

**‘Am I Twa or HMP?’:
Examining the ‘Historically Marginalized People’
Label and the Acculturation of the Twa in Rwanda**

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Abstract

The Twa – a traditional hunter-gatherer people found in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo – remain one of the most marginalized and underrepresented populations in East Africa. In Rwanda, the Twa comprise one of the country’s three groups along with the Hutu and Tutsi and have long been considered Banyarwanda, or ‘people of Rwanda’. Today, it is estimated that the Twa comprise 20,000-35,000 people or about 0.3-0.4% of the total Rwandan population. The decision of the current, post-genocide Rwandan government to pass anti-discrimination and segregation legislation restored the humanity and status of the Twa as equal members of Rwandan society. However, as ethnic labels cannot be used in ways that may enable segregation or discrimination, the Twa are known officially today as ‘Historically Marginalized People’ by both the Rwandan government and the broader Rwandan population. Since the ambiguous start of the label’s use around 2004, government and non-government organizations have used it as a means of positive discrimination, given that the Twa make up the lowest socio-economic echelon in Rwanda. The results of this research demonstrate that the Twa do not understand the meaning of the term HMP, revealing that the government has implemented the label with insufficient sensitization or consultation with Twa communities. For the Twa, the HMP label causes confusion. Moreover, Twa respondents not only reveal that the label has negative connotations but also that, in the end, they prefer to retain their current ‘Twa’ identity during the integration process into modern Rwandan society.

Keywords

Batwa - Historically Marginalized Peoples – Twa - Acculturation –Marginalization –Assimilation – Integration - Separation.

Introduction

Discourse on Rwanda is laden with commentary on ethnicity, highlighting the violent relationship between Hutu and Tutsi, while at the same time continuing to perpetuate a status quo that overlooks the country's most vulnerable and marginalized group: the Twa. Since the 1994 genocide, the Twa have been re-labelled 'Historically Marginalized People' (HMP) in a quasi-official manner that has left both the Twa and other Rwandans in general questioning the purpose of the term. While the government promotes a narrative that calls for unity and reconciliation, there has been little attempt either at uncovering how the Twa respond to this new identity – a label premised on their marginality throughout Rwandan history – and few policies of sensitization or education as to why the Twa have been given this name and how they have been marginalized. This is significant because when examining the historical and contemporary positionality of the Twa, ethnicity and race must be part of the discussion, given the ethnicization of the Twa under German and Belgian colonizers and the racialization of the Twa and other 'pygmy' peoples under European ideology and colonization. In 2006, the African Regional Expert Working Group on Indicators of Wellbeing and Indigenous Peoples stated in their report on the Twa of Central Africa, and particularly Rwanda, that they 'are not represented in management of conflicts even though many of them have been decimated by these armed conflicts' (UNPFII, 2007). While this is certainly not confined to Rwanda, as widespread violence has repeatedly enveloped the Twa in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, their identity and narrative have been largely overlooked in the post-1994 period both by the Rwandan government and the international community.

This article seeks to address this gap in the discourse by examining the Twa and their relationship with the label 'Historically Marginalized People' as it concerns attempts by the Rwandan government to create a nation that is free of racial and ethnic discrimination. Specifically it brings the present position of the Twa in Rwanda into focus by placing the Rwandan government's label for them - HMP - under critical examination. Does such a label exceptionalize the Twa and hinder their participation in the country's ongoing unity and reconciliation processes and the general 'Rwandanization' of the population? How is this label interpreted and perceived by Twa communities and by the government? Is the HMP label the most effective way to acculturate the Twa as a distinct and complex minority group and to help them develop their communities so that they may coexist in, and with, modern day Rwanda?

To answer these questions, this article engages with the process of acculturation, deploying Canadian sociologist John Berry's (1980) four categories of acculturation strategies – assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration – as an explanatory framework. Berry's definition (2005: 698-699) is widely regarded as central to understanding this sociological phenomenon:

Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire. These cultural and psychological changes come about through a long-term process, sometimes taking years, sometimes generations, and sometimes centuries. Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups.

Berry's perspective on acculturation and its four forms provides an excellent lens through which to view the relationship between the Twa and the rest of Banyarwanda society. It will be explained that acculturation can be either voluntary or involuntary, a distinction that is necessary to understand the acculturative effects of the HMP label, and whether it results in the continued marginalization of the Twa in Rwanda.

This article will argue that the 'HMP' label for the Twa, in the ways it is understood at the government level and within Twa communities, perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and, ultimately, requires revision and re-examination if the Twa are to be fully integrated into Rwandan society. This study demonstrates that there is a clear preference within Twa communities for retaining the Twa identity as Banyarwanda rather than 'HMP', revealing that integration of the Twa into present day Rwanda is tied to the politics of recognition.

This article not only seeks to address the general absence of evidence-based commentary on the status of the Twa, but also to contribute to more frequently held debates regarding minorities, Indigenous Peoples and acculturation practices in Africa.

Following an examination of acculturation as a theoretical framework, this article will examine the HMP label and its origins to demonstrate the lack of clarity surrounding the term at an official level. It is important to recognize that the use of the term is very much part and parcel of the Rwandan government's policy of assimilatory acculturation, whereby identities are shed or deprioritized in order to be part of Banyarwanda society. This section will ultimately question whether the HMP label allows the Twa to shed their identity of marginality, an identity that has been historically engrained in Rwandan society. In this regard, it is critical to demonstrate that the Twa have a cultural and socio-economic narrative that has diverged from the rest of Banyarwanda society. As mentioned previously, there is no official interpretation of the HMP label that points to the ways in which history has marginalized the Twa. It is thus important to examine the histories that have contributed to this involuntary marginalization to better assess whether the HMP label addresses this context as a social integration mechanism. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the Twa have not historically been part of a voluntary acculturative process that has involved their consent. Naturally this history of involuntary marginalization raises the question of whether the Twa seek to remain separate from a society that has consistently seen them as the lowest socio-economic echelon.

This paper will then go on to examine the politics surrounding the application of the Indigenous People label; an international identity that could be seen as the obvious alternative to the ambiguous 'HMP' label. Interpreted by the government as alluding to notions of 'nativism' and self-determination, the Indigenous People label has been struck down as divisive in a country undergoing a unity-building process, despite the fact that regional and international organizations have been relentless in criticizing and lobbying the Rwandan government to recognize the rights of the Twa as an Indigenous People under the international Indigenous Peoples' rights regime.

As will be fully outlined in the methodology section, this study is based on a ten-month period of qualitative research that included focus groups and questionnaires in Twa communities across Rwanda, as well as individual interviews with local government officials. It was also combined with previous research that was undertaken in 2014 on the identity politics of the Twa vis-à-vis that 'Indigenous' identity and the political space it affords. This qualitative research will demonstrate the realities of the HMP label for Twa communities. Importantly this article focuses on what the Twa themselves think of the HMP label, in keeping with a methodological approach that seeks to highlight the place of Indigenous voices rather than further colonise their knowledge and practice as is so often the case in Western discourse.

