Becoming "Historically Marginalized Peoples": examining Twa perceptions of boundary shifting and re-categorization in post-genocide Rwanda

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Becoming "Historically Marginalized Peoples": examining Twa perceptions of boundary shifting and re-categorization in post-genocide Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The overwhelming majority of academic literature on pre- and post-genocide Rwanda focuses on the Hutu-Tutsi duality while resigning the narratives of the Twa to a mere footnote. From their nomadic lifestyle as hunter-gathers, to their experiences of conflict and genocide, to their perceptions of political transition and post-conflict nation-building, little is known about the lived realities of Rwanda's most marginal minority. This article addresses this gap by exploring the impact of the government of Rwanda's national unity project on the Twa using survey, interview and focus group data with Twa youth, community leaders and villagers. Borrowing from Andreas Wimmer's taxomony of boundary-making strategies, it shows that despite state-led efforts to unmake Twa identity by blurring ethnic boundaries and recategorizing the Twa as "Historically Marginalized Peoples", Twa have a strong attachment to their identity and culture and challenge government efforts to re-draw boundaries through everyday acts of resistance.

That ethnic identities are socially constructed categories of analysis is conventional wisdom in social science circles. Routine references to the "constructed", "dynamic", "power-driven", and even "ephemeral" character of ethnic identity are strong indications of constructivism's ascendance. But aside from critiquing their "naturalness" and treating ethnicity as a variable, constructivists agree on little else. Questions about the ease with which identity categories are (de)constructed, by whom, and under what conditions continue to generate heated scholarly exchanges. Post-genocide Rwanda is an interesting setting in which to examine processes of ethnic boundary (un)making because the state seeks to rapidly transform the relationship between ethnicity and nationhood by promoting a "unifying" conception of

Rwandan national identity while simultaneously denigrating ethnicity as a sinister foreign construct associated with the ideology of oppression that caused the genocide. Academic analyses of the impact of this shift on popular perceptions of political transition, social trust and reconciliation abound. Yet, the overwhelming majority of this literature reinforces the image of an ethnically bipolar state, composed of Hutu and Tutsi struggling to co-exist, thus side-lining the narratives of Rwanda's most marginal minority, the Batwa (Twa).[1] In this article, we argue that the particular situation of the Twa offers unique insights into the modalities of ethnic boundary-making, negotiation and contestation. In addition to criminalizing the expression of Twa identity, the GoR has also introduced a new identity category – namely, "Historically Marginalized Peoples" (HMP) – which ostensibly refers to "all Rwandans left behind by history" but is widely interpreted as a moniker for "Twa." The introduction of the HMP category adds an additional layer of complexity to the boundary-making process, which illuminates broader questions about power, external categorization and processes of internalization.

Based on interviews, focus groups and survey analysis collected during a combined 14 months of fieldwork, this article examines the ways in which Twa perceive, interpret, experience and enact the HMP label in relation to the Government of Rwanda's (GoR) national unity programme. This snapshot of their everyday interaction with government policy illuminates both the unpopularity of the HMP label among individual Twa, and the continued relevance of Twa identity and culture at the community level. We find no evidence that Twa were consulted prior to the adoption of the label in 2007. We also note considerable confusion surrounding the term's origins, definition and use. However, despite this ambiguity, few Twa display indifferences toward the label, and many challenge its imposition using counterhegemonic strategies. Borrowing from Andreas Wimmer's (2008a, 2013) typology of boundary-making strategies, we show that some Twa resist the HMP label by embracing a strategy of boundary *expansion*, insisting on "being Rwandan" rather than "HMP", while others pursue the more dangerous strategies of boundary *contraction* by self-ascribing as "Twa" or the hyphenated, "Rwandan-Twa", and boundary *inversion* by linking Twa identity to the transnational Indigenous rights movement. Our work makes a significant contribution to theories of ethnic boundary making, which draw on constructivist logic by showing the limitations of external or imposed categorization to de-construct ethnic boundaries, even in controlled authoritarian settings. Instead, we show that members of marginalized categories contest and carefully subvert top-down efforts to re-draw boundaries in subtle acts of "everyday resistance" (Thomson 2013).

Our argument is developed in four sections. Section one positions our case study in the academic literature on the comparative study of ethnicity to make a case for examining Twa perceptions of the GoR's national unity project. The

second section provides an overview of the historical and contemporary situation of the Twa, drawing insights from the scant literature on Twa populations in Rwanda. The third section uses Wimmer's typology to interpret the GoR's treatment of Twa in the post-genocide period, referring to strategies of boundary *expansion, blurring* and re-categorization. The final section outlines our research methodology and presents our main findings.

