Ethnic Boundaries in Contemporary Rwanda: Fixity, Flexibility and Their Limits

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Abstract: This article investigates how ethnic boundaries operate at the level of everyday practice in post-genocide Rwanda. Using situational analysis of two ethnographic accounts, I argue that Rwandans experience ethnicity as both descent-based (fixed) and social-relational (flexible), the convergence of which finds expression in everyday forms of moral agency. An account of the historical emergence of Tutsi and Hutu ethnic stereotypes develops the idea that, in everyday life, there is no single criterion that Rwandans can use to conclusively resolve how they belong ethnically. Thus, the question of how and when ethnicity matters in the post-genocide period remains uncomfortably open.

Keywords: Rwanda, ethnicity, genocide, state formation, moral agency, urban Africans

Résumé : Cet article examine la façon dont les frontières ethniques opèrent au niveau de la pratique quotidienne dans le Rwanda de l'après-génocide. En utilisant l'analyse situationnelle de deux enquêtes ethnographiques, je soutiens que les Rwandais vivent l'expérience ethnique à la fois comme étant fixée par la descendance et comme s'appuyant sur une relation sociale souple. Cette convergence s'exprime dans les formes quotidiennes de l'action morale. Une étude au sujet de l'émergence historique des stéréotypes ethniques des Hutus et des Tutsis révèle que, dans la vie quotidienne, il n'y a pas de critère unique que les Rwandais peuvent utiliser, de manière concluante, pour savoir quelle est leur appartenance respective. À l'heure actuelle, la question consistant à savoir comment et quand l'ethnicité importe, durant la période de l'après-génocide, demeure malheureusement irrésolue.

Mots-clés : Rwanda, ethnicité, génocide, formation de l'État, action morale, citadins africains

Introduction

In conceptualizing my contribution to this collection in honour of Malcolm Blincow, I aim to capture his commitment to both political economy and rich ethnography to elucidate how broad social forces play out at the level of everyday practice. Such an approach is especially germane for grasping how ethnic difference is produced, evaluated and interpreted in everyday social relationships in contemporary Rwanda. There, the politics of ethnicity have given rise not only to the devastating 1994 genocide but also to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)-led government project of forging a "New Rwanda", which aims to overcome ethnic difference and reduce it to a divisive relic of the colonial past.

Although ethnic politics took on an extraordinary tenor in the 1994 genocide, debates on Rwandan ethnicity parallel those in the wider Africanist literature and beyond. First, in Rwanda and elsewhere, scholars have focused on the conditions under which ethnic differences come to matter politically, particularly the coincidence of ethnic boundary production with decolonization (A. Cohen 1974; Lemarchand 1970; C. Newbury 1988; Williams 1989; Wilmsen and McAllister 1996). Second, two main configurations of ethnic boundaries populate the ethnographic record on Rwanda and constitute an opposition that mirrors larger debates on the nature of ethnic difference (Barth 1969; R. Cohen 1978; Nagata 1974). On the one hand, there is an absolute, "either-or" perspective and, on the other, a fluid, situational approach. In the case of Rwanda, the rigid, caste-like understanding of ethnicity based on patrilineal descent found its classic expression in Jacques Maquet's (1961) "premise of inequality" between Hutu and Tutsi. Against this reductive, descent-based view of ethnicity grew a set of counterperspectives that saw Tutsi and Hutu as social-relational, flexible categories that overlap with differences like region, class, clan and gender (e.g., de Lame 1996; Gravel 1968; Lemarchand 1970; C. Newbury 1988; D. Newbury 1980). However, immediately after

the genocide, the either-or view of ethnicity was again central because of the impulse to account for the role of the ethnic binary in the violence. Scholars traced the historical production of the Tutsi–Hutu opposition and emphasized the relatively recent crystallization of political factions around an either-or view of ethnicity (e.g., Chrétien 2003; des Forges 1995; Mamdani 2001; Prunier 1995) to counter the "ancient tribal hatreds" narrative promoted by the international media during the genocide. However, Lee Ann Fujii (2009:104) argues that ethnicity was more than a rigid binary, even in 1994, as the killing of Hutu as well as Tutsi meant it was not always clear who the main targets were.