Berry has noted that Indigenous Peoples constitute a demographic that seeks an acculturative separation from the rest of the populace for the sake of cultural preservation. With that in mind, the question will then be posed whether the success of the HMP label in the eyes of the Twa is measured according to a collective desire to remove themselves from the rest of the Rwandan population.

Understanding acculturation and its forms

This paper treats the Twa as a distinct and complex culture within Banyarwanda society. As the next section will more fully demonstrate, the nature of Twa community and identity is multifaceted, composed of collective memories and cultures that range from forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers (also known as *impunyu*) to servants to the royal courts to inter-generational potters. Taken from a comparative analysis of multiple Twa communities across the country, these narratives are intersectional in some communities and separate in others. Nevertheless, the common thread in a vast majority of these memories is that of Twa marginalization relative to the rest of the Rwandan population (Kagabo and Mudandagizi, 1974). This section will contextualize the 'marginalization' that the Twa have experienced as a predominantly traditional hunter-gatherer people (Des Forges, 2006).

Sociologist John Berry's four forms of acculturation – marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration – are useful in observing the current status and social positionality of the Twa via-à-vis the rest of the Rwandan population. Although used mostly for the purpose of examining immigration policy, Berry's forms of acculturation are worth considering for a group such as the Twa and for a government that is seeking to foster a positive development relationship (Appiagyei-Atua, 2012) by bringing them into the rest of the populace as citizens free of ethnic and racial discrimination. To begin, it must be clarified that acculturation, because it tends to contain pejorative connotations of forcefulness, is used in this case to imply an exchange of cultures between a minority group (i.e. Twa) and the majority group (i.e. non-Twa Rwandans). It is therefore crucial to begin looking at fundamental definitions of the process and interpretations of the circumstances that make acculturation, or acculturative change, likely. According to the Social Science Research Council (1954: 974), acculturation cannot be presumed to be an intentional occurrence, nor can it be presumed to be immediate or in response to a single catalyst:

Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modifications induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life. Its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems, the processes of integration and differentiation, the generation of developmental sequences, and the operation of role determinants and personality factors.

Acculturation in the case of the Twa cannot be confined to a single political, economic, or socio-cultural policy, event, or phenomenon. With the recognition that the Twa are a distinct group that have been treated as such for hundreds of years, the exercise of trying to pinpoint the numerous and various forms of acculturation they have experienced would be futile. Rather, this article is concerned with examining the label 'Historically Marginalized People' as a catalyst of acculturation.

In addition, it is important to use Berry's version of acculturation to emphasize the difference between the various collective and individual experiences of acculturation. Although the Twa have a common collective experience of marginalization, it varies in form and severity across Rwanda. Ranging from the dehumanization experienced by hunter-gather Twa to the widespread discrimination felt as a result of intergenerational poverty to the exclusion felt during the post-1994 reconciliation process, the experiences of the Twa population are situated on a spectrum of marginalization. The significance of using Berry's model in these circumstances is underlined by Padilla and Perez (2003: 37), in that it recognizes four distinct forms of acculturation and identifies the complexity of the relationship between minority and majority, or larger minority, groups:

Berry...expanded on the view of acculturation to include varieties of adaptation and specifically identified the following four: assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation. The importance of Berry's model was that it recognized the importance of multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and the fact that individuals have a choice in the matter of how far they are willing to go in the acculturation process.

Essentially the four forms of acculturation as defined by Berry depend on factors determined by collective and individual preferences, as shown in figure 1.

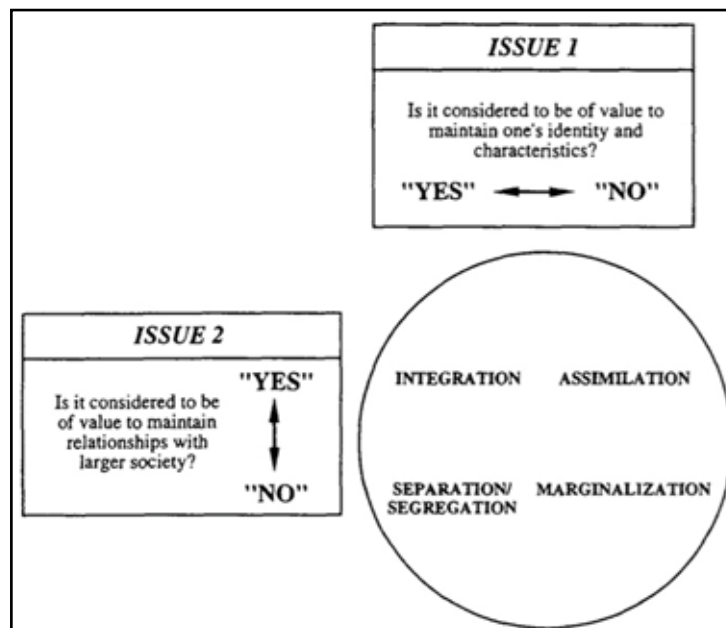


Figure 1

In accordance with Berry's model, as shown in Figure 1, assimilation depends on the willingness of a minority group to join the dominant identity while shedding its minority identity. On the other hand, marginalization, according to Berry, means that a minority does not find value in maintaining its own identity, nor does the group find value in joining the dominant identity. Separation, identified as a strategy designed to preserve an identity, centres on the notion that the minority group wishes to retain its identity while distancing itself from the identity of the dominant group. Finally, integration, the goal of many open democracies, seeks to allow for the existence of a minority group's identity at the same time as it allows for a relationship to be established between the dominant group and minority groups. Importantly for this present analysis, as Berry explains, the acculturation process is not always entered into voluntarily (1997: 8):

Many kinds of cultural groups may exist in plural societies and their variety is primarily due to three factors: voluntariness, mobility, and permanence. Some groups have entered into the acculturation process voluntarily (e.g. immigrants) while others experience acculturation without having sought it out (e.g. refugees, indigenous peoples). Other groups are in contact because they have migrated to a new location, while others have had a new culture brought to them (e.g. indigenous peoples and 'national minorities').

To reiterate, acculturative processes are not always intentional and, in accordance with Berry's definition, groups also do not necessarily enter into a voluntary acculturative process. In the case of the Twa, the qualitative analysis undertaken here will demonstrate that they do not currently possess the agency to choose to enter into an acculturative process (i.e. integration, separation, and, to a point, assimilation) and indeed have not voluntarily entered an acculturation process since the pre-colonial era.

'Historically marginalized people' label

The 'Historically Marginalized People' label is a dichotomy. The Rwandan government has found a way to pay heed to the precarious situation of the Twa without mentioning ethnicity or race, or spelling out the history that has caused this marginalization. However, at the same time, the use of the 'Historically Marginalized People' label appears to recognize that there are exceptional, collective historical narratives within Twa experience that are worth actively addressing.

