



## Legacies of Kanjogera: women political elites and the transgression of gender norms in Rwanda

Sarah E. Watkins & Erin Jessee

To cite this article: Sarah E. Watkins & Erin Jessee (2020) Legacies of Kanjogera: women political elites and the transgression of gender norms in Rwanda, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 14:1, 84-102, DOI: [10.1080/17531055.2019.1711313](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2019.1711313)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2019.1711313>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 09 Jan 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 93



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Legacies of Kanjogera: women political elites and the transgression of gender norms in Rwanda

Sarah E. Watkins<sup>a</sup> and Erin Jessee <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Independent researcher; <sup>b</sup>Department of History, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

### ABSTRACT

Kanjogera looms large in Rwandan history as a Queen Mother (1895–1931) – a position equal to that of the king – who wielded extraordinary political power. While she was not the first Rwandan woman to exercise this kind of power, she is arguably the most widely remembered in Rwandan popular culture largely due to the brutalities she allegedly inflicted upon her perceived enemies. But why do Kanjogera’s violent excesses stand out when other monarchical figures also occasionally used violence to maintain or expand their power? What might the way her name is invoked in the present tell us about modern Rwandan gender norms and people’s attitudes toward women who exercise significant political power? We respond to these questions by examining the permissible behaviours of Rwandan women political elites in historical perspective. Following an overview of Kanjogera’s political legacy, we turn our attention to two First Ladies, Agathe Kanziga (1973–1994) and Jeannette Kagame (2000–present) who, for different reasons, are occasionally referred to as modern incarnations of Kanjogera. In these two cases, we argue Kanjogera’s name serves as a rhetorical device that reveals ongoing anxieties about women exercising significant political power, while simultaneously undermining the politically prominent men with whom they are associated.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 May 2018  
Accepted 16 December 2019

### KEYWORDS

Rwanda; monarchy; women; political authority; gender norms

In the twenty-first century, Rwanda has become a beacon for women’s empowerment within Africa and globally. Its reputation is largely grounded in the efforts of post-genocide Rwandan civil society groups and the ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), to mainstream gender equality in politics and throughout its various development and transitional justice initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The genocide began following the assassination of Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana (r. 1973–1994), at the height of international negotiations to end the three-year civil war with the RPF.<sup>2</sup> Hutu Power extremists affiliated with the nation’s Hutu majority attempted to exterminate the RPF’s perceived support base – the nation’s political opposition and Tutsi minority population – resulting in an estimated 800,000 civilian casualties.<sup>3</sup> As part of their broader genocidal plan, Hutu Power extremists overtly advocated for the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, including Tutsi women and women married to Tutsi men, resulting in an estimated 250,000–500,000 women victims of sexual assault.<sup>4</sup>

**CONTACT** Sarah E. Watkins  [sarah.e.watkins@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.e.watkins@gmail.com)  403 E. Maynard Ave., Columbus, OH 43202, USA

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

In the genocide's aftermath, some Rwandan women – particularly those who were able to mobilize as genocide survivors – have had great success advocating for women's inclusion in domestic and international policy debates.<sup>5</sup> In the process, they have been able to work with the Rwandan government to criminalize gender-based violence and domestic violence, and grant women and girls inheritance rights, among other advances.<sup>6</sup> Today, Rwanda is particularly celebrated for the 2013 parliamentary elections in which women secured 64% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, dramatically altering the nation's previously male-dominated political landscape.<sup>7</sup> For many observers, this was a significant step toward gender equality in a society that prior to the genocide was dominated by “deeply entrenched patriarchal systems” in which “Rwanda's women were hard pressed for a space to exercise agency”.<sup>8</sup>

While there is ample research that frames modern Rwanda as deeply patriarchal, there is a need for careful contextualization of Rwanda's gender politics prior to the nation's independence in 1962, and especially before colonization in 1896. Indeed, scholars know very little about Rwandan women and their contributions to their communities and nation prior to independence. Understanding the historical roles and gender norms that determined Rwandan women's agency prior to the colonial period is limited by the relative dearth of primary source materials and academic interest in women's lives. However, there are occasional examples of women who figure prominently within the historiography, all of whom were elites affiliated with the monarchy who acted both in “traditional” roles and in overt opposition to the assumed contemporary Rwandan gender norms in order to exercise political power.

This article focuses on one such example of a powerful elite woman whose name has survived in the present: *Umugabekazi* (Queen Mother) Kanjogera (r. 1895–1931). She looms large in modern Rwandan popular culture for overthrowing her adopted son Rutarindwa (r. 1895–1896) so her biological son Musinga (r. 1896–1931) could be *mwami* (king). She then exterminated those court notables who allegedly opposed his reign. But beyond her transformative impact on Rwanda, Kanjogera's name persists in present-day popular culture for another reason – to cast aspersion on modern Rwandan women elites who are perceived as exercising substantial political power independent of or in tandem with their politically prominent husbands. To explore this phenomenon, we consider two vastly different Rwandan First Ladies who are occasionally referenced as modern incarnations of Kanjogera: Agathe Kanziga, the widely condemned wife of former President Habyarimana, who was allegedly a central figure in the genocidal Hutu Power extremist movement that emerged toward the end of his regime; and Jeannette Nyiramongi Kagame, the widely celebrated wife of current President Paul Kagame, whose visibility in Rwandan politics largely relates to her charity work and efforts to promote women's empowerment.<sup>9</sup> In analysing the manner in which these prominent women's critics use the label “Kanjogera” to condemn them, we reveal ongoing anxieties within Rwanda related to women's political authority, both real or perceived. Simultaneously, such critiques are also instrumental for undermining the political power of the men with whom these First Ladies are associated.

### ***Rwandan gender norms in historical perspective***

Prior to discussing Kanjogera and the modern women political elites who are occasionally tarnished with her name, however, it is important to consider the current state of

knowledge related to Kanjogera and the gender norms she would have navigated during her life. Beginning with the Nyiginya kingdom – whose *abami* (kings) belonged to the powerful Abanyiginya clan – historians such as Alexis Kagame, Peter Schumacher, and Jan Vansina offer occasional insights on early Rwandan gender norms.<sup>10</sup> Each preserved invaluable collections of oral traditions maintained by court historians, ritualists, and other experts filtered through the lens of the rapidly shifting cultural and political climate associated with Rwanda's colonization by Germany (1895–1916) and Belgium (1916–1962). While none of these early historians engaged in sustained analysis of women's historical contributions within the Nyiginya kingdom, and particularly not those of non-elite women, Vansina concluded that

the social position of women was complex and variable ... In principle they were inferior to one man—this was most evidence in the case of women married to farmers since women could not control any land, but it was also apparent among herders despite women's right to own cattle. Usually their status derived from that of their fathers, husbands, or sons.<sup>11</sup>

To this end, Vansina identified a “sharp” division of labour by gender within the household that left women with primary responsibility for cleaning and maintaining the family home, preparing food, and raising children.<sup>12</sup> However, he noted that “age and personality were of considerable importance” for women's authority.<sup>13</sup> In particular, older married women were often set up in their own households and in this capacity enjoyed considerable authority. Vansina also highlighted women who exercised “mystical power inherent in femininity and human fecundity”, noting that “[s]ome women became famous as magicians or healers, and above all as prophets”.<sup>14</sup> However, Vansina typically presented these potentially prominent women as footnotes to the broader history of the Abanyiginya *abami* that he sought to establish, a pattern that persists across contemporary historical studies of the Nyiginya kingdom.

