Education and Conflict in Rwanda
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In the last two decades, armed conflict has shattered the lives of millions of people around the globe. Since the end of the Cold War, intrastate conflict and internecine violence have taken a horrifying toll on societies especially in the developing world. Africa has been among the most affected regions. As the Human Security Report 2012 grimly concluded, »Sub-Saharan Africa has been by far the most conflict-prone region in the post-Cold War years«.

Rwanda is a primary example among the many African countries that have been deeply scarred by recent armed conflict and violence. While this tiny country in the heart of Africa went largely unnoticed for a long time, few nowadays are not aware of its existence in the wake of the infamous 1994 genocide. In just one hundred days, in the course of a civil war fought between the Hutu-dominated government and a rebel movement mainly composed of Tutsi refugees (the RPF), an estimated 800,000 people, mostly from the Tutsi minority, were brutally killed by their neighbours in a frenzy steered by a clique of Hutu extremists. This incident is widely recognised as one of the worst cases of state-sponsored mass violence in recent world history.

Since the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide, a wealth of literature has been produced to try to describe and explain an event that seems to defy all reason and to find ways of preventing its recurrence. Although greatly overlooked by the extant literature, education has been one of the domains that have been identified as possibly offering some answers in this respect. On the one hand, it has been argued that schooling played a negative role in the build-up of internal divisions and tensions that eventually culminated in the massive participation of ordinary people in the violence. On the other hand, education has been acknowledged as a potential force for peace that could contribute to the promotion of reconciliation and social cohesion in the aftermath of the war and genocide.

Education before the genocide

In Rwanda, the role of schooling in engendering ethnic division and tension has been traced back to the establishment of formal education in the colonial era. During this time, education was systematically used in support of a Belgian colonial policy of »divide and rule« which formalised and crystallised Hutu and Tutsi identities while favouring an allegedly racially superior Tutsi elite within a system of indirect rule. The latter group received preferential treatment in terms of both educational access and teaching contents. Members of the Tutsi community were granted privileged access to the country's best educational opportunities with a view to preparing them for a career in the colonial administration as state auxiliaries. Also, Tutsi pupils were imbued with a sense of collective pride and arrogance vis-à-vis their Hutu counterparts. In particular, they were taught that they belonged to the Hamitic race, a superior human breed related to the white race which was extolled as the great »civilizer' of Africa«. As such, the Tutsi were defined as a natural aristocracy which had conquered, dominated and subjugated the autochthonous Bantu Hutu and which was destined to rule over the »inferior Negroes«. Colonial schools thus worked to nourish essentialist and antagonistic identities among the country's educated elites, thereby fostering young people's negative attitudes towards the »other«. Feelings of innate superiority among the Tutsi and of resentment among the marginalised Hutu eventually came to the fore a few years prior to Rwanda's independence in 1962. In an atmosphere marked by scarce educational and employment opportunities and consequently by fierce competition, superiority-inferiority complexes deriving from structural inequalities and Manichean teachings led to major societal tensions between Tutsi and Hutu educated elites, eventually affecting broader society.

At the time of independence in 1962, as the political system was overhauled, the education sector was reformed to reflect and reinforce new dominant interests. As an emergent Hutu elite violently came to power in 1959 with the support of the Belgians, divisive and discriminatory practices that had been introduced during colonisation were maintained and consolidated, this time favouring the Hutu majority. Concerted efforts
were made by the new power-holders to prioritise Hutu education. Since the late 1970s especially, this objective had been pursued mainly through the enforcement of a quota policy, which regulated access to post-primary education as well as to employment based on an artificial demographic formula that estimated Hutu and Tutsi to account for 81% and 9% respectively of the country's total population. Besides perpetuating structural inequality, schools promoted division both through teaching practices and through curriculum and textbook contents which emphasised ethnic differences and conflict. In the classroom, pupils were encouraged by teachers to openly identify and occasionally to divide themselves into groups according to their ethnicity. Their identity-group was then formally recorded in personal files, strengthening a sense of ethnic belonging. Such feelings were reinforced through teachings that conveyed ethno-racial prejudices as well as a biased and Manichean version of Rwandan history, which aimed to legitimise the position of power of the dominant Hutu elites. Among other things, they emphasised the different origins and successive migrations of an autochthonous Hutu majority and of a foreign Tutsi minority. Also, they exalted and celebrated the 1959 violent rise to power of the Hutu elites as a liberation of the masses from a secular condition of feudal servitude imposed by an oppressive and exploitative Tutsi rule, and as the beginning of an era of democracy and social justice. School teachings further underscored the menace posed by the «terrorist» Tutsi refugees and by their attempts to re-invade the country in order to illegitimately re-conquer power.

Questions about the relationship between this type of education and the 1994 genocide have been raised in the face of the zealous participation of educated people in the orchestration and perpetration of the violence. During the genocide, educational institutions across the country saw teachers and pupils persecuting and killing other teachers and fellow students. Often, schools functioned as slaughterhouses where hundreds and even thousands of villagers from the surrounding areas were gathered to be massacred. Eventually, in schools, the violence took a great toll. Infrastructures were severely damaged or completely destroyed, and most teachers were either killed during the genocide or jailed for having allegedly participated in the lunacy. Also, a large number of children were deeply traumatised as a result of having directly witnessed the horrific violence and having profoundly felt its pervasive consequences.