The making of ethnicity: an evolving debate

Frederick Barth (1969) was among the first scholars to challenge the treatment of ethnic "groups" as "real and substantial entities" (Brubaker 1996, 13), and to fashion ethnic boundary-making as a product of ongoing social processes. "The Barthian paradigm" inaugurated a shift in ethnicity studies, pioneering what became known as social constructivism. Heated debate emerged between proponents of constructivism and devotees of "Herderian ontology" (Wimmer 2009, 254), which fashioned ethnic groups as "self-evident units of observation" for social inquiry (Wimmer 2013, 21). The literature framed this debate as a schism between "essentialism/primordialism" (see, e.g. Connor 1994; Geertz 1973; Shils 1957; Van Evera 2001), according to which ethnic groups are historical givens rooted in affective emotional attachments; and "instrumentalism/ constructivism" (see, e.g. Brass 1997; Brubaker 2004; Laitin 1986, 1998; Wimmer 2013), according to which ethnic "groups" are *socially constructed* categories of analysis, (re)produced by structural forces, discursive formulations, and behavioural patterns. A second but related debate emerged in the 1980s and 1990s focusing on the origins of the nation, distinguished conceptually from the ethnic "group" because of its fusion of ethnicity and territorial claims to self-government. Here, "modernism" was contrasted with "perennialism", the former claiming that nations are the product of modern state-formation shaped by such forces as industrialization, print capitalism and democratization (see, e.g. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Haas 1986); the latter claiming that nations are stable principles of social organization with pre-modern roots in the ethnic community (see, e.g. Connor 1994; Smith 1986). These debates no longer generate theoretically fertile insights given the "routine beatings of the dead primordial horse" (Wimmer 2013, 2). Modern primordialist theory accepts that ethnic identities are constructed at some stage throughout history, yet it maintains that under certain conditions identities operate as "fixed", "crystalized" and "resilient".

Debate has thus evolved from an interest in the generic origins of ethnic/national identity – i.e. whether natural or constructed – to consideration of the ease with which identity categories can be (un)made: "Just how fluid are ethnic identities? How quickly and easily can new ethnic groupings be constructed?" Is this, "a process that spans generations … [o]r do these creations emerge quickly at the behest of politicians?" (Farree 2012, 312). Whereas early

canonical works focused on macrohistorical trends over the long durée (see, e.g. Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1986), more recent contributions scrutinize the modalities of boundary shifts over shorter periods of time to unearth changes in the content and topography of ethnic boundaries, and to survey shifting representations of "groupness" (see, e.g. Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Ignatief 1995; Omi and Winant 1994). Relatedly, a branch of anthropology, sometimes dubbed the "situationalist school", examines contextual rather than temporal variability, claiming that individuals identify with myriad social categories and invoke different levels of differentiation depending on the logic of the situation (see, e.g. Nagata 1974; Okamura 1981; Song 2003; Waters 1990). Andreas Wimmers' (2008b, 2013) multilevel process theory of ethnic boundary-making is a sophisticated attempt to synthesize these schools of thought, for it integrates institutions, power differentials and political networks into a single analytical framework to explain variation in the political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation and stability of ethnic boundaries across time *and* space.

Borrowing from Barth's lexicon, the emphasis in the existing scholarship tends to be on the *internal* process of "group" identification – when "actors signal to in- or out-group members a self-definition of their nature or identity" – at the expense of *external definition* or imposed categorization (Jenkins 1994, 198–99). A separate but related body of literature examines external categorization practices in relation to the state as an instrument of power and control (see, e.g. Caplan and Torpey 2001; Jackson 1999; Kertzer and Arel 2002). Many studies of colonial and post-colonial societies, for example, explore how official schemes of classification, such as censuses, identification documents and quota systems, not only shape understandings of "groupness", but also "*construct* and *constitute* the groups they ostensibly describe" (Brubaker 2009, 33). But while the powerful may institutionalize shifts in ethnic boundaries and make these consequential for ordinary people, they cannot induce belief, nor can they prevent the emergence of counter-discourses that represent a critique of power.[2] This generates important questions about the conditions under which imposed categories take hold in the minds of individuals, muddying the divide between *internal* and *external definition* (Jenkins 1994, 199).