For the first half of Rwanda's colonial period, historian Alison Des Forges analyzed the reign of Mwami Musinga, including the central role that Kanjogera played in court affairs. Des Forges emphasized that in some families – particularly among Tutsi and members of Kanjogera's powerful Abega clan, from which many of the Abanyiginya *abami* took their *abamikazi* (queens) – the power that a mother had over her son “often persisted even after he was thrust into the largely masculine world ...”<sup>15</sup> While Des Forges was, in this instance, contextualizing the elite gender norms that allowed Kanjogera to exercise power within Musinga's court, she raises the provocative possibility that women other than the reigning Umugabekazi might have enjoyed similar power within their families and communities when she notes that Rwandans used the term *ubukururamweko* (“trailing a woman's sash after one's self”) in reference to men who were dominated by their mothers.<sup>16</sup> Much like the historians who preceded her, however, Des Forges did not analyse the lives of women other than Kanjogera, making it impossible to offer general conclusions about women's authority within their families.

Fortunately, anthropologist Helen Codere provided rare insights on gender norms across Rwanda's colonial period as they pertained to women from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. In doing so, she emphasized the vast changes that contemporary Rwandan women – including elites like Kanjogera – were navigating as a result of colonialization. Codere acknowledged that many Tutsi women “knew comfort, freedom from hard physical work, and relative economic security” compared to their Hutu

compatriots, who were typically impoverished and expected – as subsistence farmers – to perform “unremitting physical labour” to support their families.<sup>17</sup> However, she observed that as Rwandan men became “Europeanized men in European occupations”, Rwandan women, regardless of ethnicity or socio-economic status, faced heightened economic hardship and social stigma. This was particularly the case where women were associated with long-standing practices like divination or concubinage that were being rejected by the growing number of converts to Christianity in their communities.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, throughout the autobiographies that Codere documented, the women featured their marriages as their “greatest moment of social recognition and exposure”, after which they could realize their potential as good wives and mothers.<sup>19</sup> The emphasis on Rwandan women being good wives and mothers – a theme that also persists in gender norms associated Rwanda’s post-independence period – thus seems well-established prior to independence, at least as presented by Rwandans to scholars who conducted research during Rwanda’s colonial period. The near-total exclusion of women from most public spheres, and particularly politics, however, was a relatively new phenomenon that emerged during Rwanda’s colonial period.

### ***Kanjogera: the apex and downfall of women’s monarchical power***

Kanjogera’s reign as umugabekazi thus occurred amidst great cultural and political change in Rwanda. She rose to power as the favourite wife of Mwami Rwabugiri (r. 1863–1895) – a warrior king who relied on terror to expand and maintain control of conquered territories – and was chosen to serve as the umugabekazi of Rwabugiri’s chosen successor, Rutarindwa, his adoptive son and co-regent during the last five years of his reign.<sup>20</sup> However, Kanjogera had a biological son by Rwabugiri whom she wanted to become mwami. Belgian incursions in the region provided the perfect opportunity to undermine Rutarindwa’s authority. Kanjogera and her brothers encouraged Rutarindwa to engage the Belgians in battle at Shangi in western Rwanda. His warriors’ inevitable defeat, including the deaths of some of Rwanda’s best fighters, exposed the weakness of Rutarindwa’s military, prompting concerns about his leadership.<sup>21</sup> Kanjogera then used this defeat to isolate Rutarindwa from his court notables and amass support for a coup.

In December 1896, while Rutarindwa was camped with minimal security at Rucunshu – the site that was to become his new residence – Kanjogera’s brother Kabare rallied his army against him. The resulting battle was one-sided and most of Rutarindwa’s supporters were either killed in battle or, faced with certain defeat, suicided. The battle ended when Rutarindwa set his house on fire, killing himself and destroying the ritual artefacts associated with the kingship.<sup>22</sup> Among these treasures was the drum Kalinga, which signified kingly legitimacy and without which Kanjogera’s son, Musinga, would face challenges in convincing the court of his legitimacy.<sup>23</sup> Kabare, however, had confidence in the Abega clan’s ability to shore up support for Musinga’s claim. In response to Kanjogera’s concern regarding the destruction of the royal drum, he allegedly said: “We have the mwami, we can make the drum”.<sup>24</sup> In the years that followed, Kanjogera and her supporters “relied primarily on execution and pillage, or the threat of them” to silence critique of Musinga’s legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> In this manner, Kanjogera was directly responsible for undermining the functional superiority of the Abanyiginya clan and ensuring that her son was

surrounded almost exclusively by Abega advisors, enacting a remarkable transformation of political power within the monarchy.

Having eliminated the main threats to Musinga's rule, Kanjogera settled into a more acceptable role for an umugabekazi, which involved serving in public as a dutiful mother and supporting her son's leadership from behind the scenes. Yet Kanjogera continued to wield great power over Musinga's affairs. She was instrumental in negotiating an alliance with the Germans against the Belgians and the British that allowed Musinga and his court to maintain power without undue interference from these colonizing powers. She accomplished this in part by employing her other brother, Ruhinankiko, who was over seven feet tall, as a negotiator for Musinga during early meetings with the Germans, to which she listened from behind a screen in the royal household.<sup>26</sup>

Rwandan popular culture abounds with narratives related to Kanjogera's violent excesses, both prior to and during her tenure as umugabekazi. The story behind how Kanjogera became Rwabugiri's favourite wife is notable here:

Giharamagara was the beer maker of the king.<sup>27</sup> One day, [Mwami or king] Rwabugiri told Giharamagara to give him some beer for Rwabugiri's servants, but Giharamagara refused, saying there was no beer. Rwabugiri became angry and they started fighting. In the house, they were with the queen Nyirayuhi (Kanjogera) only; the servants were outside waiting to receive the beer because they were supposed to be called when the beer was going to be available. For that, no one knew what was happening inside the house. Giharamagara held Rwabugiri and threw him on the floor, strangling each other; when Nyirayuhi saw that she became angry and grabbed a sword to defend her husband. She killed Giharamagara and he fell down.

Rwabugiri asked his wife what she wanted as a reward, between his land and his cattle which were in a very big number; the wife replied that she only wanted to be his favorite and most cherished wife. Then Rwabugiri accepted to give that to her.<sup>28</sup>

This narrative reveals several elements of Kanjogera's personality that are commonly highlighted in Rwandan popular culture. Kanjogera's prowess with a sword – an impressive blade she allegedly called *ruhuga* (killer) – is legendary, as are the atrocities she perpetrated with it as presented in the following account documented in 1972:

The Queen Mother also had the power to kill. Like Nyirayuhi ... Whenever she said that 'ruhuga is thirsty,' a healthy baby would be brought in, fed with milk and then put before the Queen Mother, who would then place her sword on the baby's tummy to support herself as she got up.<sup>29</sup>

These popular narratives also highlight Kanjogera's unpredictable temper and penchant for bloodshed. For a woman, even a political elite, to have learned to handle a sword with competence is exceptional. A review of the literature on Rwandan gender norms prior to the genocide suggests women were not allowed on the battlefield until after the fighting had ceased, and even prohibited from handling weapons as it was believed that this would bring bad fortune upon the owner, resulting in his injury or death.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, there are taboos that prohibit women from engaging in physical violence, particularly against children.<sup>31</sup> Instead, the literature suggests that Rwandan women were valued for being *nyampinga*, a term that encapsulates such ideals as purity, innocence, and maternal care rather than political cunning, physical strength, and other qualities associated with hegemonic masculinity in Rwanda.<sup>32</sup> To this end, popular narratives abound wherein