Moreover, the origins and meaning of the HMP label are themselves ambiguous: nowhere during the field research period could the origins of the label or its meaning be located. Although Article 80(2) of the Rwandan Constitution of 2003, as revised in 2015, calls for eight senators to be appointed by the President to

represent ‘historically marginalized groups’ there is no mention in the constitution of who these groups are and how they are defined. From a previous study conducted in 2014 (Collins), representatives of international organizations in Rwanda and Rwandan civil society organizations interpreted the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label as referring to all groups that have experienced historical marginalization – including women, the disabled community, Muslims, and the Twa – which echoes the government’s designation. In responding to the concerns of the UN Human Rights Council about the situation of the Twa, the representative of the Rwandan government stated that the Twa are allotted one Senator to represent their concerns (UNCERD 2012). Two observations can be drawn from this: first, that the HMP label is an umbrella term – at least in the Senate; and second if the Twa have been allocated their own Senator then they must be officially considered as a ‘Historically Marginalized People’.

Unofficially, however, the term takes on a different meaning. Government policy to rid the country of ethnic loyalties for the purposes of fostering a post-ethnic national identity – and hence preclude the possibility of a return to ethnically based violence – leaves the Twa as the only group under the umbrella of the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label that bears no other name considered acceptable in official terms. Moreover, there is no record of whether the Twa were consulted on this label and no studies have examined its implications for Twa communities in their attempts to be part of the country’s post-1994 nation-building process. This begs the question, in a country with no ethnic labels other than Banyarwanda, are the Twa seeing a continuous, albeit different, marginalization by the government by the use of the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label? Additionally, if there is no clear official definition of the HMP label, how is it interpreted by Twa communities themselves?

Contextualizing the marginalization of the Twa

Despite contemporary government narratives that emphasize that the socio-economic fluidity of the Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa identities was a defining trait that made cohesion and cooperation among the three groups possible, the marginalization of the Twa in Rwandan society has deep historical roots. Even before colonialism the Twa were hindered in their socio-economic mobility within Banyarwanda society (see Kagabo and Mudandagizi, 1974) and the policies enacted by German and Belgian colonizers ‘fixed’ their marginalization, establishing the set nature of ethnic identities - Tutsi, Hutu and Twa - that would be the catalyst for the violence seen in Rwanda throughout the 20th century. Moreover, the Twa experienced a colonial racialization as ‘Pygmies’ that the Hutu and Tutsi did not experience. As Ballard notes, ‘Pygmies have long served, both in Western imagination and in Western science, as a sheet anchor for racial hierarchies and for putative sequences of human and social evolution’ (2006: 133). Ultimately, for the Twa, colonial ethnicization of their identity resulted in their position at the lowest echelon of society in Rwanda enshrined and indoctrinated, while the latter process went even further; a dehumanization of the Twa and other ‘pygmy’ forest peoples accompanied the spread of European racial Darwinist ideology (Kidd, 2009).

The inherent socio-economic traits of the Hutu and Tutsi labels in pre-colonial Banyarwanda society, as opposed to the physical and ‘Hamitic’ traits that later became associated with them, remain widely uncontested, despite some questions as to how fluid social advancement was. For example, the class mobility from Hutu to Tutsi was achieved through the phenomena of *Kwihutura*, which means literally to lose ‘Hutuness’ and to become a Tutsi. Some scholars (eg. Vandeginste 2014; Thibon 2004) have concluded that the Twa were never afforded the same opportunity of socio-economic promotion, although little study has been done into this assumption. A key question, however, remains whether a Hutu or Tutsi could become a Twa. This is the underlying question that points to the distinct identity the Twa have in central African societies, a question that further complicates the ‘socio-economic fluidity’ narrative.

Simply put, before their colonial ethnicization and racialization, the Twa were seen as a more distinct class of Banyarwanda either because they did display physical and socio-cultural characteristics that distinguished them from others, such as their height, or a unique spoken dialect of Kinyarwanda, or because of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle that they traditionally practised (Lewis and Knight, 1995; UNPO, 1995; Mugarura and Ndemeye, 2001). Indeed, it was only in the early 1990s, through the creation of national parks and the implementation of failed World Bank projects (Cultural Survival, 2015; MacDougall, 2009), that the last remaining forest dwelling, hunter-gatherer Twa were forced to leave their traditional lands without compensation.

In this sense, the historical marginalization of the Twa becomes clearer: the Twa were not only subjected to European Darwinist racial and ethnic categorizations but were also discriminated against as forest dwelling hunter-gatherers in pre-colonial agro-pastoralist society and as an underdeveloped, backwards people in post-colonial Rwandan society. Under Berry's acculturative processes, this involuntary marginalization could have likely led to a mutually shared desire by both Twa and non-Twa Rwandans to separate themselves from mainstream Rwandan society. The question is whether the Twa actually seek to remain segregated and thus insulated from the embedded discrimination they face in the broader Rwandan society. If they do, this points to what is deemed within Berry's acculturative framework as voluntary separation.

Acculturative separation through indigeneity

The politics of Indigeneity is inherently tied to the question of whether the Twa have the desire to remain removed from Rwandan society. After all, although without a universally accepted definition, Indigenous Peoples are often defined by their situation of historical marginalization and an international rights regime that supports separation via self-determination. Regional and international bodies already recognize the Twa as an 'Indigenous People', and the participation of Ugandan, Burundian, and Congolese Twa in international fora continues to underline this notion. The global Indigenous Peoples' rights legal regime remains an active advocate for the Twa across the region, particularly in Rwanda. In the past decade alone, the African Peer Review Mechanism (2009), the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (2008), the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (1995; 2016), the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues (2009), and the UN Human Rights Council (2015) have all noted the Twa's status as an Indigenous People in reports that have criticized the Rwandan government for its treatment of the Twa. Indigenous rights organizations have also continuously lobbied for the notion that the Twa can retain their identity and their claim to indigeneity, and still be considered Rwandan (MacDougall 2009). However, the 'Indigenous' identity is complex for the Twa, and for most Indigenous Peoples in Africa.

It is clear that the Rwandan Government does want the Twa to be part of Rwandan society (UNHRC, 2011). However, a 2010 report by the African Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities recognized:

Despite the measures put in place to improve their living conditions, the situation of the Twa remains precarious: their educational level remains very low, and far below the national average; they do not have access to land; they suffer from discrimination, especially with respect to access to employment; and they do not participate equally with other communities in the management of public affairs.

The response of the Rwandan government to the idea of the distinctiveness of the Twa as an Indigenous People has been to argue that any notion of the existence of an Indigenous People in the country is unfounded and moreover counter-productive in a country whose history has been marred by violence over claims over 'nativism' (see Mamdani, 2000; UNHRC, 2011). At the same time, however, the government has remained ambiguous in its stance regarding the presence of an Indigenous People in Rwanda. In a report to the UN Human Rights Council, it noted with satisfaction that

the Special Rapporteur on indigenous people in Africa visited Rwanda in 2008 and appreciated the Rwandan Government's efforts to promote the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable population (Government of Rwanda, 2010).