As the initial imperative to explain the genocide receded, scholars, especially ethnographers, began to recover the situational view of Rwandese ethnicity. Many emphasize how ethnic boundaries overlap with north–south regional divides, status and class distinctions, and citizenship categories to destabilize RPF claims to having excised ethnicity from the social order by outlawing the labels Tutsi and Hutu (Buckley-Zistel 2006; Burnet 2012; Doughty 2011; Fujii 2009; Jefremovas 1997; McLean Hilker 2009; Thomson 2013). Still, scholars do not deny the ongoing significance of "inherited" ethnicity, as they also highlight the constraints posed by one's ethnic heritage in the post-genocide moment. Inherited ethnicity governs who can openly mourn their dead at genocide commemorations and how one stands in relation to categories like victim, survivor and perpetrator (Burnet 2012; Doughty 2011; Vidal 2004), which profoundly shape how people participate and belong in their social worlds. Thus, even at historical junctures where either rigid or mutable perspectives on ethnicity dominate the literature or Rwandan politics, the other is never ruled out completely.

In this article I do not ask whether a rigid or situational view of ethnicity has greater explanatory power in the Rwandan context. Both configurations exist and matter; anthropologically speaking, the question is how they intersect in the everyday lives of Rwandans. This article contributes a perspective on the practical tensions raised by this convergence of absolute and situational ethnicity. I show how their confluence finds expression in everyday practices of moral agency in the "post-conflict" moment. By *moral* agency, I mean deliberate acts based on strong evaluations of the worth of one's desires and possible actions (Taylor 1985), evaluations that are made against standards of moral regulation— that is, "proper forms of expression," both linguistic and non-linguistic, that constitute "moral repertoires" out of which social identities are produced (Corrigan 1981:319). Those social identities, however, are never unproble-

matic, since competing standards of moral regulation in Rwanda shape everyday practices of self-presentation as people grapple with the question: "What kind of person should I be?" I argue that it is not just rigid, either-or ethnicity that limits the identities people can felicitously perform. Since moral qualities, personal capacities and behavioural traits are ethnically marked, they can also cast doubt on "inherited" Hutu or Tutsi ethnicity. But, simultaneously, the relationship between rigid descent categories and victim–perpetrator categories continues to place profound constraints on how people know themselves and others.

This article is based on one year of ethnographic fieldwork from 2008 to 2009 in the Rwandan university town of Butare. The findings are part of my larger doctoral project on personhood, ethnicity and everyday social relationships in post-genocide Rwanda. I worked with educated (but not necessarily high-income) town residents, including university professors and students, small business owners, NGO workers, clergy members and workers in low-skill jobs (who are not necessarily uneducated)—like wait staff, groundskeepers and motel cleaners—as well as the unemployed. All conversations and interviews were conducted in French. Since these Butare residents are not representative of the rural majority of Rwandans, the question is, why investigate the routine operations of ethnicity among privileged, urban people? The exceptional position of the educated urban dweller renders the tensions between the absolute and situational dimensions of ethnicity especially discernible. Since ethnic categories are marked by status and wealth differentials (des Forges 1995 Fujii 2009; Lemarchand 1970; C. Newbury 1988) and vice versa, the mapping of stereotypes onto social organization places the educated urban dweller in a position marked by stereotypical forms of "Tutsi" privilege, which relatively few Rwandans can claim. However, in light of the history of violence, wealth and education carry social dangers, ones that urban dwellers aim to mitigate through situational performances that may or may not correspond to their "inherited" ethnicity. Therefore, I suggest that this atypical case study provides particular analytical clarity for grasping how both rigid and mutable ethnic boundaries operate in small-town Rwanda at the level of everyday practice.

The argument unfolds in four parts. First, I discuss how the current political context in Rwanda shapes and constrains the methods choices of the ethnographer interested in ethnicity. Second, I provide ethnographic accounts of two social situations from my fieldwork. Following the Manchester School tradition of the extended case method (Burawoy 2009; Evens and Handelman

2006; Werbner 1984), both situations focus on a university professor whom I call Charles. The third section describes the historical political-economic production of stereotypical qualities and capacities of "Hutuness" and "Tutsiness,"[1] which provide the interpretive lenses for the final section, which analyzes the two situations in light of those long-standing stereotypes and their vicissitudes. It draws out the limits that mutable and immutable ethnic boundaries impose on each other and the moments in which the social actor cannot easily escape the salience of either inherited or situational ethnicity.