Kanjogera smokes a pipe, which in modern Rwanda is typically regarded as a masculine activity, except where women are post-menopausal.<sup>33</sup> She also allegedly blinded the court historian Kayijuka for bringing Europeans into her compound while she was bathing.<sup>34</sup>

Popular memory in Rwanda thus highlights Kanjogera's cunning and her desire for political power, as well as the ease with which she exercised said power, whether directly or through court agents. Such qualities are particularly evident in the way that Kanjogera approached potential political subversives, such as Muhumusa – another elite woman who led an important rebellion in the north against Musinga and the Abega-dominated court in the early 1900s.<sup>35</sup> Muhumusa's claim to authority had similar roots to that of Kanjogera – both claimed to have been married to Rwabugiri and to have produced sons with him, though the official historical narratives only recognize Kanjogera's claims as legitimate.<sup>36</sup> However, Muhumusa was a medium of Nyabingi, a mythical queen who allegedly ruled the northern region of Ndorwa long ago, and whose spirit could possess people, allowing them to perform miracles.<sup>37</sup> Muhumusa thus had great spiritual authority in addition to political authority, which helped her amass followers in northern Rwanda, where she fled following the coup at Rucunshu.<sup>38</sup> In response to Muhumusa's rebellion, Kanjogera sought out German support to secure Musinga's position in exchange for increased missionary access across Rwanda. In 1912, the Germans collaborated with the British to launch a military campaign to restore political stability in northern Rwanda, capturing Muhumusa and confining her to house arrest. Subsequently, Kanjogera increasingly turned to the Europeans to secure her and Musinga's position. Their increasing reliance on the colonizers, however, undermined their monarchical authority by demonstrating that they needed the Europeans to successfully rule Rwanda. As European and Roman Catholic ideals spread within Rwanda, the monarchy arguably became less salient in many Rwandans' lives.<sup>39</sup> By the time Kanjogera and Musinga released their precarious position and tried to resist Belgian interference, the Belgians were able to depose Musinga (and, by extension Kanjogera) with minimal resistance from the royal court, and empower his missionary-educated son, Rudahigwa (r. 1931–1959).

### ***Neo-tradition and the changing face of women's authority***

Taken together, what is notable about the qualities attributed to Kanjogera is the degree to which they relate to her transgression of Rwandan gender norms that dictate the appropriate behaviour of women, at least since the spread of Roman Catholicism in Rwanda. Similarly notable is the iconic nature of stories about Kanjogera over time, and the extent to which Kanjogera continues to be referenced as “treacherous and illegitimate”, among other perceived unwomanly qualities, rather than celebrated as a cunning and at times highly effective political figure, for example.<sup>40</sup> But Kanjogera lived and ruled during a period of profound upheaval and transition in Rwanda, which were in part a direct result of her actions. Though she has received little credit (or blame) in historical scholarship until recently, the oral traditions curated by Rwandan historians and storytellers are replete with stories that centre Kanjogera's role in the 1896 coup at Rucunshu, an in negotiating with the Germans to subdue various rebellions, and secure her and her son's position.<sup>41</sup> These narratives portray her as an elite attempting to stabilize her position as her royal predecessors, both men and women, had done. Her continued inclusion in these narratives also seems dependent upon the narrator in question. Some historians, like Jan

Vansina's key informant, Jean Mugina, present her as a powerful actor, while others diminish her role in shaping Rwandan politics and history.

Yet Kanjogera does not feature as prominently in the scholarship of the prolific historian Alexis Kagame, nor in other historical work from the colonial and independence periods, the majority of which was produced by European scholars.<sup>42</sup> She was rewritten into the historiography by Alison Des Forges in her analysis of Musinga's reign, based in part on oral histories.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, the historical record of Kanjogera's life is critical because of the varied ways she has been represented in scholarship and among the public. Her continued inclusion in sources closest to the monarchy – stemming from court historians recorded by Vansina – contrasts with histories that privileged colonial or church documents over Rwandan sources. Though modern Rwanda's antecedent kingdom was certainly patriarchal, it was not devoid of women in positions of institutional power – nor were these women transgressing contemporary Rwandan gender norms in taking on these positions.<sup>44</sup> Yet in Rwanda, as in other African nations, colonial authorities often erased powerful women from their histories, either by downplaying their importance or by ignoring them altogether. Where indirect rule was employed, positions of authority went almost exclusively to men, and variable gender systems were often ignored in favour of the more binary European model.<sup>45</sup> These changes benefited men in colonized societies, giving them opportunities to subordinate previously powerful women.

As mentioned previously, the concept of *nyampinga* governed, at least in theory, the expectations for Rwandan women, emphasizing feminine virtues of purity and innocence over ambition and political savvy. By their very nature, *abagabekazi* (queen mothers) defied this, as did *abamikazi* who helped their husbands govern by holding court, overseeing herds, and in some cases managing armies. Elite women were less bound by convention due to their proximity to power. Some, like Kanjogera, used this to their advantage to bolster their individual, familial, and clan ambitions. But this does not mean that they were loved or celebrated for it. This became increasingly the case during the colonial period, as rising anti-monarchical sentiment was bolstered by a European patriarchal morality associated with the spread of Roman Catholicism, to which Mwami Rudahigwa formally converted in the mid-1940s.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, some missionaries in the Great Lakes of Africa recognized the importance of women's spiritual leadership and sought to channel it in a manner that aligned with Catholic theology, encouraging worship of the Virgin Mary in place of Nyabingi, for example.<sup>47</sup> Aside from this ongoing mechanism for exercising spiritual authority, however, women's roles within the monarchy diminished, and they became conspicuously absent from politics as Rwanda neared independence.

In this context, it is easier to grasp why a figure like Kanjogera could become a target of critique of anti-monarchical forces. Though she was not unusually violent for a monarch, she certainly violated popular understandings of what a "good woman" by Rwandan standards should be. Her grandson Rudahigwa worked hard to not only unify Rwandans, but to resist the colonial rule that Kanjogera had once courted. Thus, as Rwanda moved toward independence, she became the perfect villain – a violent woman who revelled in the excesses of power, controlling the men around her, and scheming with foreigners who subsequently implemented policies that intensified forced labour, discrimination, and division. Without a strong women's movement fighting to reclaim the historical

position of these women elites, Kanjogera could easily fill the role of national scapegoat: a woman, to satisfy the patriarchs, and an *umugabekazi*, to satisfy the anti-monarchists.

In sum, Kanjogera is arguably the best-known *umugabekazi* to modern Rwandans, though her discursive image is used in a variety of ways. She becomes the avatar of the alleged tyranny and depravity of Tutsi elites prior to independence, and a figure through which people express their anxieties around women exercising political power in the present. She is also used to undermine the authority of the men with whom powerful or ambitious women are associated. This trend is most evident in a form of protest that has emerged in response to two modern Rwandan women's efforts to exercise some modicum of visible political power – First Ladies Agathe Kanziga and Jeanette Kagame – to whom we now turn our attention.

### Agathe Kanziga

In discussing modern Rwandan women who are referenced as Kanjogera in popular culture, Agathe Kanziga is the most prevalent example. Indeed, in recent history there are few women in Rwanda who are so consistently reviled by historians and the public alike. Kanziga is descended from the matrilineal Abagesera clan, as well as one of the Hutu *Abahinza* lineages who ruled Rwanda's northern communities as late as the 1920s.<sup>48</sup> Once a small autonomous kingdom, the arrival of superior German weaponry and other factors associated with the advent of colonialism convinced its leaders to gradually submit to incorporation into Musinga's Rwanda. Kanziga's family was nonetheless able to maintain extensive regional power and influence throughout the First Hutu Republic that took shape under the post-independence leadership of President Grégoire Kayibanda (r. 1962–1973).<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Kanziga's family rallied in support of her husband – who then served as the Army Chief of Staff – to orchestrate the “bloodless coup” that deposed Kayibanda in 1973.<sup>50</sup> Her family connections granted Habyarimana's bid for power an element of historical and political legitimacy that was otherwise missing. Though he was a civil servant and very popular among the Rwandan military, Habyarimana did not come from a powerful and storied lineage like Kanziga.