While not forthcoming in its recognition of an Indigenous People, the government nevertheless held up the opinion of a legal instrument belonging to the Indigenous Rights regime vis-à-vis the Twa. The government has repeatedly revealed a particular paranoia and confusion about notions of aboriginality and self-determination, which have characterized the Indigenous Peoples' rights regime.

It should be noted, however, that these concerns surrounding assertions of Indigeneity are not confined to Rwanda. Concerns around the the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and its application to the African continent were even raised at the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AHSO) of the African Union in Addis Ababa in 2007. Rwandan scholar Felix Ndahinda comments on this controversy with

the 'Indigenous' identity and the African continent (2011: 57):

While some forms of affirmation of indigeness might be traced back to earlier years, the proliferation of indigenous claims across Africa remain inseparable from the internationalization of indigenous rights activism and the involvement of international institutions of indigenous rights issues.

As Ndahinda also points out, the roots of the global Indigenous rights movement rest in the Americas and Oceania where the dichotomy between the colonized and the colonizers is distinct, and the socio-economic and political disparities between the two are unquestionable. The controversy of aboriginality, or 'who was first', when it comes to land and its inhabitants is critical, particularly in Africa. Indeed, definitions of 'Indigeneity' centred on the notion of 'original inhabitants' are unlikely to derive from African shores, as Ndahinda points out. Defining aboriginality on the African continent becomes extraordinarily complex when combined with thousands of years of multiple mass migrations, the history of European colonialism, the arbitrary borders that divided groups, and the post-colonial narratives promoted by many African governments that 'all Africans are indigenous' (Sena, 2010).

In a previous study completed in 2014, however, there was clear opposition by many members of Twa communities to application of the Indigenous identity via the use of Abasangwabutaka ; indeed, it was revealed that this understanding of aboriginality was tied to the assumption that anyone who was Abasangwabutaka possessed land. Twa advocates from Rwanda and the Great Lakes region have still drawn parallels between their situation and international definitions of what constitutes an Indigenous People to gain access to platforms where they could have their grievances heard. But as a result of the lack of sensitization to African and international consensus over definitions of Indigeneity, the Rwandan Government will likely continue to hear claims of aboriginality, self-determination, and cultural exceptionalism whenever the Twa are referenced as an Indigenous People; an exceptionalism that cannot be accommodated within the country's nation- and unity-building process. The question though has yet to be asked: do the Twa have any desire to separate or remain separated from the rest of the Rwandan population? With all of these questions posed, this article will turn now to an examination of the methodology used in this study.

Methodology

This study focused primarily on the collection of qualitative data through focus group discussions and questionnaire collection. The nature of the questionnaires and focus groups ultimately centred on the opinions of the Batwa toward their lived experience with discrimination and how the HMP label fits into this experience. For cultural reasons, interviewing on an individual basis was not found to be an appropriate methodology to use with Twa communities. For this reason, focus groups were used as the primary way of gathering accurate information. The focus groups were structured to allow all members of the respective Twa communities to participate. This included allowing all voices to be heard and taking into account the importance of Twa cultural norms (e.g. prioritizing the voices of elders, allowing time for dancing and singing to create a more open atmosphere). In total, nine districts of Rwanda were visited: Musanze, Rusizi, Gasabo, Gicumbi, Burera, Nyabagame, Nyaraguru, Rwamagana, and Nyagatare. These districts resulted in 14 focus groups being held with a total of 272 Twa participants, an average of 19 in each focus group. The gender breakdown was 61% (166) Twa women and 39% (106) Twa men. There was only one constructed focus group in which the researchers specifically gathered a group of 10 Twa with tertiary education. In terms of the handling of the data that was gathered in focus group statements, all names and locations below the district level were anonymized.

Questionnaires were also used during the field research period, providing complementary data to the qualitative study. These were used as a means of collecting information from those who felt uncomfortable participating in the focus groups or preferred to have their individual views recorded in written form. Questionnaires were therefore offered as an option for data collection in each community, and during an African Initiative for Mankind Progress Organization (AIMPO)-sponsored workshop in May 2015 with 40 Twa women and 7 Twa men from across the country. Given that this workshop did not allow sufficient time for focus groups to be conducted, questionnaires (translated into Kinyarwanda) were also the most efficient means of data collection in the short amount of time available. As illiteracy is a major issue facing the Twa across Rwanda, a majority of questionnaires taken from communities in the nine districts were filled out orally in Kinyarwanda.

For the questionnaires, all names and locations below the district level have also been anonymised. Many participants chose not to provide the district in which they live. Therefore, while it can be confirmed that questionnaires come from all five provinces (North, South, East, West, and Kigali), the geographic distribution is skewed according to those who provided their district information (10 Nyaraguru, 6 Nyagatare, 2 Nyamasheke, 2 Gicumbi, 1 Burera). In total, 88 questionnaires were collected. The gender breakdown was 68% (60) female, 25% (22) male, and 7% (6) marking ‘no gender’ or chose not to answer. Several variables affected the clear gender split. However, in the end, all participants from the workshop for Twa women decided to fill out the questionnaires, leaving the number of questionnaires collected from field research across the 9 districts at 41, with a gender breakdown of 37% (15) men, 49% (20) women, and 15% (6) responding ‘no gender’ or did not answer. An additional five structured interviews were held with government officials at the district, sector, and cell levels. The positions and names of these officials have been anonymised. Ages were not collected unless the participant specified.

Sometimes, as a result of financial and time factors, visits to communities were necessarily short. However, because of the position of the organisation that one of the authors (Ntakirutimana) is involved in, and his connections to the communities, visits could be arranged at short notice and done in such brief amounts of time while maintaining a mutual trust and respect. Recordings of focus groups were taken when circumstances permitted and when permission from all participants was unanimously given. Transcriptions of the focus groups were translated from Kinyarwanda to English, and, as with all translations, there is room for error in interpretation of what was said. However, all errors remain the authors’ own.

Finally, the researchers are both aware of their positionality on this particular topic: one as a university educated, white, Western male academic and the other as a university educated Rwandan male Twa leader of a Kigali-based development organization. Together the researchers have a vested interest in ensuring the survival and integration of the Twa in modern day Rwanda. Nevertheless, both researchers have been aware of this positional bias and as a result inhabit a position – now and when the interviews were conducted – that seeks collaboration with willing parties to ensure equity is given to all Rwandans.