Researching Ethnicity in Rwanda

Contemporary politics raise several perils for those investigating the practical workings of ethnicity in Rwanda. The most obvious challenge is the state moratorium on using ethnic labels in public, a post-genocide move that is directed to producing a de-ethnicized, pan-Rwandan form of national belonging. Violation of this can result in accusations of "divisionism" or "genocide ideology" (Pottier 2002). Even as rigid, descent-based ethnic boundaries underpin the RPF-led government's highly political account of the "genocide of the Tutsi," RPF state formation strategies paradoxically rest squarely on the claim that ethnicity is an illusory boundary that the former colonizer used to divide Rwandans. In this narrative—one now heavily critiqued by scholars (e.g., Pottier 2002)—Tutsi and Hutu were relatively innocuous status or occupational distinctions, ones that were changeable and lacked political salience. Indeed, to suggest, as I do in this article, that one's ethnicity can shift depending on social-relational and situational factors could be read as treading dangerously close to the government's idyllic vision of pre-colonial history and ethnicity or attesting to the truth of its model-making or "magical thinking" (Ingelaere 2012). My aim here is not to reproduce a politically convenient account of the pre-colonial past but, rather, to draw out the complexities of how broad social forces of political economy play out in the routine workings of ethnic boundary production. Indeed, as I discuss below, drawing from my fieldwork, Rwandans experience ethnicity both as a rigid boundary *and* as a relation entangled with other social distinctions in popular stereotypes. Hence, the absolute and changeable dimensions of ethnicity are produced and negotiated in everyday social interaction (see Barth 1969).

The fraught political context of today's Rwanda, in which ethnic labels can only be spoken to denounce them, produces strict constraints on the methods that an ethnographer can use to "get at" the practical workings of ethnicity. No one can ask Rwandans whether someone was "acting like a Hutu" and expect a serious answer (the only politically expedient response is to claim that one no longer thinks that way). As a result, when investigating the practical operations of Tutsi and Hutu categories, the ethnographer is primarily limited to participant observation and interpretive approaches, ones that pay attention to people's use of social categories, the limits to what can be performed and the uncertainties of how those performances can and should be interpreted. The central difficulty in researching the politics of ethnicity in post-genocide Rwanda is that one can never be certain whether Rwandans intend or interpret any given interaction, depiction or expression to have an "ethnic" meaning. And yet there are compelling reasons for pursuing this line of investigation, since researchers have shown that Rwandese ethnicity has not simply disappeared with the outlawing of Tutsi and Hutu labels by the government (e.g., Buckley-Zistel 2006; Burnet 2009; McLean Hilker 2009; Straus and Waldorf 2011; Thomson 2013).

Social Situation I: Those Who Work Hard at *Umuganda*

Umuganda ("contribution" in Kinyarwanda) is community work that takes place nationwide in Rwanda on the last Saturday of each month. It was first introduced under President Juvénal Habyarimana's populist rural development campaign of the 1970s but was quickly co-opted by the elite for personal gain. Wealthier people stopped participating and corruption in high government ranks meant that work groups were ordered to till the personal fields of state officials (Longman 2010:123). After the 1994 genocide, umuganda was revived as a strategy of unity and reconciliation: working together to rebuild the country. It is, in principle, compulsory for all adult citizens and each person has a card that must be signed by the neighbourhood head (*chef du quartier*) to mark her or his attendance. However, many, if not most, affluent town residents choose to pay a fine instead of participating; so, depending on the neighbourhood, numbers can be quite thin. Umuganda usually consists of cultivating fields, maintaining public property, planting trees, picking up litter or building houses for genocide survivors. Fortunately, on the occasions when I attended, the activity was tree planting, a form of work for which even I had the necessary skills.