Historian Sarah Watkins argues that Kanziga embodied the essence of the *abagabekazi* at a point when this position and its monarchical context had formally ceased to exist.<sup>51</sup> Kanziga ensured that her family held politically influential positions in Habyarimana's presidency. Her three brothers Protais Zigiranyirazo, Élie Sagatwa, and Séraphin Rwabukumba became key figures within Habyarimana's inner circle.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, sociologist André Guichaoua found that in honour of International Women's Year in 1975, Kanziga began establishing a “government of women”, which made and unmade women deputies, pushing women to posts of greater responsibility and visibility, and “controlled the women's organizations that were authorized at the time”.<sup>53</sup> For these reasons, many Rwandans recall Kanziga as the real power behind Habyarimana's presidency, leading them to refer to her as “Kanjogera”, and “*Umwamikazi*” (queen).<sup>54</sup> In doing so, Habyarimana's political authority was undermined by casting him as a man who was controlled entirely by his wife and her powerful family.<sup>55</sup>

Take, for example, Philip Gourevitch's recounting of the Mayuya Affair, in which Kanziga's supporters allegedly assassinated one of Habyarimana's most trusted confidants.<sup>56</sup> He notes:

... Madame Agathe was called Kanjogera, after the wicked queen mother of Mwami Musinga, the Lady Macbeth of Rwandan legend. *Le clan de Madame*, Agathe's court within the court, was known as the *akazu*, the little house. The *akazu* was the core of the concentric webs of political, economic, and military muscle and patronage that came to be known as Hutu Power. When the President crossed the *akazu*, he was quickly set straight. For instance, Habyarimana once cultivated a protégé from outside the *akazu*, Colonel Stanislas Mayuya; he liked Mayuya so much that one of the chiefs of the *akazu* had Mayuya shot dead. The gunman was arrested; then he and the prosecutor on the case were also killed.<sup>57</sup>

This excerpt demonstrates the exceptional power enjoyed by Kanziga and her extended family from the perspective of Gourevitch's informants. However, beyond her efforts to minimize her husband's independence, Kanziga is often referenced as the mastermind of the 1994 genocide. Anthropologist Christopher Taylor documented the RPF's efforts to cast Kanziga as Kanjogera through Radio Muhabura and other propaganda tools during the Rwandan civil war.<sup>58</sup> In particular, the RPF highlighted – accurately – the role Kanziga played in demonizing the Tutsi minority as foreign invaders and enemies of the Hutu majority through extremist media outlets. Among the Hutu Power ideologues behind these media outlets was Hassan Ngeze, author of the infamous “Hutu Ten Commandments”, which encouraged Hutu civilians to reject their Tutsi friends, spouses, business associates, and comrades in arms.<sup>59</sup> Historian and convicted *génocidaire* Ferdinand Nahimana was a long-term critic of both what he perceived as violent conquest by the Abanyiginya monarchs of the less powerful *abahinza* (northern, predominantly Hutu, kings) who allegedly preceded them, as well as the historiography that cast the Abanyiginya court as Rwanda's shared national history. This antagonistic perspective on the central court's was one of the reasons he was drawn to Kanziga's *akazu*.<sup>60</sup> In doing so, these extremists echoed the critiques of Hutu nationalists of the 1950s who objected to the use of the royal drum *Kalinga* as a symbol of national unity, owing to the fact that the drum once displayed the genitalia of conquered *abahinza*.<sup>61</sup> To Hutu nationalists, these were not ancient histories: the northwest's incorporation into the modern Rwandan state happened in the early twentieth century under Kanjogera's leadership. For the *akazu*, as well as many others, memories of the conquest and its fallout continue to cause animus.

As in Kanjogera's case, Kanziga's transgression of contemporary Rwandan gender norms is complicated by her alleged crimes and has resulted in social and political stigmas that have followed her into exile. Yet the nature of the discourse surrounding her legacy demonstrates the gendered dynamics of that critique. She is not simply labelled a *génocidaire*: by calling her Kanjogera, her critics compare her to a historical figure whom Kanziga undoubtedly hated, but who similarly exists within a Rwandan pantheon of elite women.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, she is not just accused of ideological violence, like her male colleagues. Her violence, like that of other women *génocidaires*, is understood as more evil precisely because of her womanhood.<sup>63</sup> This is evident in the invocation of Kanjogera's monarchical power that is popularly understood as capricious, cruel, and tyrannical.

## Jeannette Kagame

Meanwhile, in the years since Kanziga's flight from Rwanda, Rwanda's current First Lady has also been nicknamed Kanjogera, largely by an embittered political opposition in exile

that conspires to overthrow her husband. Jeannette Kagame is – like her husband – a descendent of a prestigious Abega lineage, who spent her youth in exile after her family fled ethnic and political violence surrounding Rwanda’s independence. She returned to Rwanda as the wife of Paul Kagame, then the Vice President and Minister of Defence in the new transitional government established in July 1994 by the RPF. In 2000, following the controversial resignation of moderate Hutu President Pasteur Bizimungu (r. 1994–2000), Paul Kagame became President, a position he has maintained through three allegedly democratic elections.<sup>64</sup> As First Lady, Jeannette Kagame is known as an intelligent, hard-working humanitarian who performs an impressive range of charity work to benefit vulnerable people, including HIV/AIDS patients, widows and orphans of the genocide, and the rural poor. She is also a key figure in the struggle for women’s empowerment in modern Rwanda – an area the RPF has increasingly prioritized with varying degrees of success.<sup>65</sup>

However, as Jeannette Kagame’s public visibility has increased, she has fallen victim to gendered critiques of her work, particularly by Rwanda’s political opposition in exile – a group that regards Kagame and the RPF as a threat to Rwanda’s long-term political stability.<sup>66</sup> In these highly politicized circles, Jeannette Kagame is frequently nicknamed *Kanjogera* in reference to the power she allegedly exercises over her husband and his inner circle to ensure the persecution of individuals whom she perceives to be a threat. It is important to note that many of the allegations against Jeannette Kagame raised by Rwanda’s political opposition in exile are impossible to substantiate. Indeed, we consider these allegations solely to explore the authors’ anxieties around Jeannette Kagame as a powerful woman, and do not read them as evidence of her involvement in the persecution of perceived political subversives.