Education in the aftermath of the genocide
As the war and the genocide came to an end in July 1994, the new transitional government, which was installed following the military victory of the RPF, showed its commitment to reforming an education system that was deemed to have contributed to making the genocide possible. At the dawn of the new era, education was soon assigned a key role in the service of a state policy of «national unity and reconciliation». Although critics have raised questions as to the extent of the government's success in this regard, one cannot ignore the laudable efforts to break with the violent past. The government has worked to address a longstanding legacy of inequality and division in the education sector through policies designed to promote greater transparency and accountability, to outlaw ethnic identification and discrimination, and to widen access to a merit-based education. It has also taken steps to transform schools into peace-building tools through a revised curriculum that stresses positive values, including peace, national unity, good citizenship and democracy.

In the context of curriculum change, teaching national history has been a particularly challenging and contested issue in post-genocide Rwanda. As early as 1995, the old curriculum and textbooks were banned for presenting a distorted and antagonistic image of Rwandan history and society. Although the first revised syllabi were issued in the second half of the 1990s, a virtual moratorium was apparently maintained by many teachers, who, provided merely with simple lists of topics and lacking adequate references, had been hesitant to address the country's highly sensitive and controversial history in the classroom. As a result, the new generation was left for a long time without any guidance to help make sense of the past. After more than a dec-
ade of uncertainty about what to teach and how, clear directives have recently come from the state on how to broach the subject. Following the publication of new, detailed curricula in 2008 and 2010, the first officially approved didactic materials since the end of the genocide were issued. In particular, in 2010, the Ministry of Education provided teachers with the much-awaited guide *The History of Rwanda. A Participatory Approach*, a document that clearly outlines what schools are expected to tell children about the nation's past. The new material appears to greatly distance itself from the old rhetoric and to embrace the current government's storyline. This narrative claims to replace a false »ethnicist« history with a »truthful« and »unifying« account of the nation – an account that emphasises national unity while denying the existence of ethnic differences in Rwandan society. In particular, the new history course appears designed to provide historical justification for a government policy that has outlawed »Hutu« and »Tutsi« labels. In stark contrast to pre-genocide history teachings, today's narrative promotes an idealisation and celebration of Rwanda's ancient past as a golden age of harmony and solidarity.

The primary responsibility in dividing the nation and in engendering conflict is nowadays mainly laid upon the colonisers while the country's post-colonial regimes are accused of having perpetuated and exacerbated externally-imposed divisions. The »new history« further seeks to legitimise the RPF's invasion as a »Liberation War« that ousted a dictatorial and murderous regime, and that halted the »Tutsi genocide«. In an effort to consolidate the legitimacy of the new government, the narrative also amply praises its achievements in rebuilding the nation. While many have welcomed the government's attempts to propagate a narrative of unity and reconciliation among Rwandans as a strategy to overcome divisions, several critics have denounced the historical bias of teachings which seem to be primarily intended to keep the current elites in power. The fiercest criticism has targeted this narrative's simplistic and one-sided representation of the war and genocide, and, more specifically, its silence with regard to the crimes reportedly perpetrated by
RPF soldiers against Hutu civilians. Concerned observers have stressed that open and sincere discussions of the country's history have regrettably been hampered by strict controls over which narratives are allowed to circulate in the public domain. In particular, they have deplored the government’s use of legal constraints which have essentially worked to criminalise any deviation from the official discourse on history and identity. There are fears that this largely distorted absolutist history which is taught in and out of school in Rwanda today could eventually counteract rather than advance genuine reconciliation.

**Conclusion**

In the past, the education sector in Rwanda has been implicated in societal conflict and violence. Its reconstruction and reform presented an opportunity to favour national reconciliation and democratisation processes in a deeply divided and traumatised society. Whilst several positive steps have been taken to transform formal education from a conflict-ridden and violent system to a peace-building tool, there still appears to be considerable room for improvement. In particular, the promotion of a reformed history course which is based on a democratic and participatory approach and on a critical exploration of multiple perspectives should be a priority. As Rwandan society is closing a dark chapter in its history, an honest reflection on the past by the new generation is key to attaining the goal of »never again«.

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**Der Charme binationaler Lehrerhandreichungen – Ansprechpartner GEI**

*Robert Maier*

Der Anspruch, nationale Sichtweisen zu überwinden, ist in der historisch-politischen Bildung aktueller denn je. Insbesondere bei europäischen Nachbarn wächst das Bedürfnis, parallel zur schwindenden Bedeutung der Staatsgrenzen auch eine Öffnung der ehemals hermetisch geschlossenen und oft gegeneinander gerichteten nationalen Geschichtsnarrative herbeizuführen. Der Grad der angestrebten Öffnung ist dabei unterschiedlich: Manchmal steht nur der Wunsch im Vordergrund, mit der jeweils eigenen Geschichte im anderen Land besser wahrgenommen zu werden, ein anderer wird eine Vertiefung des Verständnisses für einander durch eine vergleichende Betrachtung angestrebt; schließlich gibt es auch Versuche, die Geschichte in synthetisierender Form gemeinsam zu schreiben.


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