I attended umuganda with Charles (a pseudonym),[2] a professor at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) in Butare. According to patrilineal descent rules, Charles is Hutu, a fact he never revealed to me directly. I gleaned it from a February 2009 conversation in which Charles complained that people think he and a friend (someone

who had previously divulged his Hutu ethnicity to me) do favours for each other because of shared ethnicity. Charles regularly attended umuganda, but he sometimes stated somewhat sheepishly that when the assigned work was to build houses, he would end up just standing around because of his lack of experience with construction. Charles grew up on a rural hill in neighbouring Gikongoro province, but he is a long-time resident of the town. He first arrived there as a secondary school student to attend the prestigious *Groupe Scolaire* established during the colonial period. He later attended the NUR as an undergraduate student; many of the professors he remembers from that time eventually became propagandists for the genocide or, sadly, its victims. During the civil war (1990–94), Charles married a Butare woman whom he met while studying at the university. Like most Hutu men, he says little about where he was and what he was doing during the civil war and genocide. During the eleven years I have known Charles, he has spoken only in passing of where he was during the war, and when he did so, he spoke only vaguely about how that was a time when he had "real problems." Shortly after I first met him, in 2004, he told me that his (Hutu) father was killed in the genocide, but he has not spoken of it to me since. To my knowledge, Charles was never imprisoned or indicted as a genocide suspect, so he was spared the ordeal of standing trial at *gacaca* (local-level genocide courts). Unlike many NUR professors who reside in the capital, Kigali, and commute to the campus, Charles and his family reside in Butare. On this basis, Charles often staked a claim to being a "simple" person who is not seduced by the lure of the capital. However, his frequent trips to Kigali for meetings and conferences were the subject of scrutiny and speculation among the neighbours: Who invited him to the capital so often, and what did he do there that let him buy a house and a car and fund both his own children's and other children's education?

During umuganda we worked in Charles' neighbourhood of Ngoma, a mixed-income residential area. There, it is not unusual for houses like Charles', ones with indoor plumbing and electricity, to be built in close proximity to others' simple, sometimes even makeshift homes. On the morning of umuganda, the *chef du quartier*, a young, energetic acquaintance of Charles' with a light-hearted demeanour, was waiting on the street to organize participants. The street, the main artery through Ngoma, was rather quiet compared to its usual bustle. Since businesses are required to close on the mornings of umuganda, there were not many people on the road making their way into town. Surveying our calm surroundings, the chef expressed concern that few people would come

to help. He wondered how, with so few hands, we would be able to plant all of the saplings that were to be dropped off. He then proceeded to make a joke about my small frame, which suggested that he was not particularly confident that I would be much help in this regard.

We conversed casually for about 30 minutes while waiting for the trees to be delivered, during which time a handful more people arrived. Some were wealthier residents dressed like Charles in the Adidas or Reebok tracksuits often worn on weekends by the affluent, but they paired them with the heavy rubber boots favoured by rural agriculturalists. Others were low-income neighbours dressed in eclectic combinations of second-hand clothing, who could be counted on to bring the wheelbarrows, shovels and other tools required for umuganda.

Once the trees were delivered, we set out in a group of only eight to begin. At the start, all participants were men, all of whom appeared between 40 and 65 years of age. One woman, wearing jeans and a polo-style shirt, joined us about a half hour later. She greeted me with a joking "Bonjour, monsieur!" to signal the oddity of a young white woman attending umuganda. Only one man, a low-income neighbour, had brought his wheelbarrow along to cart trees around. Since we could not all follow him around if we wanted to distribute the trees evenly and efficiently throughout the neighbourhood, Charles volunteered to go back to his house to retrieve the wheelbarrow that normally is used only by his gardener and by his domestic worker for hauling firewood. He appeared pleased to be contributing agricultural tools not usually supplied by those who do not make their living using them. With his wheelbarrow, we were able to split into two groups and make our way around the neighbourhood. As we moved along our way, good-natured banter characterized exchanges between participants. They teased each other about their planting techniques and their level of know-how when it came to agricultural tasks. Other residents would occasionally arrive to join the work, but most passers-by, upon seeing the work group, quickened their pace. The workers shouted to those who passed and asked them where they were going and why they had not come to share in umuganda. To some extent, their shouts were in jest, but they also demonstrate real resentment and criticism of those who buy their way out of shared work—agricultural work that has the markings of the rural peasant majority of the country. Charles has a good reputation in the neighbourhood in large part because of his willingness to join in shared work with his lower-income neighbours instead of paying the fine. The *chef du quartier* appreciates that someone of his status works

hard at umuganda, and he is quick to do Charles small favours, like witnessing his passport application, a request that could easily be put off for weeks by a chef who is unhappy with the applicant. While the moral agency of participating in shared physical work is a crucial way for wealthy town residents to maintain good reputations and relationships with neighbours, I could not help but notice that the work group nonetheless split up along lines of those who work in modern, urban sectors and the urban poor who make their living in ways not unlike the work of umuganda.

