

## The Experiences of Rwandan History Teachers in Teaching the Genocide against the Tutsi as a Controversial Issue

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### Abstract

In 1994, around 1 million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This article investigates empirically how the genocide as embedded in the history curriculum is taught in Rwandan secondary schools. Based on history teachers' drawings, photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews obtained from 11 secondary schools history teachers from across Rwanda we analysed teachers' experiences in tackling the genocide as a controversial issue. The participating history teachers generally acted as determined advocates for the intended curriculum while exhibiting commitment to the idea of 'never again'. They also acted as avoiders and containers of controversial issues. This resulted in a general absence of risk-taking in their teaching or even pursuing a strong position against genocide denial. Such a positioning is embedded in the everyday realities of the post-genocide Rwandan context and teachers' familiarity with the genocide and its aftermath. Therefore, for the teachers, teaching about the genocide was not an abstract intellectual exercise but an engagement with the lived reality of their environment; therefore when teaching the genocide, they opted to comply with official expectations in terms of aims and content. As a result, history teachers tended to shun the prescribed learner-centred pedagogies in favour of safer and more familiar teacher-centred ones. Accordingly the genocide was taught in an uncontroversial manner and it was left to learners to raise contentious issues. The teachers' common reaction to this was avoidance and containment, and in so doing they suppressed the teaching of issues they considered a threat to their own aims and content. In the process, elements of resisting and undermining were prevalent. In all of this the history teachers were not only practising forms of 'self-care' but also claimed that they were protecting learners and Rwandan society.

### Keywords

Genocide - controversial issues - self-care - teacher centred pedagogies

## Introduction and background

The Genocide against the Tutsi is one of the most researched topics in the history of Rwanda, and many authors identify historical elements among the primary causes of the genocide. As a result, history education in Rwanda has attracted close scrutiny. A case in point is the argument that pre-genocide textbooks and the teaching of the period between 1962 and 1994 contributed to the conditions that enabled the 1994 genocide.<sup>1</sup> Despite such claims, little research has been conducted into the ways in which the genocide is taught as part of the history curriculum in Rwandan schools. In this article we analyse how Rwandan secondary school history teachers deal with this controversial issue, including the name of the genocide, its victims and perpetrators, the number of victims and the causes of the atrocity.<sup>2</sup>

The above teaching occurs within the context of a contemporary living memory of a genocide that took place in broad daylight, during which neighbours slaughtered neighbours,<sup>3</sup> while at the same time neighbours also tried to save neighbours.<sup>4</sup> This occurred despite the fact that Rwandans shared religious affiliations, culture and values, inhabited the same hills and inter-married across “ethnic” lines. In a nutshell, Rwandans suffered deeply from the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, an event that still elicits a wide range of explanations and generates considerable contestation.<sup>5</sup>

This article was primarily motivated by the fact that history education was considered one of the causes of the genocide.<sup>6</sup> As a result, to avoid the recurrence of such events, after the genocide there was a cooling down in the teaching of Rwanda’s history.<sup>7</sup> As time passed, however, given the interest in teaching the genocide, a number of conferences recommended that the European example of Holocaust education be followed as a template.<sup>8</sup> The latter allows learners to identify themselves with the wider European context and to understand the roots of current challenges. In a similar manner it is argued that teaching about the genocide could help to reconcile Rwandans by creating an understanding of its causes, and in so doing, shape a new way of living.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the post-genocide resurgence of divisive ideology in Rwandan secondary schools also pointed to the likelihood that history teaching could still contribute to disunity.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, both the revised history curricula for Ordinary Level (13-16 years) and Advanced Level (16-19 years) of 2008 and 2010 aimed at promoting mutual understanding, harmonious living without ethnic or religious distinction or other forms of discrimination that have the potential to tear Rwandan society apart. Thus, the promotion of a culture of peace among learners through the practice of a critical pedagogy had been recommended as a priority for history teaching in the post-genocide period. But this vision is in itself confronted by questions such as what version of history should be taught, what teaching methods should be used, and how textbooks should be written to present events impartially.<sup>11</sup>

Answers to some of these questions started to emerge after the history curricula and chosen pedagogy were introduced. For example, some teachers avoided topics they felt were controversial or difficult to teach due to the recent history of genocide in Rwanda.<sup>12</sup> Such educational decisions can be understood in light of the fact that genocide is often deemed so horrific and beyond rational understanding that it can be difficult to teach.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, history teachers have different attitudes when tackling genocide or other controversial issues that are related to their own geopolitical settings.<sup>14</sup> It is thus of paramount importance to understand how the Genocide against the Tutsi is taught since it was included in the history curriculum for secondary schools in Rwanda. This article will therefore engage with the following research questions: i) What are the

experiences of Rwandan secondary school history teachers in teaching the Genocide against the Tutsi as a controversial issue? ii) What factors explain teachers' experiences in this regard?

Answers to these questions were sought by employing drawings, photo-elicitation and semi-structured interviews to generate the necessary data from 11 Rwandan history teachers from across the country. In analysing the data we drew on the 'controversial issues' theory propounded by Stradling and others as explained in the literature review.<sup>15</sup>

In our conclusion we argue that the experiences of teaching the genocide as a controversial issue meant that history teachers in part acted as determined advocates for the intended curriculum while exhibiting a commitment to the idea of 'never again'. At the same time they also acted as avoiders and containers of controversial issues. In so doing, the teachers tried to comply with official expectations in terms of teaching the genocide while also practising 'self-care' in the post-genocide environment. This meant a general absence of risk-taking in their teaching or even pursuing a strong position against genocide denial. Such a positioning is rooted in the reality of the post-genocide Rwandan context and the first-hand familiarities of the teachers with the genocide and its aftermath. Therefore, for the teachers who participated in this study, teaching about the genocide was not an abstract theoretical exercise but a daily engagement with lived experiences; in this context they tended to shun the prescribed learner-centred critical pedagogies in favour of more familiar and safer teacher-centred ones. Consequently the genocide was taught in an uncontroversial manner and it was left to learners to raise contentious issues. The teachers invariably reacted to this by clamping down in a teacher-centred manner on anything they viewed as a threat to the aims and content they were pursuing in teaching the genocide. Therefore teachers preserved the educational status quo through elements of resisting and undermining, albeit not in an overtly political manner.