Research results: problems with involuntary acculturation

This section will focus on three key research findings: first, the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label does not fulfil its purpose as a means of assimilative acculturation via positive discrimination and has been given unofficial interpretations by the Twa as a result of the lack of sensitization surrounding the label; second, the label has fostered, rather than halted, an involuntary acculturative process that can best be characterized as ‘marginalization’; third, the Twa participants in this research overwhelmingly expressed a consensual desire to integrate into the rest of the Rwandan populace and to abandon the stigma they have historically carried. However, a significant part of this third finding is the view among Twa respondents that the ‘Twa’ and ‘Rwandan’ identities are not mutually exclusive, and that, in fact, retaining the ‘Twa-Rwandan’ identity is how a vast majority of respondents interpret an inclusive integration. The first finding establishes the premise for the second; the ambiguity of the term and the lack of education regarding its purpose has allowed the Twa and the wider Rwandan population to ‘fill in the blanks’. As a result, according to respondents, the HMP label has been interpreted as one that publicly flags their ethnic identity and does nothing to educate the populace on their ‘historic marginalization’. The third finding demonstrates that Twa respondents wish to participate actively and to voluntarily integrate as members of Rwandan society, while at the same time being given the chance to remove the stigmatization surrounding the term and reinvent the Twa label, as it relates to their day-to-day lives.

Ultimately, then, the results of this study have proved conclusive on the opinions of the Twa vis-à-vis Berry’s four acculturative processes. One of the most obvious findings is the awareness of Twa respondents of their marginalization and the severity of their precarious circumstances. These results will lead this study to conclude that the government must revise its use of the HMP label as a means of involuntary assimilative acculturation and should instead opt for a voluntary integrative acculturative process –one that involves the consent of Twa communities.

Involuntary assimilation through the HMP label

In terms of the idea that the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label is not fulfilling its purpose as a means of assimilative acculturation via positive discrimination and is misunderstood by most Twa and non-Twa Rwandans, this study demonstrates that the government has clearly implemented the HMP label without consultation with the Twa communities. Indeed, the results demonstrate that none of the Twa interviewed understand the term. The implication of this is that the HMP label is damaging and unhelpful both for the Twa themselves, and in terms of the government’s attested aim of a unified country.

Further, the interviews demonstrate a number of key themes of particular significance in terms of involuntary assimilation, specifically issues surrounding the Rwandan government’s non-discrimination policy; the lack of consent in Twa communities regarding the HMP label; and a lack of understanding on the part of officials of the reason for, and impact of, the HMP label. These themes came out most clearly in the narratives below; however, these themes were also evident throughout the interview responses.

In terms of the support that exists for the HMP label and its implications for a policy of assimilation, interviews with local officials highlighted their focus upon Rwandan government’s non-discrimination policy as a motivating factor. For example, one local government official noted that:

Every Rwandese is included in government plans. If it is education, it is for everyone, unless you fail on your own, but the state has made that opportunity available for all. There are education opportunities for everyone... Contrary to what was here back in the day it was that some people were meant to go to school while others did not. But today, there are some Twa who went to school, and this is because education has been made universally accessible. Also today, the government took the initiative to build houses for us, but looking back in history, when [the Twa] were integrated in communities [after being removed from the forests], they got nothing. No housing, nothing (Jean Claude, Local Government Official 1, Nyamagabe).

This was echoed in an interview with a District Mayor:

First the Twa are Banyarwanda like others. We give opportunity to all people without discrimination. We have programs... and other support for vulnerable peoples. The HMPs benefit from these programs and so the HMPs should feel like they are Rwandans. (Delphine, District Mayor)

We don’t like to call them HMP but it is the term given from the government and the country. Because of the poor leadership and government, the Twa haven’t been the only ones marginalized - all Rwandans have been marginalized. Now the Twa are not marginalized anymore... They are not marginalized anymore and they can’t refer to being marginalized now. (Delphine, District Mayor)

It must be noted too that there was some support for this view in one of the focus groups:

Yes, we are benefiting from that name, like in school, they are registered as Historically Marginalized People, and it is easy for the kids to study because they are known as HMP. Also, I find that when I go to the executive secretary office for a service, they welcome you with open arms. They want to help you. (Jacque, Gasabo Focus Group 2)

However, this study further revealed the lack of consent that exists regarding the application of the HMP label (a fact that will be confirmed later in the evidence gathered that demonstrates that most Twa do not understand the official meaning of label). Moreover, related to this there appeared to be a lack of understanding on the part of officials regarding the nature of Twa culture, again intimating that there is no real recognition of the Twa mentality that is associated with generations of involuntary marginalization, and a collective mentality that stems from a subsistence-based, hunter-gatherer lifestyle. This can be seen most clearly in the following interview excerpts:

A Senator came here and asked if they are getting support from the government, and you would find a person standing there denying that they received any help even though we just gave them livestock. So, the main issue is that they don't even know how to manage what they have. We gave them livestock, and they never think of raising those animals and maybe have them multiplied in the future, but instead of feeding the livestock, they would either eat them right away or sell them (Jean Claude, Local Government Official 1, Nyamagabe)

Personally, when I see all of these [problems], I say that there is a mental issue...that is to say, in their understanding and knowledge, everything they are given, the first thing that comes to mind is 'eat'. I am sure if you give them clothes, they would sell them immediately. (Jean Claude, Local Government Official 1, Nyamagabe).

Indeed the only counter-narrative to this was a comment by one local official concerning the need for more nuanced programmes for Twa communities:

Why doesn't the government give the Twa clay and train them in modern pottery machinery, and then Rwanda could become exemplary in modern pottery across the world. And then Rwanda is known as a country with great pottery! (Vice District Mayor of Social Affairs)

This idea of nuanced government development programmes specifically for Twa communities was seen as an overwhelmingly positive one in the questionnaire results (see Figure 2):

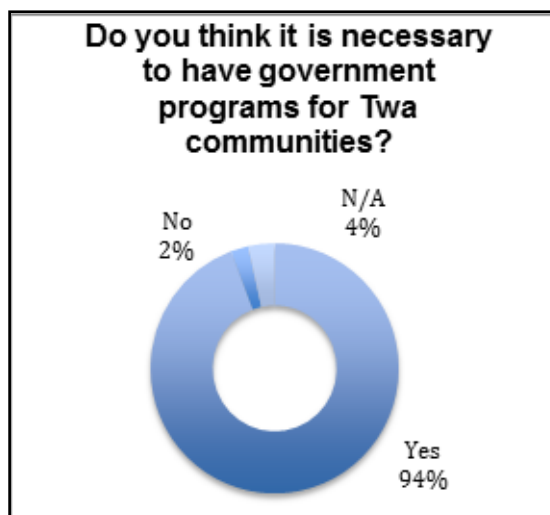


Figure 2

In general, and contrary to the widespread belief of non-Twa Rwandans, this study demonstrates that there was recognition of government support by a majority of the Twa population (see Figure 3). This is in contrast to the numerous non-Twa Rwandans who, throughout this study, mentioned that Twa communities would lie if asked whether they receive government assistance, a stereotype that was even found to be perpetuated throughout the study.

