limited missionary activity, while the south was increasingly “ruled directly and as much by Christian missionaries as by Anglo-Egyptian officials.”<sup>78</sup> Amid this dramatic cultural change most of the people of Darfur became migrant laborers and gradually assimilated to their new national identity. Indeed, when Sudan declared its independence on December 19, 1955, the people of Darfur seemed largely content with this development, though the region’s neglect by state officials continued, sowing broader civilian discontent across the latter half of the 20th century.

The genocide in Darfur is rooted in this historical context of state neglect, as well as three intersecting conflicts: the 1955–1972 civil war between the Islamist, Khartoum-based government and two Darfur-based rebel groups that first began in February 2003; the 1983–2005 civil war in the south that, in 2011, resulted in the new nation of South Sudan, but

without the approval of Darfur-based rebel groups; and the Darfur-specific civil war from 2003 to 2006 between sedentary agriculturalists who claim black “African” heritage and nomadic pastoralists who claim “Arabic” heritage.<sup>79</sup> Combined, these conflicts have resulted in an estimated 100,000 to 400,000 civilian casualties in Darfur.

Years of state neglect amplified by severe drought and associated famine in the 1970s gave rise to land disputes as nomadic pastoralists were forced to encroach upon agricultural land to survive. The availability of cheap weapons made it relatively easy for the affected communities to purchase guns to protect their interests, and, as tensions increased, the added spread of Arab-Islamic nationalism in the region prompted Darfuri Arabs to appeal to Khartoum for support, while becoming increasingly vocal about their desire to expel their African agriculturalist compatriots. Periods of overt physical conflict began in 1987, when pastoralists began attacking members of the Fur ethnic minority, destroying an estimated 40,000 homes and killing an estimated 2,500 to 5,000 civilians.<sup>80</sup> The atrocities were eventually ended by a local peace agreement, though this did little to address the imbalances of political power at the national level that privileged the Arab pastoralists in Darfur. As a result, tensions in the region remained high, as did the rate of armed raids among parties to the conflict. In 1997 renewed violence prompted the government of Sudan—under the leadership of President Omar al-Bashir—to declare a state of emergency in Darfur, and its military began training local Arab militia groups—known as the Janjaweed—to defend their lands and interests. In response, the “African” agriculturalists began forming self-defense groups to protect their communities, recognizing that the Sudanese government was unlikely to intervene on their behalf. Conflict between these combatant groups became more common, and the intermittent peace increasingly fragile.<sup>81</sup>

As the conflict continued to escalate, a non-Arab rebel movement emerged in 2001, represented primarily by the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and

Equality Movement (JEM). The movement lobbied the Sudanese government to address the economic and political marginalization of Darfur, and to cease its program of “Arabization” in the region.<sup>82</sup> The government response was initially “half-hearted and incoherent,” but as the movement’s guerrilla forces began conducting targeted attacks on government military outposts, al-Bashir invested in an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign that relied heavily on the Janjaweed.<sup>83</sup> By the start of 2003 it had become clear that the government was using scorched-earth policies against non-Arab communities across northern and western Darfur, from which the rebel movements were believed to receive their greatest support. The Sudanese government forces worked alongside the Janjaweed: the typical pattern of attack began with bombings by Sudanese government aircraft, followed by ground attacks by Janjaweed militia, and were often accompanied by government soldiers. Together they burned homes and farms, and massacred an estimated 200,000 Darfuri civilians, prompting survivors’ flight from the region.<sup>84</sup>

The literature on Darfur abounds with examples of the widespread sexual violence to which African Darfuri women were subjected at the height of the genocide. The historian Samuel Totten argues that the patriarchal nature of Sudanese society in the years preceding the genocide rendered African Darfuri women particularly vulnerable to rape, gang rape, and sexual mutilation, as well as psychological torture—often also of a sexual nature—in addition to being massacred along with their communities.<sup>85</sup> The Janjaweed militias and Sudanese soldiers operated on the understanding that women were “spoils of war” and that by assaulting Darfuri women, they would simultaneously terrorize the women’s families and communities, forcing them to flee their ancestral lands. Survivors frequently report having been verbally abused with racist slurs and told by the Janjaweed that they were being raped in order to force them to give birth to Janjaweed or Arab babies. Some women were even