Post-genocide Rwanda provides an interesting setting in which to examine the interaction between *external* categorization and *internal* group-definition because the state has imposed and tightly policies a radically different conception of nationhood on its domestic publics in the aftermath of the genocide. This dramatic shift in Rwanda's national imagining has inspired a wealth of literature on the relationship between the state, power and ethnicity, much of which highlights the gap between government projections of national unity and popular struggles to rebuild social networks at the micro level (see, e.g. Buckley-Zistel 2009; Hintjens 2008; Ingelaere 2010; Thomson

2013). But there are noteworthy gaps in these analyses chief among which is the tendency of scholars to ignore Rwanda's most marginal minority, the Twa. With few notable exceptions (see, e.g. Adamczyk 2011; Beswick 2011; Thomson 2009), Twa experiences of violence, regime change and post-war reconstruction elicit a mere footnote in the leading academic literature on Rwanda. Moreover, cursory depictions of the Twa as a primordial group of former hunter-gathers reinforce longstanding tendencies to exoticize the Twa as ethnic "Others" while oversimplifying the linguistic and cultural diversity of Twa groups that inhabit Africa's Great Lakes region (comprising Burundi, Eastern DRC, Uganda and Rwanda) (see, e.g. Kohtamaki 2010). Such depictions do little to overturn racist depictions of the Twa as primitive "pygmies" (see, e.g. Klieman 2003; Woodburn 1997), representing an early evolutionary stage of humanity, found in early commentaries from missionary ethnographers who visited Rwanda (see, e.g. Pearson 1936; de Lacger 1939; Lestrade 1955). While organizations such as "Minority Rights Group International" (see, e.g. Lewis 2000; Warrilow 2008; Ramsay 2010), "Forest Peoples Programme" (Huggins 2009), and the "International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs" (Lewis and Knight 1995) challenge these constructions by producing insightful surveys of the socio-economic and livelihood status of the Twa in present-day Rwanda, they continue to treat the Twa as distinct from the broader Rwandan population, thus offering limited analytical and comparative insight to contribute to theory-building. The remainder of this paper seeks to position the Twa in broader theoretical debates about post-conflict nation-building and ethnicity management by arguing that the GoR's peculiar treatment of the Twa offers a unique perspective on the ways in which marginalized populations experience and resist *external categorization* in everyday life.

Displaced and unheard: the Twa of Rwanda

While historians often dispute the nature and timing of the migratory patterns that brought Bantu-speaking populations to Africa's Great Lakes region, few disagree that the Twa were the region's first inhabitants.[3] Oral traditions common to many ethnic groups identify the Twa as Indigenous peoples of Central Africa who survived for centuries primarily as hunters and foragers in the equatorial forests near the great marshlands. Over time, patterns of avoidance in marriage, residence and commensality (practices termed *kuneena batwa*) emerged between the Twa and the wider population stemming in part from the antediluvian association of the Twa with gluttony, impurity and moral indecency – degrading stereotypes that persist today (Taylor 2011, 187). While these practices antedate colonialism by centuries, European notions of biological determinism reinforced and exacerbated localized understandings of Rwanda's "concentric hierarchy", which placed the

Tutsi elite and Twa groups at opposite poles (Taylor 2011, 201). From an early point in Rwanda's history, cultivators and herders gradually encroached on Twa homelands to clear the forests for agricultural and pastoral land. The Twa resisted, sometimes violently, the loss of their subsistence base, but large-scale deforestation, conflict leading to violence, mining and resource extraction, and the creation of lucrative national parks meant that as early as the mid-nineteenth century, the majority of Twa groups were unable to survive in accordance with their traditional way of life. Twa became black-smiths, woodcrafters, tinkers, day labourers and potters – marginal subsistence strategies that involved direct contact with the earth – reinforcing the association of Twa with impure low-status labour. Some Twa became clients of Tutsi kings, performing important services at the royal court as dancers, musicians, spies, secret messengers, warriors and even assassins and court executioners (Lewis and Knight 1995, 25–37).

Between 1974 and 1994, the remaining forest-dwelling Twa in Rwanda were expelled from Volcanoes National Park, Gushwati-Mukura National Park and Nyungwe National Park. They now constitute the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the country, comprising an estimated 25,000–30,000 people, approximately 0.25 percent of Rwanda's population (IWGIA 2019, para. 1). Twa groups are also found in Burundi, Uganda and the DRC, with the wider population numbering an estimated 70,000–80,000 people. While all Twa groups experience discrimination and insecurity, the rate and impact of deforestation is not equally distributed: much of the lowland forest remains intact in the Congo basin, meaning the Twa of the DRC have greater access to the forest than their Eastern brethren (Lewis 2000, 5). Owing to their sustainable use of forest resources, the Twa of Rwanda did not leave evidence of land exploitation, which enabled colonial administrations and post-independence governments to claim the land as "vacant" from a Eurocentric legal framework. Twa are therefore denied rights over their traditional forest territories and have been forced to adopt a sedentary way of life (Huggins 2009, 9–10). The overwhelming majority of adults also lack formal education, and many Twa children do not regularly attend school due to food insecurity, poverty, poor health and ongoing discrimination. The pottery industry has also waned as more durable plastic and metal products have become available, and land shortages have led the GoR to drain marshlands, depriving the Twa of clay (Warrilow 2008, 7–8, 15).