For example, one anonymous *Ikaze Iwacu* blog post from September 2013 references Jeannette Kagame as the “queen from Hell”.<sup>67</sup> Among the allegations raised by the author are claims that Jeannette was directly complicit in persecuting Jeannette Rwigema, the wife of Fred Rwigema, who prior to his unexpected assassination in 1990 was the charismatic leader of the RPF and anticipated President of the “New Rwanda” that the RPF was fighting to “liberate”. The blog claims that Jeannette Kagame was instrumental in bringing about the social and political demise of Jeannette Rwigema and her sons. The implied purpose of her machinations was to ensure that Rwigema’s family could never pose a threat to Paul Kagame’s legitimacy as president and Jeannette Kagame’s legitimacy as First Lady. The blog’s author further claims “criminal Paul Kagame who [*sic*] now wears the skirt and Jeannette Kagame now wears trousers, meaning that Jeannette Kagame is the real Boss at Village Urugwiro”.<sup>68</sup>

For Rwandans, this trope of a woman political elite attacking her family’s perceived enemies is a familiar one. As suggested by the stories of Giharamagara’s death and the coup at Rucunshu, *Kanjogera* was allegedly willing to sacrifice anyone, even her own family members, to secure her husband’s position. In a monarchical context, this is unsurprising: the power of the *abagabekazi* was dependent upon being married to, and then being the mother of, the *mwami*. Therefore, the *mwami*’s security was of utmost importance to his *umugabekazi*, more so than other kinship ties. But the blog’s author seems further incensed by Jeannette Kagame’s allegedly immoral and womanly behaviour by Rwandan standards – referring to her as “a princess” and “a girl for bad boys”, among other gendered accusations. This kind of gendered stigmatization would be similarly

familiar to Rwandans given the dialectic of “male/female distinctions” that is prevalent in Rwanda today.<sup>69</sup>

Another blog, *Umuwugizi: The Voice of Rwanda*, makes similar allegations, condemning Jeannette Kagame for having “mercilessly requested her husband President Kagame to behead Major John Sengati on baseless charges as the only way to continue witch hunting her former business partner Rosette Kayumba whose aunt was Major John Sengati’s wife”.<sup>70</sup> The blog’s author accuses Jeannette Kagame of using her feminine wiles – “bed sweetening her husband” – to convince him to have Sengati killed, and then ties her manipulations of the President to her business ambitions, which they condemn as greedy and shameful. In this case, the author repeats a trope related not only to Kanjogera, but more explicitly to Jeannette Kagame’s namesake, Umugabekazi Nyiramongi (r. 1847–1863), a former umugabekazi who was Kanjogera’s aunt. In a narrative dedicated to Nyiramongi’s life story, she spirited her husband, Mwami Gahindiro, away from another jealous wife, and cloistered him in her house for three days, after which he named her son, Rwogera, his heir.<sup>71</sup>

Blogs such as *Ikaze Iwacu* and *Umuwugizi* speak to a disturbing trend among Rwanda’s political opposition in exile, and perhaps among Rwandan society more broadly: the tendency for those threatened or marginalized to attribute the ultimate political power underlying Paul Kagame’s regime to Jeannette Kagame. This serves a dual purpose. It undermines the legitimacy and presidential authority of her husband, while simultaneously deflecting criticism from him, offering protections to those deploying this criticism from persecution using harassment, illegal detainment, forced exile, and even alleged, assassinations.<sup>72</sup> By concentrating on Jeannette, these critiques carry a certain plausible deniability informed by deeper anxieties about women in power – that even a powerful man with the best of intentions can be swayed by a capricious woman, especially by unrestrained feminine sexuality. This certainly is the tenor of many oral traditions regarding abagabekazi. The narrative creators who told these stories walked a fine line between acknowledging the agency of powerful women like Nyiramongi and Kanjogera, while at the same time attributing their power to sexual manipulation. This theme is clearly and unequivocally echoed from the oral traditions about Umugabekazi Nyiramongi to the *Umuwugizi* blog’s accusations against Jeannette Kagame. However, in the present it could arguably also express ongoing anxieties about the RPF’s efforts to promote gender equality throughout Rwanda’s society.

## Conclusion: women in power, ambiguously

In a moment in which Rwanda is grappling with the rapid cultural shift brought on by its ambitious gender equality initiatives, it is worth investigating why politically prominent women – in this instance Agathe Kanziga and Jeannette Nyiramongi Kagame – are nicknamed Kanjogera. We have argued that this tendency is an expression of Rwandans’ anxieties around politically powerful women that derive from Rwandan gender norms having shaped how Kanjogera is remembered in present-day popular culture, as well as part of a broader effort to delegitimise and emasculate their powerful husbands.

Rwanda, like many modern nations, faces obstacles in challenging gender inequality including the risk of “patriarchal backlash” among its citizens.<sup>73</sup> Some Rwandan women occupy high profile positions in civil service, for example, and their presence

appears to have widespread public approval. However, these women civil servants are often engaged in work that does not overtly challenge modern Rwandan gender norms. In addition to Rwanda's much-lauded women parliamentarians, in 2018 Rwanda announced its first gender-balanced Cabinet, and women ministers lead the ministries of Gender and Family Promotion, Health, Public Service, and Agriculture and Animal Resources, among others.<sup>74</sup> In most instances, Rwandan women political elites are engaged in roles to which women are regarded as well-suited: promoting health and well-being, overseeing diplomacy, and managing public affairs. In doing so, they follow the model established by earlier generations of women genocide survivors who advocated for gender equality by eschewing overtly feminist rhetoric in favour of "motherist" terms, and relying on influential male allies "as conduits to further women's interests".<sup>75</sup>

Rwandan women appear to be excelling in these largely gender-conforming roles, though debates exist regarding the extent to which they exercise genuine political power. Political scientist Susan Thomson argues that while Rwandan women's visibility in public life is at an all-time high, their ability to shape their nation's future is limited by the RPF's domination of Rwanda's parliament: "[t]he number of Rwandan female parliamentarians glosses over their limited role in policymaking, the continued marginalization of the vast majority of Rwandan women, and the government's superficial commitment to democratic governance".<sup>76</sup> Put another way, as classicist Mary Beard writes in her treatise on women and power: "But I do wonder if, in some places, the presence of large numbers of women in parliament means that parliament is where the power is *not*".<sup>77</sup>

Rwanda, it seems, like many nations around the world, has a complicated relationship with women in positions of political authority. Indeed, as indicated by the cases of Agathe Kanziga and Jeannette Kagame, where Rwandan women begin to transgress or are perceived as transgressing gender norms, they risk condemnation as modern incarnations of Kanjogera, among other gendered accusations. Power and gender are not easily untangled. Those vices that are often associated with critiques of monarchical government and the flagrant misuse of power – cruelty, promiscuity, violence, and capriciousness – overlap with and are congruent with fears about "unnatural" behaviours for women. This, perhaps, has most to do with the fact that political power, as it is conceived in patriarchal societies, is frequently the antithesis of values associated with idealized womanhood. In her survey of England's pre-Elizabethan queens, historian Helen Castor writes,

But the converse of this exceptionalism—the fate of a woman who exercised authority in ways perceived by a disapproving observer to be undesirable or illegitimate—was more pervasive and much more damaging, an infinitely regressive double-bind in which female rulers were all too easily trapped. Women were soft and weak, hence unfit to rule; but a woman who showed herself to be strong was not the equivalent of a man, but a monster, a crime against nature.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the vastly different cultural context, the questions Castor raises can be applied to patriarchal contexts across the globe: if gendered expectations are such that women who embody any of the hallmarks of masculine power are perceived as monstrous, how can we reconcile attempts to empower women with the inevitably negative consequences? The answer, it may be, lies in redefining both gender and power by destigmatizing femininity and stripping power of its masculine bias.