### **Literature review and theoretical framework**

In Rwanda, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) has recommended the use of a participatory approach in the history classroom.<sup>16</sup> The NCDC's view was that a democratic approach would foster a climate of tolerance, acceptance and respect because it would enable safer and more dynamic learning environments in which learners would be empowered to think critically about a range of issues including the genocide.<sup>17</sup> Consequently traditional teacher-centred approaches became frowned upon and conceptualised as one-sided transmission of knowledge not suitable for teaching controversial issues.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of teaching controversial issues emerged in the 1970s in the United Kingdom and the United States of America as well as in the 1990s in France with its *Questions vives*.<sup>19</sup> In the process, a rich literature arose that advocated the teaching of controversial topics in schools.<sup>20</sup> However, it was only with the introduction of citizenship education in the late 1990s that the teaching of controversial issues truly became an educational focus.<sup>21</sup> This focus connected to policy ideas that promoted critical approaches to teaching and learning in which the teacher acts as a facilitator while learners take a more self-directed participatory approach to learning.<sup>22</sup>

Based on the reviewed literature there is no one accepted conceptualisation of what a controversial issue is. There is agreement, however, that controversy arises when the ideas, information, views, theories, culture, or opinions of an individual or group, are incompatible with those of others. This can lead to anger, views that are overly based on emotion, or bias.<sup>23</sup> In a curriculum a topic may be controversial due the concerns and

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views of parents and the community, the pedagogy employed, teachers' views and the fact that it was studied at all.<sup>24</sup> In addition, controversy does not necessarily have a permanent character because what is viewed as acceptable by one individual or community might be considered controversial by another, and this may change over time. Moreover, contemporary controversial topics are more difficult to tackle in the education process than historical topics.<sup>25</sup>

The teaching of controversial issues is both process- and product-based. In addition to learning about theories, content and concepts, and gaining understanding and more accurate generalisations, learners also acquire transferable skills they can use outside the school environment such as collecting and evaluating evidence, presenting findings, applying critical questions to any kind of source and becoming aware of a diversity of perspectives.<sup>26</sup> In spite of the educational advantages of teaching controversial issues, teachers encounter challenges, to which they react in various ways, which have been theorised most prominently by Stradling.<sup>27</sup> Stradling proposes the following categorisation of approaches when teaching controversial issues: the balanced approach, procedural neutrality, stated commitment and indoctrination.

The balanced approach implies that the teacher should offer learners a range of alternative pieces of evidence and that different points of view on each issue should ideally be raised in each lesson.<sup>28</sup> This approach would also allow learners an educational entry point as they can share knowledge from the community and the media while being supported by the teacher.<sup>29</sup> Procedural neutrality, also conceptualised as neutral impartiality,<sup>30</sup> involves adopting a strategy in which the teacher's role is that of an impartial chairperson. The teacher would allow all learners to explain their ideas, provide evidence when needed, and in theory at least, avoid the assertion of his or her own allegiances to the issue.<sup>31</sup> In stark contrast to the balanced approach and to procedural neutrality stands the stated commitment approach. This approach is not far removed from overt teacher-centredness,<sup>32</sup> exclusive partiality,<sup>33</sup> or being a determined advocate,<sup>34</sup> or indoctrinator<sup>35</sup> which usually entails foregrounding some or other official history in an exclusive manner. This approach emanates from teachers' rejection of the possibility of maintaining an impartial line and taking a clear and unambiguous position on the controversy. The major potential problem in teaching controversial issues by means of stated commitment is the risk of indoctrination or one-sidedness. The latter is usually associated with attempts to teach something contrary or in the absence of any evidence at all.<sup>36</sup> The stated commitment approach can be successful if it serves to challenge learners to think, to clarify their own opinion, to be aware of the contradictions in their thinking and to sort out fact from value-judgment.<sup>37</sup> However, this implies that learners will be allowed to challenge the powerful position that teachers hold by being allowed to challenge their bias.

Building on Stradling's theory, various scholars have added further analytical categories. An important category of response to controversy in the classroom is avoidance; teachers who are so-called avoiders completely exclude topics deemed controversial from their teaching.<sup>38</sup> Their avoidance may be attributed to a lack of teaching skills, personal beliefs, societal pressure and other reasons. However, some are well intentioned, arguing either that pupils lack the maturity to grasp controversial issues, or that teachers follow the learners' wish of avoiding controversial issues because of the feared consequences of learning about it.<sup>39</sup> Related to avoidance as an approach is the containment approach, whereby teachers choose topics that are similar but historically far from home.<sup>40</sup> For instance, instead of dealing directly with the Genocide against the Tutsi, a teacher in Rwanda might tackle a different genocide such as the Holocaust. Finally, peace-making as a teaching approach, whereby teachers ease the tensions related to controversial issues by touting forgiveness, acceptance of the past and new found liberty and unity, has been added to the initial Stradling theorisation.<sup>41</sup>

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Some post-conflict societies such as Northern Ireland or South Africa deal with controversial issues in their schools. The former has suffered long-term violence during which people were killed by paramilitary groups and the British Army for various historical reasons including conflictual religious and national identities and colonial occupation. The partition of Ireland was considered a solution but it only partly solved the problem. Efforts are made to engage with the country's difficult past in history classes by means of evidence-based teaching. Research indicates that, despite the emotional challenges teachers face, they try to teach different perspectives by engaging with contemporary controversial issues.<sup>42</sup> In the case of South Africa, the racist policies of the colonial and apartheid past are the major controversial issues faced. In the post-apartheid context an effort is made in the curriculum to promote a culture of human rights and democracy by critically studying the past while promoting nation-building. However, in South Africa evidence exists that teachers lack the necessary skills to deal with controversial issues such as apartheid.<sup>43</sup> Although not without problems, Northern Ireland and South Africa have mostly embraced the teaching of controversial issues in history. Unlike Rwanda, though, neither of these countries has experienced genocide.