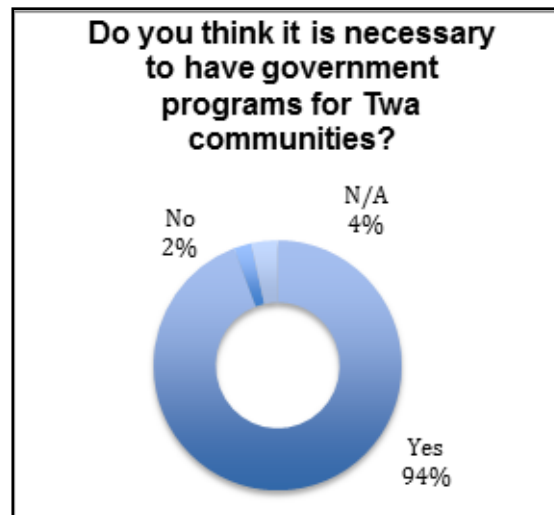


Figure 3

Such preconceptions in the non-Twa Rwandan population only serve to emphasize the lack of understanding of Twa culture which was echoed in the denial by officials that the Twa have a separate and distinctive history, and one that is characterised by marginalization:

I don't agree that history has marginalized [the Twa]. I studied history, but I never read that information, only the Tutsi have been discriminated in school and decision-making. If you tell me about the Tutsi I can agree because there is a document showing and explaining their discrimination, but for the Twa I cannot agree because there is no document showing that information. (Vice District Mayor of Social Affairs)

Has history marginalized them or have they marginalized themselves throughout history? (Jean Claude, Local Government Official, Nyamagabe)

Such a lack of recognition on the part of government officials itself demonstrates that the government has implemented the HMP label without consultation with the Twa communities, as consultation could have potentially led both to a greater understanding of the historic and contemporary marginalization of the Twa.

A continuing marginalization

For the Twa, then, the HMP label is one that causes confusion and carries connotations of continued discrimination.

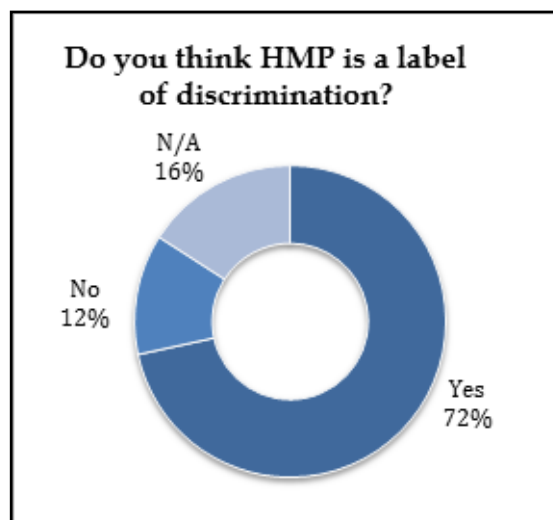


Figure 4

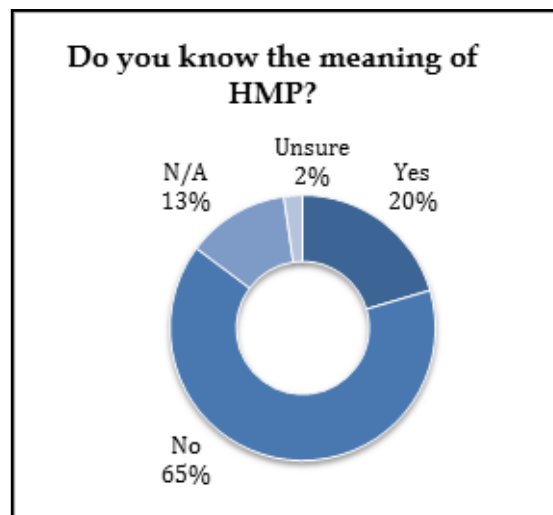


Figure 5

Looking at Figure 5 and the questionnaire responses to the question, ‘Do you know the meaning of HMP?’, 67% of respondents either did not know the meaning of the ‘Historically Marginalized People’ label or were unsure of its meaning. Moreover, of the 20% of respondents that claimed to have knowledge of the label, their answers did not demonstrate that there was a clear singular understanding for the term. For example, the following were answers to the question that asked applicants to elucidate the meaning of ‘Historically Marginalized People’:

- A word cursed by god
- A word showing that people should not have a seat at the table
- An English word that means “Twa”
- A word that implies a person has been discriminated against for a long time
- A word showing that a person is physically short
- Impoverished
- Twa (repeated 6 times)
- Left behind (repeated 2 times)

Answers a, b, and f clearly display a negative understanding of the HMP label. Answer g, which was repeated six times throughout the questionnaires, reveals a view that HMP is simply synonymous with ‘Twa’, flying in the face of the interpretation by Rwandan civil society, and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, that ‘HMP’ alludes to multiple groups. It is answer c, however, that remains perhaps the most significant vis-à-vis Twa sensitization to the HMP label in that it clearly demonstrates a perception that the nature of the HMP label is something alien and perhaps ‘un-Rwandan’. On the other hand, answers ‘d’ and ‘h’ are the closest responses that seek to interpret an official meaning of the term, even if it is quite literal.

These ambivalent, confused, and often critical responses to the term HMP were echoed throughout the focus groups, as the following narratives describe:

Sometimes we fight those who call us HMPs (Leo, Rwamagana Focus Group 1).

And when the government recognized that the problems caused the Twa to be historically marginalized in a political sense... it was not the Twa who marginalized themselves. They have been marginalized by their brothers. That’s why we have special assistance. We are the marginalized, discriminated people in history and now we are still under other people (Claude, Gasabo Focus Group 1).

The problems with [the Twa], it’s not the history, but... their mindset. If they have a well-developed mind, they should be developed. For me I see that to be called Historically Marginalized People is not fair (Philip, Male Gasabo Group 1).

They say, [the Twa] are the ‘historically marginalized people’! Why?! Why are we called the ‘histor-

ically marginalized people'? Why they don't seek some way to address the problem of historic marginalization? This is now the reason that if I get job, if I get money, I still get the label of 'historically marginalized people'. Why they don't change that? That is the problem, that 'Historical marginalized people' label. For me, I know that I'm a [Rwandan], but in the books I am a 'historically marginalization people'.

Q: Today is the first day your community has heard of that name 'HMP'?

A: Yes, now we are recently 'abacengejweimberenimiyoboreremyiza' (literally translated as 'people who developed because of a good governance')(Thomas, Burera, Focus Group).

Indeed the only example of the label HMP not being described in pejorative terms came from the following interaction:

Q: If your son would come to you and ask why are we called a Historically Marginalized Person, what would you say?

A: Me, personally, my kids asked me that, and I try to explain where the name came from. I tell them that my parents were Twa in the past, that we were potters, that we are Twa who were left out of history, and that is why we are called the Historically Marginalized People (Paul, Gasabo Focus Group 2).