## Notes

1. Over the last decade, the Rwanda National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) and other survivor-focus organizations in Rwanda have lobbied the international community to recognize and use this official label for the genocide that overwhelmed Rwanda in 1994. This official label has provoked controversy among Rwandans and scholars alike. Recently, political scientist Scott Straus cautioned scholars against using the label uncritically, as it amplifies the genocide endured by the Tutsi at the expense of the broader experiences of political violence – none of which, admittedly, approached the scale or intensity of the genocide – that Rwandans endured in the 1990s. Straus has called for an approach that serves to “affirm genocide *and* recognize the other mass crimes.” Straus, “The Limits of a Genocide Lens: Violence in Rwandans in the 1990s,” 2.
2. Controversy persists over which parties to the conflict are responsible for Habyarimana’s assassination. French soldiers and DRC peacekeepers have been blamed; see Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 213–4. Habyarimana’s own cabinet has been suspected; see Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 182. The Rwandan government’s 2010 Mutsinzi Report argues that the Rwandan Armed Forces were responsible for engineering and implementing Habyarimana’s assassination. Republic of Rwanda, “Report of the Investigation.” Kagame himself has also been blamed; see Trédivic and Poux, “Rapport d’expertise”; Hugh Schofield. “Rwanda Genocide: Kagame “Cleared of Habyarimana Crash.” *The BBC*, 10 January 2012; and Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 144–5.
3. The number of victims of the genocide is also a point of controversy. The organizers of Kwibuka25—the 25th annual commemoration of the genocide – note that there were over one million victims of the genocide, while scholars such as historians Alison Des Forges and Gérard Prunier have argued that a more accurate figure would be between 500,000 and 800,000 victims. There is a fairly high degree of consensus, however, that the vast majority of the victims were of Tutsi heritage. Kwibuka25, “About”; Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 15; and Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 261.
4. For more on the genocidal rape that occurred during the genocide, see Baines, “Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis”; Degni-Ségui, “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Rwanda”; Nowrojee, *Shattered Lives*; and Taylor, “A Gendered Genocide.”
5. For a solid overview of how Rwandan women have organized and advocated for their interests in Rwanda’s post-genocide period, see Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics*.
6. Burnet, “‘Women have Found Respect’,” 9. It is important to note that while Rwanda’s post-genocide model of governance can be celebrated for its inclusion of women, it is not without criticism. These critics – most notably, anthropologist Jennie Burnet, sociologist Marie Berry and political scientist Susan Thomson – have focused on the extent to which the gains made by Rwandan women genocide survivors have trickled down to the rural majority, arguing the advancement of a few women genocide survivors has done little to improve everyday living conditions for rural women across the nation. See for example, Burnet, “‘Women have Found Respect’”; Berry, “Barriers to Women’s Progress After Atrocity”; Berry, “‘There is No Hope to Get a Better Life’”; and Thomson, “Rwanda.”
7. See James Munyaneza, “Women Take 64% of Seats in Parliament.” *The New Times*, 18 September 2013.
8. Brown, *Gender and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 33.
9. Kanziga is also commonly referenced as Agathe Habyarimana. Here, we have chosen to use her maiden name to avoid confusion with her husband, who is also frequently discussed as bearing primary responsibility for orchestrating the genocide.
10. See for example, Kagame, *Un abrégé de l’ethno-histoire du Rwanda*; Schumacher, *Ruanda*; and Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*. Regarding the Abanyiginya clan, Rwandan oral traditions present this clan as semi-divine in origin, as the descendants of the *Ibimanuka* – the children of Nkuba, the king of heaven, who allegedly came to earth to give rise to the Rwandan kingdom. See, for example, Mukarutabana, “Myth of Kigwa.”

11. Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*, 31.
12. *Ibid.*, 27.
13. *Ibid.*, 32.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 73.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Codere, *The Biography of An African Society, Rwanda 1900-1960*, 247.
18. *Ibid.*, 137–8.
19. *Ibid.*, 309.
20. Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 10–11.
21. *Ibid.*, 15–6.
22. Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*, 44.
23. Possession of the drum was an important marker of legitimacy and was sometimes a key element in deciding succession disputes. For a case on neighbouring Ijwi Island, see Newbury, *Kings and Clans*.
24. Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 17.
25. *Ibid.*, 23.
26. *Ibid.*
27. In addition to being the king's beer maker, Giharamagara was also Kanjogera's brother.
28. Vansina collection, Rwabugiri file, H. 46. See also Rwabugiri file, H. 41; and Pagès, *Au Rwanda sur les bords du Lac*. This latter source sets the narrative in Nyamasheke and does not involve Kanjogera.
29. Uwizeza et al., "Sustaining women's gains in Rwanda." For more information regarding the prevalence of this narrative in modern Rwanda, see Jessee and Watkins, "Good Kings, Bloody Tyrants."
30. See for example, Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*; Codere, *The Biography of an African Society*; and Jefremovas, *Brickyards to Graveyards*.
31. Jessee, "The Danger of a Single Story"; and Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*.
32. Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 101–2.
33. Watkins, "Iron Mothers and Warrior Lovers."
34. Kayijuka, "Lebensgeschichte des Grossfürsten Kayijuka und Seiner Ahnen Seit Sultan Yuhi Mazimpaka, König von Ruanda," 103–61.
35. Muhumusa is also occasionally referenced in the region as Muserekande or Nyiragahumusa. For further information see Des Forges, *Defeat is the only bad news*, 269.
36. Finding independent verification for Muhumusa's claims is virtually impossible at this point. She enters the British colonial records, for example, as a rebel leader many years after Rwabugiri's death. However, the timelines during which Rwabugiri was fighting in the present-day northwest of Rwanda and southwest of Uganda, where Muhumusa lived, make her claims at least plausible. Kanjogera had far more powerful familial connections, as well as sympathetic allies as part of the *abiru* (court historians and ritualists), who could help her delegitimize Muhumusa. *Abagabekazi* (pl. *umugabekazi*) had manipulated *abiru* before, including women from Kanjogera's own lineage. For examples, see Watkins, "Iron Mothers and Warrior Lovers," especially Chapter 1.
37. Vansina collection, Rwabugiri file, T. 42.
38. For more on Nyabingi, see Freedman, "Ritual and History"; and Feierman, "Healing as Social Criticism."
39. For more on how Belgian colonization weakened the monarchy, see Carney, *Rwanda Before the Genocide*, 121 and Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 235–36.
40. Uwizeza et al., "Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda," 12.
41. See, for example, Vansina collection, Rutarindwa, Musinga, and Rudahigwa file, H. 7; H. 13; H. 14; H. 18(b); H. 20(a); H. 43; T. 1; T. 3; T. 4; T. 5; T. 13.
42. See, for example, Kagame, *Un abrégé de l'ethno-histoire du Rwanda, Vol. 2*. See also Pagès, *Un Royaume hamite au centre de l'Afrique*; and Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*.
43. Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*.