The literature on the teaching of genocide in Rwanda is extremely limited. Commentators who have researched this phenomenon theoretically have explored educational problems faced by teachers without specifically foregrounding the genocide.<sup>44</sup> However, learners' views and questions during public lectures held in the Southern Province of Rwanda revealed that they long for greater knowledge on the topic.<sup>45</sup> Research has also shown that the participatory teaching approaches advocated by the 2008 and 2010 history curricula presented a series of post-genocide challenges. These included the language of instruction; available teaching time; crowded classrooms and the scarcity of appropriate educational resources.<sup>46</sup>

### **Research methodology**

We adopt a qualitative approach in this paper. For Merriam, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experience, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experience".<sup>47</sup> Thus, "qualitative researchers want to know what the participants in a study are thinking and why they think the way they do".<sup>48</sup> The purpose of qualitative research is thus to promote greater understanding of, not just the way things are, but also why they are the way they are.<sup>49</sup> In this study, we adopt an interpretivist paradigm,<sup>50</sup> within which reality is a social construction and can hence be ambiguous and contradictory and not adhere to an agreed-upon truth.<sup>51</sup> In light of this, it must be pointed out that the aim of the research is to understand history teachers' experiences of teaching the genocide as a controversial issue, rather than to recommend specific best practice.

In qualitative research there are no clear rules regarding the necessary sample size. The sample size in this paper was informed by 'fitness for purpose'<sup>52</sup> because we emphasised the uniqueness, and idiographic and exclusive distinctiveness of the phenomenon under study. As such the research participants represent only themselves.<sup>53</sup> Consequently participants possessed at least one of the following characteristics: secondary school history teachers including a trained historians; a non-trained historian; a teacher from a school that is well-equipped with educational resources; a teacher from a school with poor educational resources; and a teacher who is a genocide survivor. These teachers were selected from 11 secondary schools from Kigali City and from outside of Kigali. The choice of categories was motivated by a desire for 'thick' research data on teaching experiences related to the genocide, from a wide range of teachers with different backgrounds and from different geographical settings in Rwanda.



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Due to the controversial nature of the topic being researched, the data-generating methods used included drawings, photo elicitation, semi-structured individual interviews, and asking participants to write short statements. Holm points out that an image is not neutral and images are produced with specific intentions in mind.<sup>54</sup> Consequently the history teachers were asked to create a drawing using pen or pencil depicting their teaching experiences of the genocide. They were given ten minutes to complete their drawings. The most important data for this research was the metaphoric meaning assigned to the depiction of their experiences. One of the positive aspects related to the use of visual methods is to deflect attention from personal sensitivities by projecting them onto an external object.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, visual images can facilitate discussion on controversial issues and in so doing increase participation in the research process.<sup>56</sup>

In terms of photo elicitation a range of images from the internet that related to the genocide were presented to the participating history teachers during the semi-structured individual interviews. The photos helped teachers to talk about teaching methods, content and challenges they experienced in teaching the genocide. Our intention was to allow them to engage with the selected photos to elicit teaching experiences that would be difficult to unearth through other traditional methods of data generation.<sup>57</sup>

The drawings, as well as the images selected for the photo elicitation part of the research, served as a starting point for the semi-structured individual interviews.<sup>58</sup> First, the drawings were discussed, followed by a conversation about the photos selected during the photo elicitation exercise. During the interviews the participants were carefully probed for clarification on how their drawings, as well as the selected photos, spoke to their experiences of teaching the genocide. The interviews were thus used to construct detailed accounts of specific educational experiences related to teaching about the Genocide against the Tutsi. Finally, participants were asked to produce a short written statement on experiences that related to the teaching of the genocide as a controversial issue but that were not touched on by the research methods employed. The aim was for teachers to draw on their memories outside of their formal participation in the research process.<sup>59</sup> In so doing, they were empowered, through the act of writing, to maximize the depth of description of experiences they had about teaching the Genocide.

The data from the drawings, photo elicitation, semi-structured individual interviews, and the writing of a short statement were analysed by means of open coding.<sup>60</sup> The themes that emerged after saturation were used to construct the experiences of the Rwandan teachers on teaching the Genocide against the Tutsi as a controversial issue. Emphasis was placed on the teaching aims, historical content and the teaching methods and approaches used.<sup>61</sup>

## **Presentation of the research results**

### ***Teachers' choice of aims and content in their experiences of teaching the genocide***

Educational aims are key to any education process. Some of the general aims embedded in the 2008 and 2010 history curricula relate to the teaching of the Genocide against the Tutsi. These include the right to live in harmony, free from any discrimination, the promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance, reconciliation and a love for Rwanda. The curricula also aim at having teachers develop learners' critical thinking skills, and more specifically, learners have to be able to define the term Genocide and differentiate it from inter-ethnic massacres. Learners, with the aid of their teachers, also have to be able to establish the role of national and international institutions in the Genocide. They must also be able to expound on the political, economic and

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socio-cultural consequences of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Finally, learners must be able to identify the post-genocide achievements of the contemporary government, termed the ‘Government of National Unity’ in the history programme for Advanced secondary school level.<sup>62</sup> Collectively the aims of the curricula can be categorised as socio-political, moral and academic in nature. Based on the intended curriculum as outlined, history teachers have had to make content and pedagogical choices.

The major socio-political aim experienced by the teachers in teaching the genocide concerned prevention. This was articulated as follows by a history teacher participating in the study:

My main idea is to make learners understand the importance of ‘never again’ so that learners not only be sensitised but can also advise their parents, brothers, sisters and neighbours about the effects of divisive ideology which was at the origin of the tragedy by teaching ethnicity.<sup>63</sup>

Even though this aim is not specifically stated in the curricula, the sentiment it entails speaks to the importance attached by the teachers to teaching about living in peace and harmony. In foregrounding the aim of ‘never again’, a fixed position or stated commitment was adopted by many of the research participants. In educational contexts in which ‘never again’ dominated, learners were rarely allowed to talk about the genocide in a manner that resonated with the recommended critical pedagogy. The educational actions of the teachers were the opposite of critical pedagogy, and their aim was to convince learners about the importance of genocide prevention regardless of whether the actual historical event was understood. The determination to contribute to genocide prevention in this manner resembled a form of low-level indoctrination for the sake of peace-making, in a manner that was free of any critical pedagogical engagement.