Social Situation II: Being a Good Patron, Being a Good Client

Charles is known in Butare as a discriminating but generous donor to several young people whom he helps with school fees. As a Hutu male, he is careful to cultivate a reputation for giving to both *rescapés* (a term that, in state usage, controversially excludes Hutu and denotes only Tutsi survivors) and (primarily Hutu) youth subject to the economic hardships of having their fathers imprisoned for genocide crimes. He explained that he does so in part because he has genuine sympathy for youth in both situations, but he also acknowledges that he must take care not to be perceived to favour fellow Hutu. Patron–client exchange—a relationship whose rigidity and ubiquity in Rwanda colonial anthropologists arguably exaggerated (C. Newbury 1988; Vidal 1969)— is nonetheless still thriving today in Butare. However, unlike the relatively stable relations of exchange that scholars say characterized patron–client bonds in southern Rwanda in pre-colonial and colonial times (Maquet 1961), today they are less enduring relationships than they once might have been. I say "might" because clientship in Rwanda has varied substantially by region and historical period (de Lame 1996; C. Newbury 1988). Thus, even as anthropologists have mistakenly fetishized cattle clientship (Vidal 1969), patron–client exchange, in its diverse incarnations, has a long history as a crucial institution in Rwanda. In Butare today, clientship usually operates around requests for school fees or for personal connections to be activated to secure employment. It typically ends when a patron has decided that she or he has given enough for the client to *se débrouiller*, or to get by on his or her own. Butare residents both celebrate today's short-term nature of patronage as the end of "premodern" relations of dependency and lament it for the decline in durable networks that people can depend on in times of need. In the following situation, a neighbourhood woman came to receive money from Charles to help pay her children's school fees.

Charles had told me about this woman, who lives up the road from him, a mother of seven who is now head of her household because her husband is in prison for alleged genocide crimes. He had explained to me that, even as he knows it is important to have a reputation for generosity, he has grown reluctant to pay students' tuition directly because of the growing financial burden each time his clients return for another instalment. Charles had thus agreed to loan his neighbour money to purchase a sewing machine so that she could generate income by making and altering clothing and pay her children's tuition fees herself.

I happened to be in Charles' living room when the woman arrived to collect her promised loan. As was his evening habit, Charles was sitting on his sofa, drinking Mützig, the more expensive of the two local commercial beers, and watching the news on television. The woman was received at the front door, through which honoured guests arrive, not the rear kitchen door, where only family members, the hired help or familiar guests enter. Charles' wife, who normally comes out to greet guests, even if she is assisting the domestic worker with food preparation, was nowhere to be found on the occasion of this visit, which indicates that she knew it was not primarily a social call. Nonetheless, Charles offered the neighbour some banana wine. To offer an alcoholic drink is a show of equality between guest and host, because non-alcoholic drinks are offered only to those of lower status, usually women and children. Since this woman was the head of her household, it was appropriate for Charles to offer her an alcoholic drink and acknowledge that dimension of equality between them.

They watched television and chatted about her sewing business for a while, joking about how many pairs of pants a person actually needs versus how many he would like to have. For the duration of the conversation, however, Charles set the parameters. He posed the questions while she, in her subordinate client status, spoke when he addressed her. Still, Charles tempered the hierarchy of their relationship with shows of equality, like the friendly chatter and sharing of drinks, so that the recipient did not feel unduly subordinated. Even though both parties knew the reason for the visit, each of them acted as though it was a friendly invitation to drink until Charles decided it was time for the woman to depart. He went into his bedroom and returned with an envelope of money. Upon receiving it, she left abruptly because she knew that this was her cue. Both donor and recipient in this patron–client exchange made use of the ambiguous boundaries between friendship and clientship (Pitt-Rivers 1961) to foreground the friendly qualities of the encounter: the donor to reduce

the subordination felt by the recipient and the recipient to limit the extent to which the donor perceived the relationship as purely instrumental. It is important in Butare that a patron not feel like "a cow that just keeps on giving [milk]," as Charles put it several times.