44. In the few cases where elite women transgressed too far from the norm, such as when Umugabekazi Nyiramongi outlived her son and refused to commit suicide in order for the burial rituals to be properly conducted, or when Rwabugiri's mother, Murorunkwere, took a lover and was rumoured to be pregnant with his child, they were killed. See Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*, and Watkins, "Iron Mothers and Warrior Lovers." One of the few cases in which a woman assumed a traditionally masculine role and was not sanctioned was when the royal servant Nyiramuhanda was appointed to the abiru during Umugabekazi Nyiratunga's regency (circa 1801-1820). This only happened because she sacrificed her infant son and personal safety to save the infant king Gahindiro's life. See Vansina collection, H. 6.
45. A notable exception is the case of Ahebi Ugbabe in Nigeria. See Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*. Yet even this exception proves the rule: Ahebi was unmarried and considered a man by the variable gender standards of Igbo culture, and spoke local languages and English, making her a valuable asset for the British. Though she enjoyed a short time in power, she did not establish any lasting authority, going so far as to perform her own burial rites because she did not trust that the male elders in her community would do them appropriate to her status as a man. Ahebi's ascent was not replicated in her own society, nor any others under British rule. Her story was almost completely ignored by scholars (though not forgotten in Enugu-Eke), and was only revived through Achebe's oral history research. For more on European colonizers tendency to undermine powerful African women, see Feierman, "Healing as Social Criticism."
46. Carney, *Rwanda Before the Genocide*.
47. See, for example, Vokes, *Ghosts of Kanungu*, 18-9.
48. Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 86; and Guichaoua archive, "Box 6: Extended family of Juvénal Habyarimana and his wife, Agathe Kanziga," 1. Historian David Newbury notes that the *abahinza* were often regarded locally as *abami* in their own right. Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 391.
49. Interestingly, Veridiyana (also occasionally spelled Berediyana) Mukagatare, First Lady to President Grégoire Kayibanda (1962-1973), has received little attention from historians and related experts. In the one account we have been able to locate that considers her life, though written in 2014, she is celebrated as "a very well-behaved woman" who was "down-to-earth beyond imagination." Indeed, the account's author claims that her absence from the historiography can be attributed to her desire to focus on her agricultural projects and good deeds in the community, and attributes her death in 1974 to be the direct outcome of her husband's removal from power the previous year and subsequent death sentence. Bwiza, "Ngo ukurusha umugore Aba akurusha urugo" (The one who has a better wife has a better household).
50. Habyarimana had gained some national recognition for his service as Army Chief of Staff prior to claiming the presidency on 5 July 1973. Far from bloodless, the coup culminated in the assassinations of 56 dignitaries of the Kayibanda regime by Habyarimana's Security Chief, Théoneste Lizinde, as well as the house arrest and gradual murder – allegedly by starvation – of his predecessor. Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 13; and Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 82.
51. Watkins, "Iron Mothers and Warrior Lovers," 215.
52. Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 51; and, Verwimp, *Peasants in Power*, 100.
53. Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 52.
54. Throughout the authors' oral historical and ethnographic fieldwork in Rwanda, Kanziga was commonly referenced as Kanjogera in off-the record conversations. As further evidence of this trend, see the personal memoir of Rwanda's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, as well as journalistic and historical accounts by Linda Melvern and Susan Thomson, respectively. Mushikiwabo and Kramer, *Rwanda Means the Universe*, 228; Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, 41-2; and Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power*, 73.
55. Guichaoua cautions scholars against reading Kanziga and her family as dominating the Habyarimana regime, though he likewise recognizes that their authority within his government should not be underestimated. Regarding Kanziga's "government of women," he found

- no evidence to suggest she ever “personally interceded with any prefect or minister for any particular favour,” though people would approach her with requests that she intervene by speaking on their behalf with her husband. Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide*, 51–2.
56. The term *akazu* has been used throughout Rwandan history in reference to the intimate political networks that have worked surreptitiously with the court or the presidency to pursue particular political or ideological agendas, and especially those networks associated with *abagabekazi*. However, in the context of the Habyarimana regime, the *akazu* is explicitly associated with Kanziga and her extended family and is often referenced as the main ideological force behind the 1994 genocide.
  57. Gourevitch, *We wish to Inform you*, 80–1.
  58. These efforts are especially notable given the close familial ties between many core members of the RPF’s leadership and the monarchical and matrilineal clans. Paul Kagame, for instance, is directly descended from one of Kanjogera’s brothers. This helps to demonstrate that the tensions around Kanjogera’s character are not merely a matter of ethnicity or Hutu hatred of the monarchy.
  59. Gitera, “Appeal to the Conscience of the Hutu.”
  60. Nahimana was ultimately convicted and sentenced to life in prison by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) for inciting genocide. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, “The Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana.”
  61. See United Nations Trusteeship Council, “United Nations visiting mission to trust territories in east Africa, 1960,” no. 120, 14; and Linden and Linden, *Church and Revolution in Rwanda*, 262.
  62. The term *génocidaires* is distinctly Rwandan and refers to those individuals who committed atrocities during the 1994 genocide. Jessee, “Rwandan Women No More.”
  63. *Ibid.*
  64. Bizimungu, a moderate Hutu whose affiliation with the RPF dates back to 1990, stepped down as President amid allegations of corruption, but claims he was forced out of office by Kagame after he objected to the RPF’s unwarranted crackdown on political dissidents. He subsequently attempted to launch his own political party – *Ubuyanja* (the Party for Democracy and Renewal) – which was then banned by the RPF on the grounds that it promoted ethnic divisions. As a result, Bizimungu was placed under house arrest between 2002 and 2007, before being pardoned by President Kagame. See *BBC News*. “From President to Prison.” 7 June 2004. In 2015, following a petition that allegedly acquired the support of over 60% of voters, Rwanda’s parliament passed a constitutional amendment that enabled Kagame to run for a third consecutive term in 2017. See *Yahoo News*. “Rwanda Parliament Votes to Allow Kagame Third Term.” 29 October 2015. Kagame won the 2017 presidential elections having received 98.8% of the popular vote, and can now potentially hold office until 2034. Jason Burke. “Paul Kagame Re-elected President with 99% of Vote in Rwanda Election.” *The Guardian*, 5 August 2017.
  65. *News of Rwanda*. “President Paul Kagame and Jeannette Kagame – The First Couple of Rwanda.” 14 December 2014.
  66. Since 2000, several long-term members of the RPF and Kagame’s inner circle have been forced into exile amid allegations of corruption, promoting genocide ideology, and attempting to stabilize the nation, among other crimes. In several instances, these individuals have gone on to become outspoken critics of the Kagame regime. Most notably, Rwanda’s former Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Army, Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, and the recently assassinated former head of Rwandan intelligence, Patrick Karegeya, helped establish the Rwanda National Congress (RNC), which represents Rwanda’s political opposition in exile. Among its various goals, the RNC seeks to draw international attention to the authoritarian nature of the Kagame regime and the negative impact it is having on genuine reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda. For more information, see Nyamwasa et al., “Rwanda Briefing.”
  67. Anonymous, “Letter from the North.”
  68. *Ibid.*

69. Burnet, *Genocide Lives in us*, 44.
70. Gasasira, “How Rwanda’s First Lady Jeannette Kagame’s Requested her Husband to Mercilessly Behead Major John Sengati.”
71. Watkins, “Tomorrow She Will Reign.”
72. See, for example, Sawyer, “Dwindling Options for Opposition Candidates in Rwanda”; and US Department of State, “Rwanda 2017 Human Rights Report.”
73. Berry and Bouka, “Limitations of Rights-Based Approaches to Women’s Political Empowerment.”
74. See Ignatius Ssuuna. “Rwanda Unveils Gender-balanced Cabinet with 50 Percent Women.” *The Independent*, 19 October 2018.
75. Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, 95.
76. Berry and Bouka, “Limitations of Rights-Based Approaches to Women’s Political Empowerment.”
77. Beard, *Women and Power*, 84.
78. Castor, *She-Wolves*, 450.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## ORCID

Erin Jessee  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8132-7966>

## Bibliography

- Achebe, Nwando. *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.
- Anonymous. “Letter from the North: Jeannette Kagame the Queen from Hell.” September 27, 2013.
- Baines, Erin. “Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis.” *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003): 479–493.
- Beard, Mary. *Women and Power*. London: Liveright, 2017.
- Berry, Marie. “Barriers to Women’s Progress After Atrocity: Evidence from Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina.” *Gender & Society* 31, no. 6 (2017): 830–853.
- Berry, Marie. “‘There is No Hope to Get a Better Life’: How Rwanda’s Remarkable Two-Decade March from Genocide has Left Women Behind.” *Foreign Policy*, April 7, 2014.
- Berry, Marie., and Yolande Bouka. “Limitations of Rights-Based Approaches to Women’s Political Empowerment: Narratives from Kenya and Rwanda.” Conference paper, African Studies Association, 2017.
- Brown, Sara. *Gender and the Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Rescuers and Perpetrators*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Burnet, Jennie. “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” *African Affairs* 107, no. 428 (2008): 361–386.
- Burnet, Jennie. *Genocide Lives in Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.
- Burnet, Jennie. “Women Have Found Respect: Gender Quotas, Symbolic Representation, and Female Empowerment in Rwanda.” *Politics & Gender* 7, no. 3 (2011): 303–334.
- Bwiza, M. “Ngo Ukurusha Umugore Aba Akurusha Urugo: Inama y’inganzo Ntaganzwa Yasante Gicanda na Veredyiana Buri Wese ari Ikibasumba [The One who has a Better Wife has a Better Household].” *Shikama: Uharanire ko ukuri Gusimbura Ikinyoma* (blog), 2014, translated by Sylvere Mwizerwa and Erin Jessee.