In addition to prevention, the idea of unity emerged as an important socio-political aim. In line with this, a trained history teacher drew persons hand in hand to depict the importance of collaboration after past atrocities. An untrained history teacher warned learners “against anyone who could divide them”.<sup>64</sup> To achieve unity, history learners were instead encouraged to embrace reconciliation and to pardon each other, and these two concepts were presented as intertwined. Reconciliation as a stated aim was present in the experiences of almost all the history teachers, and a dream-like hope was expressed by one participant, a trained historian, that the goal of reconciling Rwandans will be achieved. The participant drew a person with his hands on the head of a second, kneeling person, and used this drawing to talk about the importance of forgiveness in reconciliation. Such optimism was based on how this teacher perceived learners’ responses both during lessons and extracurricular activities.

In their experience of teaching the genocide, most verbs used to formulate academic aims, such as define, give and identify, do not imply the need for critical pedagogy. Despite this the history teachers participating in this study seemingly wanted learners to acquire a historical sense of the genocide; hence, the causes, sequences and effects of the genocide were analysed during teaching. In the process, teachers attempted to teach learners to comprehend how divisive ideas had festered, grown and manifested in the genocide. Teaching the genocide in this manner also aimed to academically dismiss unofficial histories about the event which, as one trained historian explained, are perceived to be based on vague and limited knowledge. The fact that unofficial histories were experienced by learners was shown by the nature of their questions and this led to teachers’ rejection of unofficial histories. The latter are different from official histories. Official history is conceptualised as “a domain that is approved and produced by the state”.<sup>65</sup> Official history can be known through different official channels such as official speeches and media whereas unofficial history come from the communities,

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is freer and not censored by official bodies. What also emerged from the data was that the Rwandan genocide was not viewed as a unique historical event and the teachers taught it in a comparative manner, referencing other violent events.

Teachers also had moral aims when teaching the genocide. These aims were often personal and not noticeably stated in the history curricula. This was evidenced by the integrative educational approach adopted by two trained history teachers who borrowed ethical ideas from the religion curriculum. For example, learners were told that killing is a sin because all human beings are God's children. A similar view, but based on human rights, was also mooted, namely: "genocide denies others their right to life".<sup>66</sup> One participant teacher explained that certain skills would be needed for learners to become critical and active moral citizens: "I believe that my multidimensional approach to teaching helps learners to develop reading and analytical skills so that they can defend their ideas on genocide publicly" through discussions and debates. Some teachers took such aims further by promoting action. This was done by foregrounding cases in which Hutu risked their lives to save Tutsi during the Genocide. The history teachers who participated in this study made it clear that they generally taught the stated moral aims in the narrowest possible manner to avoid engaging their learners in debate "so that they [learners] don't bring hate-based ideas in the classroom".<sup>67</sup>

Without exception, as the history teachers understood and applied the curriculum, those who participated in this study aimed to educate learners to embrace a culture of peace, tolerance, reconciliation and patriotism. In so doing, the teachers went beyond the curriculum and insisted on the role of genocide prevention and decision making capabilities. However, for the most part they were committed to the stated aims while avoiding perceived controversies. In this regard one of our major findings is that the idea of teaching the genocide to counter denial did not emerge clearly as an aim from the teachers' experiences. This was partly brought about by the avoidance of a critical pedagogy out of fear for what could emerge in classroom debates and partly because no clear aim related to avoidance exists in the curriculum for teachers to pursue. The downside of this was that teachers did not teach learners the main characteristics associated with genocide denial, to ensure that they felt secure in their teaching.

The educational aims in an intended curriculum are underpinned by content. The prescribed content in the 2008 and 2010 Rwandan history curricula engage with a definition of genocide and the causes, sequences and consequences of the event. Other topics highlighted include the "planning and execution of extermination of Tutsi and Hutu that opposed the genocide ideology".<sup>68</sup> As such the 2008 curriculum does not clearly distinguish between Tutsi who were essentially targeted by the genocide and Hutu who opposed the genocide. The curricula also promote a comparative study of genocides. Moreover, the genocide is embedded in the same chapter as the "liberation war" which preceded the genocide and the post-genocide period. In analysing the data, the following themes emerged on how the history teachers engaged with the content on the genocide.

The use of photographs allowed all participating history teachers to talk freely about topics covered in the class. All participant teachers identified the definition of the term 'genocide' and the historical background to the Genocide against the Tutsi as topics that were covered in the class. Teachers show Rwanda's historical background in a romanticised manner and portray Rwandans living harmoniously. This is evidenced by the use of photographs chosen by the participants showing how Rwandans were sharing beer without considering their social groups. However, one trained teacher chose to be silent on more negative and divisive aspects of traditional institutions such as *ubuhake* or historical practices of clientship.



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All participant teachers identified historical events considered to be clear causes of the genocide such as the Belgian divide-and-rule policy which reinforced the demarcation among the three social groups, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa, by means of identity cards and of favouritism of Tutsi which changed to support Hutu political parties on the eve of independence. The teachers did not mention the reasons behind the Belgian reversal of political allegiances.<sup>69</sup>

Some Rwandan political leaders were also classified by a trained history teacher as wrongdoers due to their collaboration with the Belgian colonial administration. In the same vein, the post-colonial leaders were described as reinforcing the division by continuing to use identity cards which helped to identify potential victims on roadblocks during the genocide and to use social identities in quotas policy. This policy served to exclude Tutsi from secondary and tertiary education, as well as in employment. Other culprits of the Rwandan tragedy were also mentioned by two trained history teachers. Without discussing the reasons, one teacher explained the controversial role of churches by pointing out that some church leaders contributed to the spread of the Hamitic myth, against the accepted church doctrine, and in so doing sowed division during the socio-political violence of 1959.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand the church was also portrayed as having contributed to easing suffering in the post-genocide period by helping vulnerable people. The powerful role of the church was emphasised by a trained history teacher who taught in a school run by the Catholic Church. He expressed fear about talking in a critical manner about the institution for which he worked. Others experienced a different kind of fear. A history teacher trained as a historian revealed that while teaching the genocide he does not use all available facts. His self-censorship and related avoidance came from a fear of being accused of propagating divisionism and of being resistant to nationwide change. Consequently he merely taught the content found in the official textbooks which do not raise controversial and sensitive aspects of the history of Rwanda.