Moral Regulation and Competing Values: Hutuness and Tutsiness

To understand how these two social situations illustrate how mutable and rigid ethnicity come up against each other, it is necessary to understand how and why competing values structured around ethnic stereotypes emerged. A brief foray into the politics of post-colonial state formation and cultural revolution (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) in Rwanda provides the basis for these insights. While the politicization of ethnicity and its manifestations were by no means uniform throughout Rwanda during the late colonial period, it was in the late 1950s that claims to legitimate rule by the traditional Tutsi elite and the Hutu counter-elite of Butare and the nearby colonial strongholds of Save and Nyanza came to be articulated explicitly in terms of ethnic difference (Lemarchand 1970:146). At this time, political parties for the pre-independence elections crystallized along lines of inherited ethnicity. At the heart of these state formation struggles were two competing visions of what modernity and equality mean and how they should be enacted in the post-colonial period. One vision was promoted by the conservative, pro-Tutsi monarchist party, the Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR), which was supported by the United Nations and the old guard of the Catholic Church, who believed in Tutsi superiority. The second was put forth by the principal Hutu party, the Parti du Mouvement de l'Émancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU), supported by the Belgian colonial administration and the more progressive wing of the Catholic missionary presence in Rwanda, concerned with inequality and social justice (Linden 1977).

UNAR and PARMEHUTU appealed to the population using parallel, but diametrically opposed, visions of what a modern, independent Rwanda should look like. The key questions behind this struggle were: Who is modern, what does equality mean, and how should it be enacted? The UNAR vision of independent nationhood preserved the status quo of the colonial ethnic hierarchy, but it was couched in terms of equality. It was based on the notion that decolonization requires an educated elite to identify and seek solutions to emergent political, economic and administrative challenges. In this vision of post-colonial nationhood, to be modern was to earn status through achieved rather than ascribed attributes, the latter being pejoratively associated with pre-colonial

and colonial social hierarchies. Equality was based not on shared rights, opportunities or material conditions but, rather, on a shared Banyarwanda (pan-Rwandan) identity (Lemarchand 1970:161). The Tutsi elite of the UNAR claimed the personal attributes and cultural capital required to instill national identity and a sense of unity in the population. UNAR ideology was thus a claim to the legitimacy of established instruments of Tutsi rule—education and ascribed superior status— thinly veiled by an ideology of nationalism (Linden 1977:260).

By contrast, the Hutu counter-elite's vision of modernity and equality aimed to redress the colonial oppression of the Hutu majority. In PARMEHUTU ideology, an equation quickly emerged in which Hutu = people = poor = majority, in which the "feudals" (Tutsi) were not fit to govern an independent Rwanda because they were colonial collaborators "detached from the people" (Ntakirutimana and Semujanga 2010:49). Modern nationhood, in the PARMEHUTU vision, meant righting the wrongs of the history of oppression wrought by the long-standing colonial presumption of Tutsi supremacy (Linden 1977:235). Equality consisted in transforming the material conditions of the Hutu population by providing equal access to the benefits of modernity, including education, from which they had long been all but excluded (250).

The state formation struggles of the mid- to late 1950s remained largely confined to the Tutsi and Hutu elite of southern and central Rwanda. However, when PARMEHUTU consolidated its support base and won the first national elections by a landslide in 1959, their victory signalled a cultural revolution (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) in both official and popular valuations and interpretations of ethnic difference. Independence brought about a radical transformation in meanings of equality, from the long taken-for-granted status quo of "Tutsi" rule to a "Hutu" vision of equality as social justice, shared material conditions and a voice for the general population (C. Newbury 1988:188). Ethnic difference was now the premise on which the new Hutu leadership proclaimed Tutsi illegitimacy and, by extension, Hutu legitimacy. Hutuness, long the mark of the subjugated, became valorized through PARMEHUTU claims to legitimate rule as the rightful inhabitants of Rwanda long exploited by a Tutsi elite (195–196).[3]