To reiterate, the HMP label has been given to the Twa community without clear consultation or sensitization, demonstrating that the process of acculturation has been an involuntary one that has served only to reinforce marginalization rather than to address it. The label, used by the government to identify Twa communities and to provide them with assistance removed of the nuances necessary to help them escape a cycle of involuntary marginalization, carries not only the stigma that was previously associated with the label 'Twa'. It also means that any additional assistance provided to them without evidence of a successful result also adds further to the Twa's stigmatization from Rwandan society. Moreover, as the next section will demonstrate, the term becomes even more destructive when seen as a means for the Rwandan government to integrate the Twa into Rwandan society since Twa respondents overwhelmingly expressed a desire to integrate with the rest of the Rwandan populace as Banyarwanda while also maintaining a desire to keep the Twa label.

Dispelling the Notion of a Desired Voluntary Separation and Arguing for Voluntary Acculturation

The heart of the issue, then, is one of the differing perceptions among three sets of stakeholders: the Rwandan government, the non-Twa Rwandan population, and the Twa themselves. These differing perceptions have, in turn, led to an inconsistency in policy towards the Twa.

The Rwandan government has enacted anti-discrimination laws as part of its official policy that there is only one ethnic group - the Banyarwanda. The Rwandan government has enacted soft policies that have sought to prevent the Twa from physically removing or culturally exceptionalizing themselves from the rest of the Rwandan populace, such as the ban of the use of the 'Indigenous' identity and the ban on the political use of ethnic labels. There is a clear concern that political equity exists among all Rwandans, regardless of previous ethnic and racial categorization. What must be noted, however, is that the Twa wish to be seen as a group belonging to Banyarwanda society and also that they want the opportunity to rid their identity of stigma, something that requires the government to recognize their history and identity if they plan to bring the Twa into Rwandan society. In terms of acculturation processes, assimilative acculturation does not then provide the space for recognition of such an identity, while integrative acculturation does. Moreover at the same time as the official policy seeks to recognize only one ethnic group, the government appears to treat the Twa as a distinct group in that they focus on addressing their marginalization. For the Rwandan government its treatment of the Twa is not based on Twa ethnic identity as such but rather upon their socioeconomic needs. For the Rwandan population at large, however, the socioeconomic status of the Twa, and hence the special treatment that they receive from the Rwandan government, is perceived to be a result of their ethnic identity - i.e. because they are Twa. The latter was highlighted in an interview with a local government official who noted the perception that the Twa label might have among the wider Rwandan population:

In Kinyarwanda, we used to always compare something bad to the Twa. Like if a person is not clean, you would say he has Twa manners, or he misbehaves or mismanages 'like a Twa'. So this means that there are stereotypes that have been given to the Twa because of their many bad habits. So in Rwanda now, we may not have ethnic categories, but Rwandans will still call each other a 'Twa' because they have bad manners (Jean Claude, Local Governmental Official, Nyamagabe).

To demonstrate that the Twa voluntarily wish to be identified as Rwandans and join the dominant culture of the country, it must first be shown that the Twa do not wish to separate themselves voluntarily or involuntarily from the Rwandan populace. The results in this section will show that the Twa see themselves in a light that would cause them to voluntarily separate themselves from the Rwandan identity and culture.

It should be stated that this may come as an obvious observation since the Twa continuously express the importance of being Banyarwanda. For example, the relationships the Twa held with the Hutu and Tutsi before colonization are still collectively remembered fondly to this day. Their view of these relationships must be emphasized given the lack of qualitative research that amplifies the voices from Twa communities. Thus, during a focus group in Musanze, an elder male Twa provided a version of the Rwandan creation story to explain the historical positionality of the Twa in relation to the other groups:

The myth says that Gihanga, who created Rwanda had three children and it is said that one night he gathered all three of his children – Gahutu, Gatutsi, and Gatwa - and told them that he was going to give them a test. So he placed milk in front of them and said whoever passes the test will be the successor to my kingdom. So the test was to allow nothing to happen to the milk – it could not be tasted or touched. Gahutu fell asleep and he poured the milk to the ground unconsciously. When Gatwa saw this, he decided to drink his cup of milk, and Gatutsi was the only one left with milk in the cup. So in the morning Gihanga told Gatutsi to always keep milk in the cup and Gahutu could go to Gatutsi when he wanted milk but he must cultivate. Finally, Gihanga told Gatwa that he must go everywhere Gatutsi goes and when Gatutsi holds ceremonies, he must give Gatwa a goat every time. Gatwa would then be there doing nothing, except dancing for and protecting the king of Rwanda. Nothing would go to the king without passing by Gatwa.

This creation story that situates the Twa among the Hutu and Tutsi as brothers is common in Rwandan society and is a clear reflection of the historical relationship and bond that has existed between the three groups.

Speaking in theoretical terms, Berry's 'separation' as a form of acculturation is asserted as a way of preserving an identity, culture, or sovereignty against various circumstances, whether it is cultural degradation or the opposing values of other groups. Our findings reveal that for the vast majority of Twa, even those in former hunter-gatherer communities, there was little or no interest in removing themselves from wider Rwandan society. Throughout each of the 15 focus groups, all participants were asked, 'How would you self identify?'. Out of the 235 individuals who participated in these focus groups, 224 (95%) said that they saw themselves as Rwandans. The remaining 11 saw themselves as Abasangwabutaka or simply chose not to self-identify as anything distinct.

More than this, most Twa respondents expressed an overwhelming desire to retain the label Twa, while remaining Rwandan. 205 of the 235 focus group participants (87%) self-identified as Twa, and some focus group participants mentioned the label as a vehicle to having a political voice with other Rwandans:

To call me Twa is good because it gives me chance to sit together with Tusti and Hutu (Francois, Twa, Nyagatare).

They should integrate the Twa... If there is representation we have a voice. Now, there is no voice (Jean Pierre, Gasabo Focus Group 1).