Only one trained history teacher covered a topic on the role of propaganda in the “development of ideology of genocide”.<sup>71</sup> He talked about this by referring to the socio-political violence that broke out in 1959 whereby some Tutsi were killed and others compelled to go into exile. This was considered by the history teachers to be one of the remote causes of the genocide to the extent that, after refugee combatants attacked Rwanda, the then government exploited the attacks to expand an ideology of hatred.

What clearly emerged from our research was that the time spent on the teaching the background to the genocide, such as pre-colonial and colonial history, decreased substantially the time available to teach the sequences of extermination during the genocide. The issue of the planning of the genocide and the intent to exterminate a group of people sharing common characteristics, were emphasised to show the difference between the genocide and other forms of atrocity. Much of this was done in a curriculum-compliant manner with emphasis being placed on one social group being harmed or killed due to its ethnicity. Much was also made, as stated in the history curricula, of the consequences and aftermath of the genocide. In teaching this, the teachers focussed on the social, economic, political and psychological consequences of the genocide. Illustrative cases used to explain the consequences and the aftermath included instances of orphans left without any assistance, the destruction of infrastructure – specifically those which sheltered the Tutsi – and the large number of refugees in countries neighbouring Rwanda.

In the process of teaching how the genocide unfolded, a clear sub-theme, not explicitly found in the stated curricula, emerged. Much time was dedicated to stories of “heroes” who risked themselves to save their neighbours during the genocide. One such story used in class to illustrate the phenomenon of how Rwandans saved fellow Rwandans during the genocide involved a man named Gashayija:

As the family of one Gashayija was targeted, he lost some family members including his father, four sisters and their husbands, father's brothers, aunts, uncles and other relatives. His Tutsi neighbour was also killed. At that time he was 13 years old. He escaped because he spent much time in the forests and grass hiding there. How was Gashayija saved? Later on, there was a Hutu family who took him and protected him at their house. He was freed when the [Rwandan Patriotic Front] RPF army stopped the genocide in July 1994 and a new life was possible. When schools re-opened, it was a nice time to continue his studies.<sup>72</sup>

Alongside the above story, one history teacher used other stories to explain that young people also exhibited the courage to save others, and did so in spite of a lack of support from their parents. The teachers' overall aim here was to encourage the learners to behave patriotically regardless of the circumstances.

In accordance with the intended curricula, the achievements of the government in the post-genocide period were also a focus during teaching. Unity and reconciliation were the key sub-themes in this regard and the idea of forgiveness was considered an educational cornerstone. A case in point is the history teacher who used the story of Gashayija to show that those who killed Gashayija's parents recognised that they had done wrong and asked for pardon, which they were granted. Consequently, according to the teacher, Gashayija lives in harmony with the perpetrators because he realised that it is necessary to stop living in a state of permanent conflict with the killers of his parents. Thus this story was used to focus one-dimensionally on moral aspects related to Gashayija's life: forgiveness and the motivation to live peacefully with the killers of his family. Additionally, prominence was given to teaching about initiatives such as Vision 2020, the government's overarching plan for development; strategies such as *Girinka* the English name for which is 'One Cow per Poor Family'; and *Ubudehe*, which aims at uniting and developing Rwandans for a better future.<sup>73</sup>

Our research also revealed that all history teachers who participated in this study were, in light of the content they were teaching, acutely aware that the Genocide against the Tutsi is a deeply controversial and nuanced topic that necessitates deep historical understanding. Hence they commented on that fact that an official version of the genocide exists which is presented to the general population, and unofficial versions exist which originate mainly from perpetrators. Consequently, in their experiences, learners confronted them with different controversies regarding the genocide content they taught.

Migration to Rwanda as a cause of the genocide emerged as one such controversial issue, and some learners could not understand how migration from different regions into what is now Rwanda could be a source of conflict leading to genocide. Likewise, the causes of the genocide identified by the history teachers did not escape the scrutiny of the learners, who proposed alternatives including the idea of 'bad governance', the grounding of the presidential jet and discriminatory policies against the Tutsi. One teacher insisted on the prominence of the latter without engaging with the complexity of the causes of genocide in particular and the idea of multiple causes in history in general. Learners also regularly prompted the idea of a "double genocide" meaning that one genocide occurred against the Tutsi and another against the Hutu. Similarly some learners also argued that in certain history books it is stated that both Hutu and Tutsi died during and after the genocide. In response, the teachers tended to point to the distinction between genocide and other violent killings and that genocide must be confirmed as such by a competent international tribunal – as was done for the Genocide against the Tutsi. In addition they explained to learners that the Hutu killed during the genocide were victims of human rights violations because they were not the main target. It was argued that no planned killings aimed at the Hutu occurred. Another controversial issue brought to the fore by the learners was the number of vic-

tims during the genocide. In this regard an untrained history teacher revealed that debates about statistics were avoided by holding up recent official sources as the final word, such as the one provided by the Ministry of Local Government which states that around one million Tutsi were killed.<sup>74</sup>

In the experiences of the history teachers the learners also found some post-genocide issues controversial, specifically the government funds intended to assist genocide survivors.<sup>75</sup> One learner perspective was that funding should assist all vulnerable people. The majority of participating teachers made a counterargument along the lines of the official justification, namely that most genocide survivors, the victims of a planned crime, did not have families to support them and therefore should receive special support. The participating teachers did not refer to other government funds which support other vulnerable children.

In dealing with the content related to the genocide, most teachers either portrayed a romanticised pre-colonial past or implicitly endorsed the present government by complying with the curriculum or by imagining a better future. As one history teacher explained: “I tell my learners that despite the fact that it happened, there is a need to return to a normal life and to restore relationships between Rwandans as it used to be many years ago.” History teachers worked to achieve such idealistic aims by hewing as closely as possible to the stated content of the intended curriculum. Controversies related to the genocide were raised by learners, almost without exception. The reaction of the participating history teachers was generally similar – avoiding the issues raised by the learners by falling back on a position of stated commitment related to the content that was in line with what the curriculum expected – and in so doing they both avoided and contained any possibly controversies.