It bears emphasizing that this cultural revolution did not seek to make Hutuness connote the same wealth, status, educational attainment or moral qualities associated with Tutsiness. Rather, it aimed for a revaluation of the stereotypical qualities of Hutuness in which they took on new esteem in light of the PARMEHUTU vision

of modern nationhood (Linden 1977:254). Indeed, PAR-MEHUTU's claim to political legitimacy rested on valorizing the "humble folk" (Chrétien 2003:302) and making Hutuness stand for qualities worth upholding to counter decades of disparagement by both colonial and Rwandan elites (although they did not end it completely since, as Thomson [2010:22–23] shows, today's RPF-dominated government is known to similarly denigrate "peasants"). Hence, the PARMEHUTU revaluation of Hutu qualities shifted the norms governing moral regulation and the question of what kind of agent one should aim to be. Nonetheless, the new celebration of Hutuness by no means erased the value of "Tutsi" qualities. For example, in 1957 Grégoire Kayibanda, the future leader of PARMEHUTU, formed the Hutu Social Movement, through which he aimed to improve Hutu access to formal education (C. Newbury 1988:192) and, by extension, historically Tutsi forms of privilege. Hence, each set of stereotypes took on new ambiguities with the emergent positive connotations of Hutuness and the denouncement of stereotypical Tutsiness, which produced competing standards for desirable conduct and social identities. Thus, even though the current "Government of National Unity" has outlawed ethnic labels in public discourse, class, occupational, educational and political distinctions are nonetheless still entangled with the ethnic stereotypes and their competing values because of the political work that went into forging these linkages during the period of independence-era state formation.

The question, then, is what those stereotypes look like, where their ambiguities lie and how they matter in everyday life. Hutuness, associated with the peasantry and the subordinate position in patron–client exchange, has certain positive moral qualities and capacities, especially stamina for the hard work and physical labour of agriculture with which the Hutu have long been stereotypically associated. Likewise, humility, honesty and good-naturedness are points of pride (Semujanga 2003:114–117; des Forges 1995:44). But also embedded in Hutuness are less praiseworthy traits that arise from the stereotypically subordinate position of the Hutu in the old system of *ubuhake*[4] cattle clientship. These qualities include poverty, a desire for positions of servitude and childlike dependency (Lemarchand 1970:43). In other words, there are two main "Hutu" capacities or ways of getting things done: either through hard work and physical labour (an admirable trait) or by appealing to a potential patron for assistance and entering into a relationship of dependency (a less respected trait). Today the valorization of physical labour helps to explain the moral importance that Charles attributes to attendance at umuganda.

Tutsiness connotes a contrasting locus of traits because of the colonial stereotyping of the Tutsi as superior political leaders and patrons to dependent clients. Catharine Newbury (1988:12) notes that *Tutsi*, as used in everyday talk, often referred not to descent but to a social condition of wealth. Especially in the pre-colonial and colonial seats of power, like Nyanza and Butare, the term *Tutsi* was used by the powerful in a self-definition of their own eliteness (12), a distinction that encompassed not only class but also power and cultural features (D. Newbury 1998:85). The largely positive characteristics associated with Tutsiness are independence of thought and action and the ability to look after oneself, instead of seeking the assistance or protection of a patron.[5] A person who demonstrates self-sufficiency is appreciated in Butare because, it goes without saying, everyone has had problems since 1994, and so residents speak highly of those who get by without burdening others. However, these same traits can be turned on their heads: the self-sufficient person is also thought to be un-neighbourly and to lack a sense of sociality when it comes to assisting others. Furthermore, it is said that a stereotypical Tutsi is lazy and cannot work hard but instead gains wealth on the backs of the Hutu. Cleverness, trickery and wiliness are also stereotypical Tutsi qualities (Lemarchand 1995:9; C. Newbury 1998:9) because it is said that the Tutsi tricked the Hutu into exploitative relations of servitude. "Tutsi" capacities or ways of getting things done are either getting by on one's own (an admirable trait) or tricking others and putting them in positions of servitude and dependency (contemptible traits). Hence, there are moral tensions that emerge when one takes on a patron role as Charles did in the second social situation above. What is important about these popular stereotypes is that, in practice, one's ethnic descent category can have little or nothing to do with the ethnic identification one might situationally be interpreted to have. Indeed, region of origin, occupation, wealth, marriage ties, stereotypical physical attributes and moral qualities are all criteria that Rwandans know how to use to evaluate ethnic affiliations (C. Newbury 1988).