abducted by the Janjaweed or government soldiers to force them to give birth to children conceived through rape, further undermining their sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the patriarchal nature of Darfuri communities and Sudanese society more broadly, women whose sexual assaults become public knowledge are at heightened risk of being rejected by their families, making it highly unlikely they will ever marry or bear children.<sup>87</sup> They also face the prospect of being prosecuted, as Sudanese sharia law allows for women to be arrested, jailed, and beaten for having been raped if they are unable to convince the court that the assault was not consensual—a process that typically requires either a confession from the perpetrator or supporting statements from four male witnesses. In this manner, the perpetrators' use of sexual violence served to psychologically and physically harm women, and to undermine the social vitality of the women's families and communities. For these reasons, genocide scholars have argued that the widespread use of sexual violence against women, as well as other patterns within the violence, meet the UN Genocide Convention definition for genocide. Indeed, al-Bashir is the first sitting head of state to have been charged with crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide by the International Criminal Court, though he has yet to be arrested and continues to serve as president.

## **Discussion of the Literature**

From the historical overviews of the colonial genocides in the Congo Free State and German South West Africa, it becomes evident that women are largely overlooked in the literature. Contemporary observers and scholars largely focused on the brutalities to which men were subjected as slave laborers and potential combatants, whom the colonizers perceived as the greatest threat, and which likely resulted in the majority of deaths in each context. Conversely, women appear in the historical record primarily in reference to their heightened vulnerability to sexual slavery, forced marriage, and rape, even though their experiences of these colonial genocides were likely far more diverse than this singular focus acknowledges. Largely missing from the historical record, due to both a relative lack of contemporary

primary sources and a persistent bias in subsequent research, are accounts of women's activities in support of combatant and resistance movements, of their independent efforts toward resistance and rescue, and of their role in rebuilding their communities in the aftermath of the genocides in the absence of men, among other significant experiences; if they could be uncovered, such accounts would lend themselves to a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of these atrocities.

A similar tendency to focus on women primarily as victims of sexual violence persists in the literature on the more recent genocides in Burundi and Darfur as well. Regarding Burundi, the literature has almost entirely overlooked women's experiences, beyond passing mentions of women being killed alongside men and children that are often associated with scholars' efforts to demonstrate that the political violence had escalated beyond the killing of political opponents or potential combatants, and thereby to reinforce their case that the atrocities constituted genocide. In Darfur women's voices are featured regularly in the literature, but predominantly in discussions of the perpetrators' widespread and systematic use of sexual violence to inflict lasting psychological and physical harm upon Darfuri women and their communities. Once again, this trend likely obscures the complexities of women's experiences and the varied roles that they may have served, perhaps not as combatants, but as instigators of violence and as advocates for peace in the post-conflict period, among other key roles.<sup>88</sup>

Genocide scholars are beginning to address these gaps, largely in response to advances in feminist methodologies and theories emerging from the fields of conflict studies and transitional justice, but there is still much progress to be made.

To this end, the literature pertaining to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda emerges as a valuable model for considering women's varied roles and actions in relation to genocide. In Rwanda, Hutu Power extremists employed sexual violence as part of an explicitly genocidal campaign against the Tutsi, and for this reason women's experiences of sexual violence make up a significant part of the literature. However, Hutu women were also implicated in the

atrocities, and so their experiences as perpetrators, as well as their post-genocide experiences of the nation's comprehensive transitional justice program, have been analyzed extensively. Similarly, Hutu women have occasionally been highlighted as rescuers and resisters of genocidal violence, as well as bystanders. Finally, there is a great deal of literature surrounding women's political activism in the post-genocide period as leaders of their communities and within the government. Rwanda is thus arguably the first example of genocide in Africa in which the full spectrum of women's agency and actions is being considered.

## **Primary Sources**

Much of the literature underpinning studies of genocide in Africa is grounded in analysis of sources from colonial archives in Europe, as well as African archives. Additionally, many key primary sources have been digitized and made available online for the benefit of interested scholars and publics.