### *Teaching methods and teaching resources*

Academic content is usually taught using certain teaching methods and resources. According to the Ordinary Level Curriculum, “the History Program will involve much Active Participation of learners in the teaching and learning process ... The approach to be used in history teaching is to consider the teacher as a coordinator, organiser, experienced adviser and a guide when learners are the first actors ... principal agents in the process of teaching-learning”.<sup>76</sup> For the Advanced Level, the curriculum recommends an emphasis on practical and comparative studies. Activities related to collecting evidence, reading and interpreting maps, photographs, statistics and different documents and films related to the genocide and government policies are encouraged.<sup>77</sup> In the light of this, how did the history teachers participating in this study teach the genocide against the Tutsi, and what resources did they use?

The teachers favoured a teacher-centred approach almost without exception, contravening the curriculum-recommended methodology. This major finding is evidenced by the specific verbs that emerged from the data analysis to describe teaching the genocide: “I give general examples”; “I explain using a lecturing mode”; “I present”; “I also teach” and “I try to give”. Teachers were aware that a teacher-centred approach is considered archaic but were seemingly unwilling to change. Consequently, different explanations were given for the enduring use of this approach. Some history teachers considered this one way of transmitting the “correct” message. One trained historian working as a history teacher returned to this approach after perceiving that attempts to use his learners as a resource had failed: “Most of the time I teach young learners, I don’t extract ideas from them. Even if they talk about ideas about the genocide they refer to what they heard at home or from another place and most of the time opposite to a good history teaching process which aims at rebuilding the country.” By doing this he avoided controversies and contained what he deemed to be problematic.

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According to this teacher, learners' discussions mostly referred to what they heard at home or in public places, which undermined the teacher's core objective by means of the curriculum, namely rebuilding the country. Particularly noteworthy was learners' reluctance not to talk about 'ethnic' identities, Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. One history teacher noticed that learners were trying to judge his ethnic identity from his physical appearance. The teacher consequently had to face testing questions about his past, but was convinced that to reveal information about himself would create problems because the learners would judge his teaching accordingly. Most of the participating history teachers also appeared guarded about revealing too much about themselves and their views in class out of fear for their personal safety and to avoid their ideas being construed as contradictory to the official version of the genocide as represented in the curriculum. Nonetheless this fear was also projected onto the learners and the teachers explained that they knew that the former inhabited a world that competed with the history taught at school. Therefore, for example, after group presentations learners were generally not given the opportunity to critique the views of their peers. Rather, teachers tended to use their power to provide explanations or ask for clarifications. As a result learners were silenced and the skills that they were expected to learn in the curriculum were normally not acquired.

The participating history teachers complained of a lack of appropriate educational resources related to the genocide. Suspicion was likewise expressed regarding the sources that did exist which were viewed as detrimental to attempt to teach in a learner-centred manner. For instance, some films were not used because they were deemed contrary to the aim of rebuilding Rwanda. As the curricula encouraged the use of film but did not specify which films should be used, some teachers revealed how learners were traumatised by the screening of *Rwanda's 100 Day Genocide*, for instance. This film gives a brief historical background of the power relations between social groups before the genocide and portrays the execution and consequences of the genocide by showing images of people killed or wounded and the weapons used to kill. In the light of this, some teachers expressed concern about their lack of skills in dealing with learners who become traumatised. However, in general, films such as *Rescuers*, which portrayed people who saved others during the genocide as heroes, served to aid teaching about decision-making. For the most part, the use of films was restricted to well-resourced schools. An exception was a teacher from a poorly-resourced school who used his computer to screen selected films to learners.

In attempting to achieve the educational aims of the curriculum, the genocide was sometimes taught using resources that were not prescribed by the curriculum. An example was the use of genocide survivor speakers to provide first-hand historical evidence. Survivor speakers were used specifically by both trained and survivor teachers to talk about Tutsi mistreatment or the sequence in which the genocide happened. These teachers argued that learners were more convinced about what happened when listening to such oral history accounts. However, the teachers believed that some testimonies were biased without specifying the substance of this, possibly because they were unsure about these accounts themselves. But the history teachers were reluctant, purportedly for reasons of time, to use multiple speakers in order to compare accounts. The teachers also explained that any perceived bias was countered by being careful when choosing which survivors to invite to present to the learners.

Visits to genocide memorial sites, as specified in the curriculum, were undertaken by experienced and trained history teachers from well-resourced schools in Kigali city and the surrounding areas. These teachers explained that such visits helped them to expose the learners to the tangible facts concerning the genocide, especially in regarding the number of victims. In the view of the teachers, such visits also served to minimise

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the impact of genocide deniers on learners. Most visits to memorial sites were concluded by a short discussion about what learners had learnt at the site. In addition to visits to genocide memorials, one history teacher took his class to visit genocide survivors' families to help them understand their living conditions and the relationships between the survivors and other residents.

Even though teaching about the genocide was dominated by a teacher-centred approach, no teacher used this approach exclusively and all participants tended to incorporate some teaching methods that could be described as a critical approach. This was evidenced by history teachers who used group presentations, discussions and the tasking of learners to collect data at home that related to traditional relationships or clans. This evidence was then shared with classmates in various ways. Question and answer sessions were also frequently employed. One trained history teacher from a school with limited resources used this approach successfully by giving learners a testimony of a young person who was involved in genocide-related killings as a member of a youth party. When the killings started, the young person was convinced that he was defending the country. From this primary source illustrative questions were put to the class:

If it was you who were a young member of the political party what would you have done at the eruption of genocide? Did those involved in the killings do something good? The decisions taken was it done with judgment? What do you think about the decision to plead guilty? Was it a firm decision or a strategy to be released?<sup>78</sup>

Questions such as those in the above quotation gave learners an opportunity to interact and to think about decisions made under difficult conditions. In addition, they would develop critical thinking skills which they would then have to use when presenting orally and in a written format. A few teachers did facilitate the use of primary sources as proposed by the curriculum to facilitate learners to think critically and to develop a range of historical skills, for example, a teacher who provided learners with a picture of an identity card. As an educational activity, learners gathered in groups of five were asked to share what they had observed and then were asked to write a coherent text to consolidate their learning. The teachers' sentiment was that this group work not only helped learners to internalise content but also served an additional aim – that of building unity. Pictures, such as that of the identity card, were deemed useful in teaching about aspects of the genocide in a learner-centred manner. One trained history teacher from a school with limited resources turned the sections on the genocide in the curriculum into a whole school activity. The teacher established an anti-genocide club at school which aimed to promote a culture of peace, tolerance, reconciliation and patriotism amongst learners, and in so doing, educate them on how to be good Rwandan citizens. As part of the activities of the club, learners from the whole school debated genocide-related issues. In the process, non-history learners also gained some understanding of the genocide.