Moreover, questionnaire respondents were also overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the Twa label:

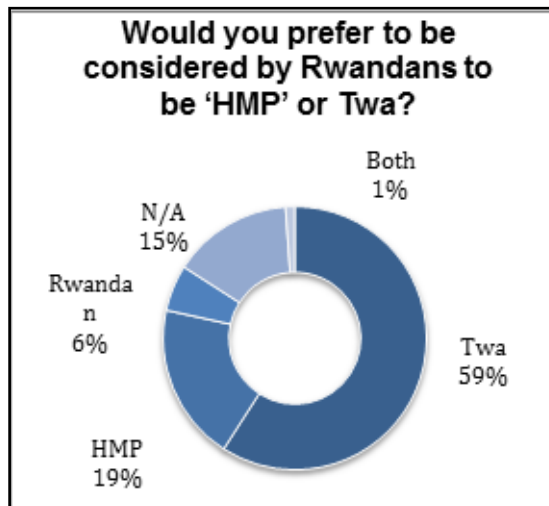


Figure 6

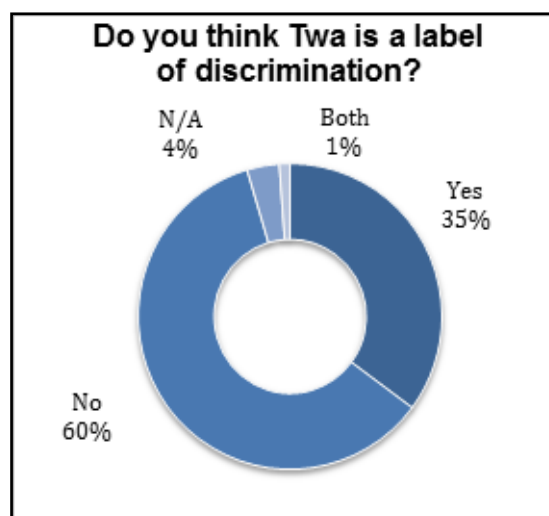


Figure 7

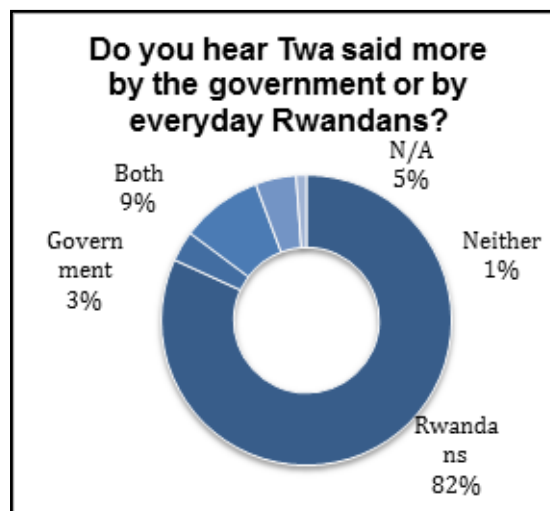


Figure 8

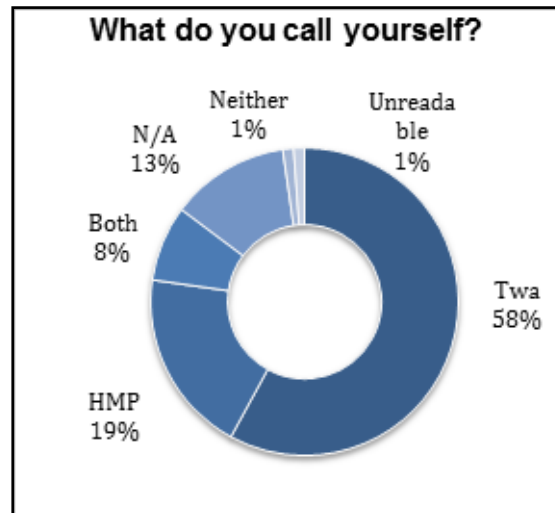


Figure 9

In figures 6, 7, and 9, there is a clear desire to self-identify as Twa because this is the label that shapes their day to day reality, as shown by figure 8 whereby 82% of respondents answered that they hear 'Twa' from their fellow Rwandans as opposed to 'HMP'.

It must be recognized that there was also a small cohort who expressed anguish with the 'Twa' label given its historical and pejorative connotations, a fact that echoes the desire that the Twa have to overcome the stigma that is associated with Twa identity:

When called "Twa", we feel as animals being hunted (Male, Nyaraguru Focus Group 1).

Q: When you are called 'Twa', are you offended?

A: Yes, very much

Q: Why?

A: Because I am Rwandese, even HMP; you feel apart, you feel marginalized (Theodore, Gicumbi, Focus Group 2).

What is clear from this present analysis is that the Twa do not want to voluntarily or involuntarily separate themselves because they view themselves first as Rwandans. Instead, in terms of government policy it would be wiser to consult with Twa communities on how best to integrate them via nuanced programming, as mentioned previously in Figure 2, as well as through an integrative acculturative process that is a voluntary one.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to place the 'Historically Marginalized People' label under critical examination to examine how the Twa are being acculturated into modern day Rwanda. The process of acculturation, as put forth by Berry, is complex and comprises various approaches that dictate how groups coexist in a single society. In the case of the Twa in Rwanda, their acculturative history throughout the 20th century is best characterized as an involuntary marginalization as a result of colonial racial and ethnic ideology and an embedded discrimination against the Twa hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

It is only under the post-1994 government that the Twa have been enshrined legally as equal citizens and given socio-economic assistance to extract them from this perpetual cycle of marginalization. The government's use of the term 'Historically Marginalized People', though, as a way of avoiding divisive terminology and as a means of identifying and assimilating the Twa via positive discrimination, needs to be revisited.

The results of this study show that this term lacks clarity at official levels and is perceived by Twa communities as a label that exceptionalizes them among Rwandans and thus perpetuates the cycle of marginalization. The ambiguity of the HMP label and its lack of nuance towards the unique history and culture that characterizes the Twa within Banyarwanda, when combined with the largely negative opinions of the Twa towards the label, reveals that there is an involuntary process of acculturation that requires revision if there is a desire to achieve a united Rwandan populace.

Otherwise, socio-economic assistance, without nuance and consultation with the Twa, will likely continue to show few positive results; the result of this being strained relations between the Twa and their non-Twa neighbors who view such HMP programming as wasted resources. For a positive acculturation process to bear fruit, it is clear that the Twa desire a chance to continue using the Twa label more than adopting the HMP label which they believe carries the same stigma and leaves them questioning how they were marginalized in the first place.

Recognizing the history and narrative of the Twa as Banyarwanda and consulting with communities on tailoring socio-economic programming would not add to the continued marginalization that is already being experienced by the Twa on an unofficial level – nor would re-examining the HMP label and its meaning on an official level. What is clear is that the Twa desire a positive voluntary integration into the Rwandan population which includes viewing them as equals. To do this, it must be recognized that socio-economic pseudonyms do little to challenge generations of discriminatory attitudes towards a small and identifiable population.

This paper has added to the literature on appropriate methods of acculturation vis-à-vis Indigenous Peoples in Africa, and provided evidence based on research among Twa communities themselves. At the same time, this article has attempted to underline the need to begin conversing about a community that is as Rwandan as the Intwatwa music they sing and yet whose own historical plight as Rwanda's third and smallest group is largely ignored.

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Primary Resources

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 Focus Group Gasabo #2
 Focus Group Gicumbi #1
 Focus Group Gicumbi #2
 Focus Group Musanze
 Focus Group Nyagatare #1
 Focus Group Nyagarate #2
 Focus Group Nyamagabe
 Focus Group Nyamasheke
 Focus Group Nyaraguru #1
 Focus Group Nyaraguru #2
 Focus Group Rwamagana #1
 Focus Group Rwamagana #2
 Focus Group Rwamagana #3
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