Conspicuous in their absence from government programming on national unity and reconciliation, the Twa are considered tangential to the causes and consequences of the genocide, and therefore tangential to post-genocide reconstruction. Yet, an estimated 30 percent (ca. 10,000) of Rwanda's Twa population perished during the genocide against Tutsi in 1994, while a third of the remaining population was displaced. In some villages, as many as 80 percent of Twa were killed. The genocide also led to virtual landlessness,

from which Twa communities have yet to recover.[4] Twa experiences of regime transition and post-conflict nation-building thus differ markedly from other Rwandans, and in ways that contribute to the comparative study of ethnic boundary-making, negotiation and contestation. In what follows, we explore Twa reactions to government policy to draw broader conclusions about the micro-politics of power, internalization and resistance.

Boundary (un)making in the "New" Rwanda

Andreas Wimmer's (2013) typology of "five elementary strategies of boundary making" is a useful framework for conceptualizing shifts in the topography and meaning of ethnic boundaries in post-genocide Rwanda (44–63). Wimmer identifies two strategies that aim to change the location of existing boundaries: namely, *(i) expansion* by incorporating, amalgamating or super-seding existing ethnic categories into a larger whole, and *(ii) contraction* by splitting extant categories, or "shifting emphasis to lower levels of differen-tiation" (Wimmer 2013, 55). The remaining strategies aim to modify the meaning of ethnic boundaries through: *(iii) transvaluation* or *inversion* by upending the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories, *(iv) crossing* or re-positioning by changing the status of a group within the hierarchy, and *(v) blurring* by creating non-ethnic forms of identification to erode ethnic bound-aries. The GoR's national unity campaign is a clear example of boundary *expansion,* for it seeks to "amalgamate" all existing social categories into a new Rwandan nation devoid of ethnic underpinnings. In this imaginary, national unity is portrayed as "a traditional value which must be reasserted, reinforced and taught to all Rwandans" based on a particular reading of pre-colonial Rwandan history, which emphasizes selective episodes of social cohesion, unity and patriotism (Office of the President of the Republic 1999, 16). The flipside of this process is to present ethnicity as a sinister foreign con-struct associated with the ideology of oppression that caused the genocide. The GoR attacks the political relevance of ethnicity on this basis and adopts a strategy of boundary *blurring* by removing the terms "Hutu", "Tutsi" and "Twa" from formal decrees and policies and proscribing the public expression of ethnic identity outside of the official frame of the genocide. The 2001 Organic Law criminalizes, "the use of any speech, written statement or action based on ethnicity" in order to combat "divisionism" – or the attempt to contest the unity of Rwandans (RoR 2001, art. 8), while the 2008 Law "Relating to the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Ideology," defines the latter in sweeping terms to render ethnic labelling illegal with severe punitive consequences, including possible imprisonment up to twenty-five years and fines ranging from 200,000 to five million RWF (approxi-mately 5500 USD) (RoR 2008, art. 4, 6). In line with this, the GoR criminalizes the expression of Twa identity to facilitate, "[t]he integration of the Batwa

into all levels of society" (Johnson Busingye quoted in IRIN 2006, 17). Contravening its ban on group labels, however, it introduced a new category in the 2003 Constitution, stipulating that the President is required to appoint eight "historically marginalized" senators (art. 80, 2). The wording of this category shifted in a 2007 Senatorial report, which referred to "*Abahejejwe inyuma n'amateka*" or, "those who are left behind by history," translated in the corresponding English-language document to "Historically Marginalized Peoples" (RoR 2007).[5] Although the term HMP has never officially been defined, a 2016 senatorial report links it to the Twa, defining HMP as a "distinct group, numbering 35,000 individuals … [having] had poor access to land, medical care and education, and mainly [having] gained a living from hunting and gathering and more recently from making pottery." The report was never publicly released, and most civil society organizations interpret "HMP" as an umbrella category encompassing "all Rwandans left behind by history", with many including women, people with disabilities, Muslims and the Twa.