However, the use of historical evidence and teaching methods prescribed by the curriculum was the exception rather than the rule. As a result, any appearance of a critical learner-centred approach was illusory because learners were hardly allowed to ask critical questions. Consequently, even when using learner-centred approach the history teachers kept an eye on what resources learners used. Learners were mostly given primary sources from the official textbooks. For internet use they were given specific websites or prevented from exploring any of their choice. According to the participating teachers, these strategies were motivated by the fear of exposing learners to documents denying the genocide. In so doing, the history teachers worked hard to contain any possible controversies.



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The history curriculum emphasises the role of the teacher as a coordinator, organiser, adviser and guide, and of the learners as principal agents in the process of teaching-learning.<sup>79</sup> However, activities such as the analysis of media extracts, discussions, and the comparison of documents related to the Genocide against the Tutsi with other genocides, discussion about films and United Nations documents were almost absent from the teachers' practices. Most teachers complied with the curriculum without going beyond the prescribed guidelines. They taught the genocide in a manner that allowed their learners to achieve good results in the national examination without helping them to develop a critical understanding. Teaching the genocide in such a guarded manner happened against a backdrop of limited and inadequate teaching resources. Consequently, many teachers relied heavily on a teaching resource produced by the Ministry of Education entitled *The History of Rwanda. A participatory Approach. Teacher's Guide for secondary schools*. Some of the participating teachers, especially those who were well-trained and Kigali-based, did try to use a diverse range of resources and teaching methods that drew on a learner-centred approach. However, teaching about the genocide in a teacher-centred manner with sources that could easily be controlled in a committed manner was the norm.

## Discussion

The experiences of the history teachers of teaching the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwandan Secondary Schools were multifarious. What strongly emerged was that the teachers, without exception, wholeheartedly subscribed to, and attempted to achieve, the aims of the curriculum. Consequently they expressed the values of forgiveness, tolerance and reconciliation, acceptance of the past, liberty and unity, and the right to live in harmony, free from discrimination and under a culture of peace and patriotism. In so doing, the teachers blended the stated curriculum aims with their own moral views, to promote ideas such as “never again” and “respect for life”. This was all done with the overarching aim of creating citizens for a better Rwanda. In short, as discussed by Wassermann in the South African case, the aim of peace-making was a noble and dominant objective.<sup>80</sup>

Teachers' aims were achieved by covering the content related to the genocide as prescribed in the curriculum. However, adhering to the curriculum content concerning the genocide was often problematic. It emerged that both the pre-colonial and the post-genocide history of Rwanda were taught in a wholly romanticised manner and Rwandans were presented as residing in complete harmony. Consequently silences arose on the true nature of *ubuhake* or clientelism, for example, out of possible fear of being sanctioned by the authorities or society. Silences were equally created around key historical issues including the manner in which the Belgian colonial administration employed the Hamitic myth to justify favouring certain groups at certain times. Such silences could have been brought about by the teachers' lack of deep knowledge regarding these periods of Rwandan history. Two examples in this regard will suffice: the causes of the genocide were generally taught in a haphazard manner and were not, for instance, broken down into close, recent or immediate causes, medium-term causes, and remote, long-term or far-reaching causes. Equally, only one history teacher revealed teaching about the “development of ideology of genocide” by referring to the socio-political violence that broke out in 1959 during which some Tutsi were killed and others compelled to go into exile.<sup>81</sup> Although these examples could be attributed to a lack of sophisticated content knowledge on aspects related to the genocide, other issues identified in the literature as controversial, such as the number of victims and the role of different historical actors, were not critically engaged with by all teachers.<sup>82</sup> Such pedagogical decisions which related to the stated curriculum content, cannot solely be attributed to a lack of knowledge but also to teachers' avoidance of content related to the genocide that they deemed controversial.<sup>83</sup> This did not always cohere with

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teachers' own interpretations of their experiences; in their view, they complied with the curriculum by embracing the official narrative. In doing this, the teachers also wanted to dismiss unofficial histories of the genocide.

In the history teachers' experiences, the biggest challenge in teaching the genocide as a controversial issue was rooted in the teaching methods employed. The curricula are unequivocal that, to achieve the stated aims and content, teachers should employ learner-centred approaches. This is linked to a balanced approach to teaching controversial issues whereby teachers can offer a range of alternative evidence and perspectives. Teachers would ideally allow all learners to explain their ideas, provide evidence when needed, and avoid, in theory at least, the assertion of his or her own personal allegiances to the issue. This is what the curriculum required; however, the participating teachers adhered only partially to this prescription.

All the history teachers employed mainly teacher-centred approaches to teach the genocide. This included lecturing, explaining, and other forms of teacher-dominated teaching. This was done by clinging rigidly to the curriculum and to the approved textbooks. When learners were allowed some active participation, it was mostly a masked form of learner-centredness and did not represent critical engagement. Thus, when learners made individual or group presentations, the teachers strongly controlled feedback from their peers, and only allowed guarded comments. It was therefore left to the learners to raise controversial issues surreptitiously for their teachers to field. Teachers' most common response was to silence the learners and to stymie attempts to engage with issues that the teachers found uncomfortable. The reason was summarised by a participating teacher as follows: "... so that they [learners] don't bring hate-based ideas in the classroom." Since according to the participant the teachers and the learners were from "a world which competed with the history taught at school", the former knew what this meant because of their experience in teaching the genocide to a class of learners who were the children of victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, the genocide is not an abstract, distant historical event but is in the experiential world and living memory of the teachers. In this context teachers saw it as their duty to mediate learner involvement for the sake of peaceful co-existence. Although the literature refers to the teaching of controversial issues with some success in Northern Ireland and South Africa, for example, these countries had not experienced genocide and therefore the teachers in them were not required to teach about it.<sup>84</sup>

Apart from the language of instruction, available teaching time, crowded classrooms and the scarcity of appropriate educational resources,<sup>85</sup> other reasons exist for the way in which history teachers taught the genocide as a controversial issue. In contrast, the history teachers confronted a different reality which included being legally bound by laws on genocide denial,<sup>86</sup> relations with the community, and issues of personal safety and job security as employees of the state which generally meant that they adhered closely to the official history. In addition, controversy does not necessarily have a permanent character; what is viewed as acceptable by one individual or community might be considered controversial by another. The teachers negotiated this situation by taking a clear and unambiguous position on the genocide by attempting to achieve the curricular aims through a predominantly teacher-centred manner.