- Carney, J. J. *Rwanda Before the Genocide: Catholic Politics and Ethnic Discourse in the Late Colonial Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Castor, Helen. *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2012.
- Codere, Helen. *The Biography of an African Society: Rwanda, 1900–1960*. Tervuren: Royal Museum for Central Africa, 1973.
- Degni-Ségué, René. “Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Rwanda.” United Nations Commission on Human Rights, January 29, 1996.
- Des Forges, Alison. *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda Under Musinga, 1896–1931*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
- Des Forges, Alison. *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999.
- Feierman, S. “Healing as Social Criticism in the Time of Colonial Conquest.” *African Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995): 73–88.
- Freedman, Jim. “Ritual and History: The Case of Nyabingi.” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 14 (1974): 170–180.
- Gasasira. “How Rwanda’s First Lady Jeannette Kagame’s Requested her Husband to Mercilessly Behead Major John Sengati.” *Umuwugizi: The Voice of Rwanda* (n.d).
- Gitera, Joseph. “Appeal to the Conscience of the Hutu.” *Kangura*, December 6, 1990, 21–29.
- Gourevitch, P. *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow we Will be Killed with our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Picador, 1998.
- Guichaoua, André. “Box 6: The family of Juvénal Habyarimana and his wife, Agathe Kanziga.”
- Guichaoua, Archive. *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015.
- ICTR. “The Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, Hassan Ngeze: Judgement and Sentence.” ICTR-99-52-T, December 3, 2003.
- Jan Vansina Collection. “Ibitékerezo: Historical Narratives from Rwanda: A Collection of Texts and Translations, 1957–1961.” Chicago: CRL-CAMP Dept. of Photoduplication, University of Chicago Library, 1973.
- Jefremovas, Villia. *Brickyards to Graveyards: From Production to Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: SUNY Press, 2012.
- Jessee, Erin. “The Danger of a Single Story: Iconic Stories in the Aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.” *Memory Studies* 10, no. 2 (2017): 144–163.
- Jessee, Erin. *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Jessee, Erin. “Rwandan Women No More: Female *Génocidaires* in the Aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.” *Conflict & Society* 3 (2015): 60–80.
- Jessee, Erin., and Sarah Watkins. “Good Kings, Bloody Tyrants, and Everything in Between: Representations of the Monarchy in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” *History in Africa* 41 (2014): 35–62.
- Kagame, Alexis. *Un Abrégé de l’ethno-histoire du Rwanda*. Butare: Éditions Universitaires du Rwanda, 1972.
- Kayijuka. “*Lebensgeschichte des Grossfürsten Kayijuka und Seiner Ahnen Seit Sultan Yuhi Mazimpaka, König von Ruanda*.” *Mitteilungen der Ausland-Hochschule an der Universität Berlin* 41 (1938): 103–161.
- Kwibuka25. “About.” 2019.
- Linden, Ian, and Jane Linden. *Church and Revolution in Rwanda*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Mageza-Barthel, Rirhandu. *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2015.
- Melvorn, Linda. *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide*. London: Zed Books, 2000.
- Mukarutabana, Rose-Marie. “Myth of Kigwa.” <http://www.dlblanc.com/Gakondo/en/Myths/Kigwa.php> (archived).

- Mushikiwabo, Louise, and Jack Kramer. *Rwanda Means the Universe: A Native's Memoire of Blood and Bloodlines*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Nahimana, Ferdinand. "Les Bami ou Roitelets Hutu du Corridor Nyaborongo-Mukungwa Avec ses Régions Limitrophes." *Etudes Rwandaises Numéro Spéciale* 12 (1979): 1–25.
- Newbury, David S. *Kings and Clans: Ijwi Island and the Lake Kivu Rift, 1780–1840*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Nowrojee, Binaifer. *Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence During the Rwandan Genocide and Its Aftermath*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996.
- Nyamwasa, Kayumba, Theogene Rudasingwa, Patrick Karegeya, and Gerald Gahima. "Rwanda Briefing." August 2010.
- Pagès, G. *Au Rwanda sur les Bords du Lac Kivu (Congo Belge): Un Royaume Hamite au Centre de L'Afrique*. Bruxelles: G. van Campenhout, 1933.
- Prunier, Gérard. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. London: Hurst & Company, 2005.
- Republic of Rwanda. "Report of the Investigation into the Causes and Circumstances of and Responsibility for the Attack of 06.04.1994 Against the Falcon 50 Rwandan Presidential Aeroplane." Kigali: Republic of Rwanda, 2010.
- Sawyer, Ida. "Dwindling Options for Opposition Candidates in Rwanda: New Regulation Restricts Social Media." *Human Rights Watch*, June 2, 2017.
- Schumacher, Peter. *Ruanda*. Freiburg: Institut-Anthropos, 1958.
- Straus, Scott. "The Limits of a Genocide Lens: Violence Against Rwandans in the 1990s." *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 4 (2019): 504–524.
- Taylor, Christopher. "A Gendered Genocide: Tutsi Women and Hutu Extremists in the 1994 Rwanda Genocide." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 22, no. 1 (1999): 42–54.
- Thomson, Susan. "Rwanda: Visible Progress yet Power is Still a Male Preserve." *Chatham House: The World Today*, April 1, 2015.
- Thomson, Susan. *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013.
- Trédovic, Marc, and Nathalie Poux. *Rapport D'expertise: Destruction en vol du Falcon 50*. Paris: Cour D'appel de Paris Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris, 2012.
- UN Trusteeship Council. "United Nations Visiting Mission to Trust Territories in East Africa." United Nations Report, New York, 1960.
- US Department of State. "Rwanda 2017 Human Rights Report." 2017.
- Uwineza, Peace, Elizabeth Pearson, and Elizabeth Powley. "Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and Post-genocide Politics." February 6, 2010.
- Vansina, Jan. *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004.
- Verwimp, Philip. *Peasants in Power: The Political Economy of Development and Genocide in Rwanda*. New York: Springer, 2013.
- Vokes, Richard. *Ghosts of Kanungu: Fertility, Secrecy, and Exchange in the Great Lakes of East Africa*. Suffolk: James Currey, 2013.
- Watkins, Sarah E. "'Tomorrow She Will Reign': Intimate Power and the Making of a Queen Mother in Rwanda, c.1800–1863." *Gender & History* 29, no. 1 (2017): 124–140.
- Watkins, Sarah E. "Iron Mothers and Warrior Lovers: Intimacy, Power, and the State in the Nyiginya Kingdom, 1796–1913." PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014.