The GoR's recategorization of the Twa is a clear example of boundary *blurring* as its purpose is to erode the political relevance of Twa identity by fusing it to a more encompassing system of classification based on historical experiences of oppression. The label could also be framed as a *transvaluation* strategy, which seeks to establish "equality in status and power" for HMP by creating a basis for positive discrimination, albeit the GoR's refusal to recognize the Twa as Indigenous peoples suggests the limits of its "transvaluation" efforts.[6] Government officials cite historic reasons for rebuffing claims of Indigeneity, linked to the devastating impact of the "Hamitic Hypothesis" on Hutu-Tutsi relations. The latter is a discredited nineteenth century European race theory, which refers to the "waves of migration" that brought Hutu agriculturalists and Tutsi pastoralists to the home of the forest-dwelling Twa. It surmises that the Tutsi were neither a Bantu people (like the Hutu) nor a Pygmoid people (like the Twa), but rather a Hamitic tribe, descended from "a superior Caucasoid race" (Sanders 1969, 521). The post-Independence Hutu republics inverted this racist ethnography to discredit Tutsi supremacy, stoke fears among the "Indigenous" Hutu of a "Hamitic" conspiracy and induce violence against the Tutsi, culminating in the 1994 genocide. A localized reading of the Twa as "the autochthonous population of the land" thus rouses memories of Rwanda's violent past (see, e.g. Adamczyk 2011, 181–184).

The GoR's rationale suggests its conflation of the terms, "autochthony" and Indigeneity. Our fieldwork revealed that many Rwandans, including Twa, also use these terms interchangeably despite the important conceptual distinction in contemporary political discourse, particularly in Francophone Africa. While the former "center[s] on ideas of priority in time ('coming first')" and "spiritual bonds with the land" (Pelican 2009, 53), thus invoking contentious questions about migration and the "Hamitic Myth" in Rwanda, the latter is generally

associated with the transnational Indigenous rights movement, which finds expression in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)[7] among other international instruments. The UN embraces an expanded definition of "Indigeneity" tied to, "the occupation and specific use of territory", "voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness", "self-identification", and a historic or present experience of "subjugation, marginalisation, dispossession, exclusion, or discrimination" (Daes 1996, 22). A mis-reading of the UN definition may in part explain the GoR's rejection of claims for Indigeneity, but there are also practical and strategic reasons for denying the Twa Indigenous status. By preventing NGOs and human rights activists from connecting Twa discourses to the global Indigenous rights framework, the GoR removes the possibility of internationally recognized land claims to traditional Twa territories that have been converted into lucrative national parks.[8]

Twa perceptions of shifting identity categories

Given the recent shift in the framing of Twa identity, how effective have the GoR's strategies of boundary *expansion*, *blurring* and re-categorization been in terms of transforming *internal* group-identification at the micro level? How do Twa perceive and experience national identity, and how do they relate to the HMP label? To answer these questions, we draw on data from fourteen semi-structured focus groups Collins and Ntakirutimana conducted in nine districts in Rwanda in 2015, which allowed for multiple voices to be heard and incorporated cultural practices such as traditional song and dance to create an open environment for conversation. A total of 235 Twa participated in these sessions, with a gender breakdown of sixty-one percent women (143) and thirty-nine percent men (92). We also analyse data from eight additional focus groups, with a total of seventy participants, carried out by Ntakirutimana between July and September of 2018 in Musanze district. Four of these sessions were gender segregated (two women-only and two men-only), two were targeted at Twa youth (18–25 years), and the remaining two were restricted to village elders (>60 years). Semi-structured focus groups were also conducted with ten of Rwanda's forty-five university educated Twa (at the time of field work in 2015).[9] We supplement our analysis with findings from eighty-eight structured questionnaires on Twa perceptions of the HMP label, distributed in Kinyarwanda between August and December 2015 (see, Collins and Ntakirutimana 2017). Before proceeding, we briefly highlight the ethical challenges of conducting ethnographic research in Rwanda: a country in which the government exerts significant control over socio-political discourses, and where insecurity, distrust and suspicion are pervasive offshoots of the recent history of violence. Many participants were not comfortable being recorded during focus groups and preferred that we take

notes instead. We heeded these requests. Where recordings took place, we kept a single and encrypted copy of each recording on password-secure computers and erased the file once it was translated. Nowhere in this paper do we use specific place names, and all personal names are pseudonyms.