Teaching the genocide in the manner outlined above was based on the history teachers' own fears and concerns. They negotiated this by operating as determined advocates while opting for forms of avoidance and containment of controversial issues regarding the genocide.<sup>87</sup> In the process, risk-taking – for example the introduction of alternative narratives and resources – was minimised,<sup>88</sup> in favour of a stated commitment approach based on overt teacher-centredness,<sup>89</sup> and exclusive partiality.<sup>90</sup> This came about because the teachers rejected the possibility of a neutral line and hence took a clear one-sided curriculum-compliant position on

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the genocide which mirrored the teaching methods adopted. In doing so, the history teachers walked a fine line by employing common sense and contextual knowledge to do what they considered the least possible harm,<sup>91</sup> to the learners, the school in which they taught, themselves and the community in which they worked. The teachers were bound by a context in which two decades ago roughly a million people were killed. Hence the teachers, and the people in the communities and schools in which they work, all carry some degree of trauma from a genocide that is still tangibly visible everywhere – in schools, curricula and textbooks and at memorials and commemoration events. To the teachers participating in this study, the genocide is thus not an abstract concept that can be theorised but is present, real and part of their lived experience. Complying with the curricular aims and content by avoiding controversies and by teaching in a teacher-centred manner thus made strategic pedagogical and personal sense to them. Teachers believe that employing alternative methods to teach controversial issues such as playing devil's advocate and adopting a procedurally neutral position, would involve taking unnecessary pedagogical risks. A tension between the prescribed pedagogy and teachers' contextual positioning thus exists.

Consequently, the teacher-centred teaching approaches adopted by the teachers signalled an ambiguous relationship with the history curriculum. While the curriculum was not openly questioned, compliance, resistance and undermining went hand in hand when the intended curriculum was enacted. Resistance and undermining were especially prevalent when it came to the teaching approaches the participants were expected to use. However, the resistance and undermining were not malicious political acts but rather rooted in fear about what they perceived to be possible in Rwandan society. Hence, a need seemingly existed among the teachers to defend themselves and the community. But the teachers' positioning was itself highly contentious, because attempting to make the controversial uncontroversial, as they did, is itself controversial. Primarily, educational policy as embodied in the history curriculum, was allowed to flounder and more importantly, on a micro level, as an educational consequence learners were hindered from acquiring the necessary critical and transferable skills such as collecting and evaluating evidence, presenting findings, applying critical questions to any kind of source and being aware of a diversity of perspectives; skills that are needed to counter genocide denial, prevent future conflict and prepare students for wider civic life.

In spite of the above, some evidence emerged that teachers challenged their own teacher-centred pedagogies in small ways by attempting to teach about the genocide in a critical manner. These minor breakthroughs included defending ideas by working in groups,<sup>92</sup> interpreting statistics and using stories about the genocide. In the process, the learners understood differently the causes, sequences and consequences of the genocide as a historical event, and developed skills related to tolerance and presentation. For instance, some learners considered remote causes such as the role of the colonial administration in dividing the Rwandan society whereas others pointed out close issues such as post-colonial policies which excluded Tutsi from key sectors of Rwandan life. However, this was the exception rather than the rule and such pedagogical endeavours were mostly practised by trained teachers with a strong history background teaching in well-resourced schools. Some guarded risk-taking moments were possible for these teachers because they felt secure in their schools and communities.<sup>93</sup> Teachers in well-functioning schools found it easier to take risks compared to their less well-resourced peers. For the untrained teachers working in under-resourced schools the reality was different; not only were they hindered by a lack of education but the lack of content knowledge and suitable teaching resources, coupled with a problematic infrastructure, made it very difficult to teach a controversial issue such as the genocide by means of a critical pedagogy. The majority of the participating teachers thus taught the genocide as a controversial issue in a product-based and not a process-based manner meaning that history teachers

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who participated in this study focus more on the content not on other skills such as critical pedagogy.<sup>94</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Rwandan history teachers who participated in this study generally acted as determined advocates in choosing the aims and content they used when teaching the genocide as a controversial issue. They adopted roles as peacemakers while demonstrating a stated-commitment to the idea of ‘never again’. At the same time, the teachers acted as avoiders and containers by not engaging with their learners in a critical manner and suppressing any attempts by learners to critically engage with controversies concerning the genocide. The result was that most history teachers did not take risks when teaching the genocide but rather taught it in an uncontroversial manner that adhered to the curriculum in terms of content but not in terms of learner-centred pedagogy. The outcome of this was an undermining of official attempts to foster a more critical education about the genocide. The teachers’ ‘safety first’ approach followed resulted in teacher-centred pedagogies which romanticised the past and presented a one-dimensional version of the genocide which did not engage deeply with denial of the event. The overarching rationale behind this was one of ‘self-care’ whereby teachers acted to protect themselves, the learners and society from any harm in the post-genocide context. Although noble in intention, this approach contradicts the critical pedagogy expected of teachers.

Until all Rwandan history teachers have been trained to teach about the genocide, against denial and for prevention,<sup>95</sup> however, and they receive the necessary resources to fulfil these roles, this teacher-centredness will persist, underpinned by forms of stated commitment, indoctrination and avoidance. Truly critical pedagogical approaches that employ the full spectrum of methods to teach controversial issues, will otherwise remain but a dream for teachers weighed down by their political and social context and lack of resources. Until Rwandan history teachers are provided with suitable training and infrastructure, they will remain only partially empowered. In the process, the ideal of building a new society will have to be deferred.

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