Going forward, historical studies of women and genocide in Africa would benefit greatly from applying an intersectional feminist lens to the study of early oral traditions across the continent. The majority of literature on genocide in Africa, and particularly sub-Saharan Africa, begins with the colonial period; this is largely due to researcher bias and a reliance on written documentation. That said, many African communities maintain rich oral traditions that can speak effectively to earlier periods in their nations' pasts, and which could be used to conduct a study of earlier historic genocides in different regions and periods, greatly enriching understandings of genocide across the continent. Similarly, oral traditions could be a source for enhanced understanding of early gender norms and women's agency in different African contexts before colonization. Many feminist historians recognize the possibility that some African communities may have become more patriarchal as a result of contact with European colonizers. By engaging with oral traditions that speak to early African history it is

possible that women could be written back into the histories of their communities and nations.

Similarly, in contexts where the literature is dominated by colonial accounts written by officials, oral histories may be particularly useful for amplifying the experiences and perspectives of ordinary people who come from these contexts. Indeed, the field of oral history has long celebrated its ability to bring multiple perspectives into conversation to enhance the historical record. Given many African communities' long-term use of oral traditions as a means of transmitting historical knowledge to future generations, oral history may be easily adapted by both scholars and community groups to make the historical record more inclusive. Indeed, a great deal of rigorous, collaborative work of this nature is already occurring across the continent.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The First Geneva Convention, “\*[Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/120)[https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/120]\*,” August 22, 1864; The First Hague Convention, “\*[Convention \(II\) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/150)[https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/150]\*,” July 29, 1899; and The Second Hague Convention, “\*[Convention \(IV\) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and Its Annex: Regulations Concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/195)[https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/195]\*,” October 18, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, reprint ed. (Clark: Lawbook Exchange, 2005), 79. Lemkin’s book was first published in 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Curthoys and John Docker, “Defining Genocide,” in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 14.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, “\*[Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf)[https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%2078/volume-78-I-1021-English.pdf]\*,” December 9, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> David Scheffer, “Genocide and Atrocity Crimes,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 3 (2006): 229–250.

<sup>6</sup> International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, “\*[Agreement for the Prosecution and Punishment of the Major War Criminals of the European Axis, and Charter of the International Military Tribunal](https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=87B0BB4A50A64DEAC12563CD002D6AAE&action=openDocument)[https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=87B0BB4A50A64DEAC12563CD002D6AAE&action=openDocument]\*,” August 8, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Dominik Schaller, “Colonialism and Genocide: Raphael Lemkin’s Concept of Genocide and Its Application to European Rule in Africa,” *Development Dialogue* 50 (2008): 78.

<sup>8</sup> Dominik Schaller, “Raphael Lemkin’s View of European Colonial Rule in Africa: Between Condemnation and Admiration,” in *The Origins of Genocide: Raphael Lemkin as a Historian of Mass Violence*, ed. Dominik Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2013), 92.

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- <sup>10</sup> Schaller, "Raphael Lemkin's View of European Colonial Rule in Africa," 89.
- <sup>11</sup> Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 16.
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- <sup>13</sup> George Washington Williams, "[\\*An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo by Colonel, The Honorable Geo. W. Williams, of the United States of America](https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/primary-documents-global-african-history/george-washington-williams-open-letter-king-leopold-congo-1890/)[https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/primary-documents-global-african-history/george-washington-williams-open-letter-king-leopold-congo-1890/]\*," 1890.
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- <sup>15</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo*, 22.
- <sup>16</sup> Adam Hochschild, *Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 161.
- <sup>17</sup> Roger Casement, *\*Correspondence and Report from His Majesty's Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo*[https://ia800903.us.archive.org/34/items/CasementReport/CasementReportSmall.pdf]\* (London: HMSO, 1904), 71. A digitized version is available online.
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- <sup>19</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 60–94.
- <sup>20</sup> Schaller, "Raphael Lemkin's View of European Colonial Rule in Africa," 91.
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- <sup>22</sup> Hochschild, *Leopold's Ghost*, 226.
- <sup>23</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo*, 22.
- <sup>24</sup> Schaller, "Raphael Lemkin's View of European Colonial Rule in Africa," 93.
- <sup>25</sup> Jürgen Zimmerer, "Colonial Genocide: The Herero and Nama War (1904–8) in German South West Africa and Its Significance," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 325.
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- <sup>28</sup> Schaller, "Raphael Lemkin's View of European Colonial Rule in Africa," 90.
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