The results of our fieldwork suggest that government projections of "unity" among Rwandans do not correspond to the experiences of Twa communities on the ground. Most Twa have not internalized the state's definition of the Rwandan nation, nor have they adopted the HMP label as a replacement for ethnic identification. In fact, the imposition of the HMP category seems to have had the opposite effect of reinforcing group cohesion, in part because of the confusion surrounding the term. Nowhere in our research were we able to locate the origins of the term, and we found no evidence that Twa were consulted on the name prior to its adoption. Bonita's observations during a focus group in Rwamagana district are characteristic of many respondents: "[t]he name 'HMP' came after the genocide, and with the change of government. In the IDs before the genocide, they were Twa, Hutu and Tutsi." When we asked respondents to define the term "HMP", we noted considerable confusion: Claude from Gasabo district provides a nuanced conceptualization: "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." Paul, from Gasabo district, offers a similar view:

> … 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.

Jacques, a middle-aged man from Nyagatare district, expresses greater confusion, more characteristic of many of our respondents: "Has history marginalized us or have we marginalized ourselves throughout history? I don't understand the term."

The results of Collins and Ntakirutimana's (2017) survey analysis confirm this confusion. Looking at the responses to the question, "Do you know the meaning of HMP?", sixty-seven percent of respondents either "did not know" or were "unsure". The twenty percent of respondents that claim to have knowledge of the term do not provide a clear, singular interpretation.[10] The following are a sample of answers received in response to a question that asked eight-eight respondents to define "Historically Marginalized Peoples":

A. A word cursed by god;
B. A word showing that people should not have a seat at the table;
C. An English word that means "Twa";[11]

D. A word that implies a person has been discriminated against for a long time;

E. A word showing that a person is physically short;

F. Impoverished;

G. Twa (x 6);

H. Left behind (x 2).

Answers A, B and F offer a negative interpretation of the term, which reflect longstanding stereotypes of the Twa positioned at the bottom of Rwanda's ethnic hierarchy. Answers D and H offer more sterilized, albeit quite literal, interpretations, while answer G, repeated six times by respondents, suggests a common view that HMP is synonymous with "Twa", challenging the interpretation of civil society organizations that "HMP" is an umbrella term encompassing multiple groups. Answer C is perhaps the most telling as it unveils a view that the label is alien, unfamiliar and decidedly "un-Rwandan".

Despite the ambiguity surrounding its origins and meaning, however, few respondents express indifference to the HMP label, and many highlight its use as an instrument of government control. Thomas, a participant in a focus group in Burera district, speaks to this when he links the HMP category to the term, "*abatejwimbere nimiberoho myiza*", translated as, "people who developed because of good governance." Survey results offer a similar interpretation. When asked whether the term "HMP" was used more by the government or by everyday Rwandans, sixty percent of respondents answered "government", while only twenty-four percent answered "Rwandans".[12] These findings suggest that the Twa have not passively received and internalized the imposed HMP label, but instead resist assimilation and show a strong attachment to their identity. Moreover, many Twa are willing to defend their cultural authenticity, despite associated risks. We found the most common form of resistance is to pursue a strategy of what Thomson calls, "irrelevant compliance" (2013, 150) by utilizing the official terminology in the presence of local authorities and other agents of the state, but covertly undermining it in the presence of family, friends and trusted community members by continuing to use the term, "Twa". This tactic situates Twa "on a very fine line between the insubordination that could bring down harsh punishment on [their] head and the compliance that would efface [their] own subjectivity and opinions": by being seen to use the appropriate terminology, Twa remain law-abiding, but in thwarting the label's use in private, they undermine the "popular unity on which the government's claims for success are based" (Thomson 2013, 453).

Popular opinions about which alternative category to use (if any) vary considerably. "They should integrate the Twa", Jean-Pierre emphatically states in a focus group in Gasabo, along with many other participants who advocate for the removal of a "special category" altogether, questioning why Hutu and

Tutsi are simply called Rwandans and Twa have been re-branded as HMP. Twa who pursue this tactic counter official strategies of boundary *blurring* and re-categorization using the GoR's own strategy of boundary *expansion* to identify with a monolithic conception of the Rwandan nation, into which all Rwandans must assimilate. More common than this, however, is the tendency among Twa to embrace a hyphenated "Rwandan-Twa" identity: while ninety-five percent of participants (224 of 235 participants) in fourteen focus groups see themselves as Rwandan, less than five percent (eleven of 235 individuals) indicate a preference for identifying solely as "Rwandan" as opposed to "Twa *and* Rwandan." Moreover, respondents do not see their dual identities as inconsistent. On the contrary, eighty-seven percent of participants (205 of 235 individuals) express the desire to be "Twa" and "Rwandan" simultaneously, viewing these identities as nested and mutually reinforcing, while only eight percent (nineteen respondents) indicate a preference for a hyphenated "HMP" and "Rwandan" identity.[13]

The rejection of the HMP label appears to stem from a widespread belief among respondents that the latter has intensified Twa marginalization, rather than contributed to "positive discrimination". "We are saddened," says Christelle during a focus group in Nyaruguru district, "because we are the only people whom are called that name [HMP] … because we are poor." François explicitly makes this connection in a structured focus group with university-educated Twa:

> Even girls are also historically marginalized. They were historically maltreated in the society. But you don't say that women are historically marginalized people. The woman is not an HMP. It is like it is a sort of discrimination but without mentioning that ethnie [*sic*].

Jean from Gasabo furthers this point, with a hint of anger in her voice:

> Why?! Why are we called the "historically 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? … For me, I know that I am [Rwandan], but in the books, I am a "historically marginalization [*sic*] people". I would like to know how the government will handle that problem.

Beyond these practical considerations, Many Twa express intense pride in their culture, identity and history, often emphasizing a strong attachment to traditional song and dance (the *Intwatwa* genre). Others celebrate the peaceful history of the Twa, who despite being collateral victims in conflicts between Hutu and Tutsi, have never instigated violence. The historical association of the Twa with the Tutsi nobility also remains strong in the collective memory and is a source of considerable pride for many Twa, as evidenced by Innocent's (a village elder) revisionist rendition of an oft-quoted *ibitéekerezo* (historical tale). In this origin myth, which gives Tutsi supremacy a

cosmological origin, Gihanga, the "Father" of the Rwandan kingdom, entrusts his three sons – Gatutsi, Gahutu and Gatwa – with a full calabash of milk overnight. Legend has it that Gahutu became drowsy, dozing off and spilling the gourd's contents. Gatwa became thirsty and drank from the calabash, while Gatutsi succeeded in preserving his milk until the morning. For his courage and obedience, Gihanga decried that only Gatutsi was fit to own cattle and rule over Rwanda. Gahutu was condemned to labour and servitude, while Gatwa, unable to contain his unquenchable thirst, was destined to alternate between periods of gluttony and starvation (see, e.g. Mamdani 2001, 79–80). In Innocent's version of events, however, Gatwa is rescued from his position at the bottom of the implied hierarchy through his association with the Tutsi royal Court, for which he provided indispensable services. Innocent recounts:

> 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.

By invoking pride in their history and identity, and continuing to identify as "Twa" or "Rwandan-Twa", respondents like Innocent adopt a strategy of boundary *contraction,* (re)drawing narrower boundaries to disassociate with the HMP category and shift emphasis to lower levels of differentiation, thus reinforcing an identity category that legally does not exist. They also adopt a strategy of *transvaluation*, seeking either to reverse the existing ethnic hierarchy by re-conceptualizing Twa identity as morally and culturally superior to the dominant groups (normative *inversion*), or to establish equality by re-interpreting historical subjugation as a heroic struggle against injustice (normative *equalization*) (Wimmer 2008a, 1037–38). In a similar fashion, several respondents describe themselves as "*abasangwabutaka*", a Kinyarwanda term loosely translated to, "those who were found first", in order to identify with a new, positive image of Twa as "First peoples". When asked what it means to be "*abasangwabutaka*", several participants emphasized their connection to their ancestral homelands. Going one step further, Jerome connects Twa identity to the global Indigenous rights movement, when he defines the Twa as, "people who used to live off the forest, the ones that are referred to as the Indigenous." Invoking the concept of Indigeneity is a tactful manoeuvre, which draws parallels between the situational characteristics of the Twa and Indigenous peoples around the world, thus appealing to an internationally recognized rights framework for pursuing cultural protections and land claims. In the words of university-educated Georges, "We want to be called '*Autochtone*' because if we are *Autochtone* there are the rights from the UN that protect us. We don't have the land … Being called Indigenous is better because we can find a way to fight for our rights."

Support for these alternative systems of classification – i.e. Twa or Indigenous - involves greater risks than the strategy of boundary *expansion* outlined above, for Twa may be accused of fomenting "divisionism" and "genocide ideology", criminal concepts associated with the legal measures outlined in section III, both of which entail severe punitive consequences. The willingness of individuals to show such support, whether openly or covertly (through completion of anonymous questionnaires) shows a level of acumen that belies popular and elite perceptions of "simple" peasant Rwandans. Moreover, knowledge of the potential drawbacks of using the HMP label and the palpable benefits of claiming Indigenous status, is evidence of the post-genocide state's failure to de-politicize "ordinary Rwandans" and enforce compliance with its definition of nationhood. Notably, Egide demonstrates an acute awareness of the politics of Indigeneity in Rwanda in a focus group in Gasabo, speculating that the refusal to recognize the Twa as Indigenous peoples is largely strategic:

> That government is using this disguise [HMP] in order to – in order to remove some rights to the Batwa races. That is why they start using different kinds of names they want … Before they called us *Autochtone*, which means the land is belonging to the Batwa ethnie. For that time, when a race has that name [*Autochtone*], anytime they can fight for their rights in order to gain their land because that land has belonged to the races of the Batwa.

Egide's use of the plural term, "races" to refer to the Twa shows that many Twa perceive their ethnic brethren in Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes region as culturally and historically distinct, despite their shared experiences of land dispossession and rights denial. Egide's comment also suggests a possible regionalization of Twa identity, which connects Twa narratives and rights claims inside Rwanda to Twa groups and other forest specialists in neighbouring countries.

More broadly, our research findings suggest the difficulties of state-led attempts to reconstruct ethnic boundaries, particularly in situations where ethnicity is politically salient, highly institutionalized, and "thick" in terms of the emotional attachment it obtains from "group" members. Elites may transform the institutional structure, which in turn may incentivize new strategies of boundary-making, but the notion that ordinary people will passively internalize imposed categorization leaves no room for autonomous agency.

Conclusion

Scholars of ethnicity have long debated whether ethnic identities are natural or constructed, and a veritable consensus has emerged in the literature: constructivism has won the day "by showing that ethnic groups are fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic and political processes" (Chandra

2001, 7). New questions are motivating scholars, concerning variation in the political salience and historical stability of ethnic boundaries across time and space. Just how fluid are ethnic boundaries? What conditions produce stability, and likewise, facilitate change? A body of scholarship examines these questions in relation to post-independence Rwanda: a country where, prior to the 1994 genocide, ethnicity was strongly institutionalized, and where, ethnic identification is now criminal. But while most scholars examine these questions in relation to Hutu and Tutsi, this article makes a case for considering Rwanda's most marginal minority, the Twa. The post-genocide state's strategies of boundary *expansion,* through its promotion of a "unifying" Rwandan national identity, and boundary *blurring* and re-categorization, through its creation of the HMP label, provide an interesting case in which to observe struggles over boundary-making and contestation.

The research presented in this paper is an innovative attempt to unearth the hidden narratives of the Twa. Our findings suggest that projections of "unity" do not correspond to the everyday realities of Twa. Many participants in our research share stories of hardship, discrimination and disadvantage relative to other Rwandans, and several associate the imposed HMP category with increased marginalization. Twa communities were not consulted prior to the term's adoption, nor were they sensitized on its meaning. In the face of these changes, Twa have asserted a strong attachment to their identity and culture, and resist assimilation into the HMP category. While many Twa publicly counter the imposed categorization by adopting a strategy of boundary *expansion*, insisting on "being" Rwandan rather than HMP, others openly or cautiously pursue the more dangerous strategies of *contraction*, self-ascribing as Twa or the hyphenated, Rwandan-Twa, and *transvaluation*, tying Twa identity to the transnational Indigenous rights movement to redefine the meaning of Twa identity in relation to Rwanda's symbolic ethnic hierarchy.

Notes

1. Batwa and Mutwa are the plural and singular forms of Twa in Kinyarwanda. Twa will be used as a substitute throughout.
2. See, James Scott (1992) on "hidden transcripts".
3. There are exceptions to this. See, for example, Kohtamaki's (2010).
4. Lewis and Knight's (1995) monograph and the mission report of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization and the Association pour la Promotion des Batwa (1995) are two of the only analyses of the impact of the genocide on the Twa of Rwanda.
5. We found that respondents who spoke with us in English varied in their use of "Historically marginalized people" and "Historically marginalized peoples". This did not appear to be done with intent. The correct translation of its Kinyarwanda counterpart is, "Historically Marginalized Peoples".
6. When the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination called on the GoR to recognize the Indigenous status of the Twa in 2016, the Rwandan

delegate insisted there are no "Indigenous peoples" or "alien people" in Rwanda (quoted in UNHCR 2016, para. 32).

7. The UNDRIP is an international instrument adopted by the UN General Assembly on the 13 September 2007, which enshrines the rights that "constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world" (UNGA 2007, art. 43).

8. See, Collins 2014 for a detailed discussion of the "politics of Indigeneity" in post-genocide Rwanda.

9. This number has increased since the time of fieldwork due to a government programme aimed at educating "HMP."

10. The remaining thirteen percent of respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

11. Original responses were given in Kinyarwanda.

12. Ten percent of respondents indicated that government officials and ordinary Rwandans use the term "HMP" in equal measure, while five percent of respondents did not provide an answer to the question.

13. The remaining five percent of participants chose not to answer this question.

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