What was clear during my fieldwork—and in the findings of numerous other scholars working in Rwanda today—is that these Tutsi and Hutu stereotypes are alive and well. Even though the RPF has outlawed ethnic labels, people continue to use ethnic categories as interpretive frameworks. Rwandans are well versed in the cultural stereotypes of Tutsi having a fondness for wealth and cattle, and they categorize people who are high status as Tutsi (Fujii 2009:114). Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006:141) similarly reports that wealthy people

are still occasionally referred to as Tutsi regardless of their ethnic descent categories and that the expression, "I am not your Hutu," is deployed if the speaker perceives that someone is trying to exploit her. Further, Lyndsay McLean Hilker (2009:89) found that urban youth in Kigali use Tutsi and Hutu stereotypes as reference points for describing or explaining others' behaviour. I occasionally heard Butare residents express concern that contemporary post-genocide politics reinforce old ethnic stereotypes. An elderly Tutsi survivor, who was critical of the gacaca courts, once remarked to me that the trouble with them is not only that the civilian judges are poorly trained but also that their conduct reinforces the stereotype of the "tricky Tutsi," even as not all judges are Tutsi by heritage. "It's cruel, truly," he said. "These poor peasants are invited to come testify to what they know and they end up getting sentenced even when they aren't the ones on trial. This does nothing to solve our problems" (June 2008, Butare). Finally, as a Hutu Catholic priest explained about the politics of his work, "You must be careful about people thinking you favour your own ethnicity. Sometimes it's hard for people to know what you are, though! For example, if you're Hutu but you show cleverness or become powerful, people will say you must have been influenced by Tutsi because you are more Tutsi than Hutu" (February 2009, Butare).

In other words, the overlap between ethnicity and other forms of difference is part of existing sociocultural frameworks in Rwanda such that when Charles and others make choices like participating in physical labour or performing the role of a good patron or good client, ethnic stereotypes, positive or negative, are always already implicated. Everyday social relationships put people in positions that are marked by ethnic stereotypes whether the social actor openly expresses such an interpretation or not. But in light of the sensitive political moment in Rwanda, what remains beyond the grasp of the researcher (and Butare residents) is absolute certainty about when a particular social actor is "thinking ethnically" about an interaction or viewing it in terms of the class-, education-, region- or wealth-based categories from which ethnicity is inseparable. Hence, I return now to the preceding two social situations to consider how rigid and mutable ethnic boundaries collide in Charles' acts of moral agency, that is, in his deliberate actions based on "strong evaluations" of the worth of his choices—evaluations made at least partially against the constellations of positive and negative qualities that comprise ethnic stereotypes.

Fixity, Flexibility and Their Limits

In light of this brief historical and conceptual examination of ethnic stereotypes and their relation to local forms of moral regulation, the two social situations at the centre of this article speak to the everyday convergence of inherited and situational ethnicity. I use *Hutu* and *Tutsi* in this analysis not to imply that, if asked, Charles (or others) would have said they were actively performing "Tutsi" or "Hutu" qualities but, rather, as a useful shorthand to point out how the qualities and conduct performed in these two situations are marked by popular ethnic stereotypes. In Charles' case, he is often situationally marked by the stereotypes of Tutsiness in spite of his Hutu ethnic descent category. His doctorate from a Belgian university, coupled with his work as an NUR professor, marks him as a member of a "traditional" elite set apart by wealth and education. The sources of Charles' privilege share the pattern established by the colonial education system in Rwanda that produced "Tutsi" privilege by virtue of ties to the world of the modern West.

What is compelling about these social situations is that in neither case was Charles' Hutu heritage enough to definitively offset the social dangers of "Tutsi" wealth and education. In social-relational, situational terms, Charles' position in the patronage relationship with his neighbour "overrode" his Hutu descent category and lent him the stereotypical capacities of Tutsiness. In patron–client exchange in Rwanda, the patron role is tied to Tutsi stereotypes and the client role to Hutu ones, an opposition that hardened, in no small part, owing to colonial era ethnography in Rwanda (e.g., Maquet 1961). However, Charles attempted, in another act of moral agency bound up with stereotypically Hutu valuations of equality, to downplay the ethnically marked hierarchy between them by temporarily emphasizing the friendly dimensions of his neighbour's visit over the transactional ones. She participated in this act through her willingness to engage in friendly chatter with Charles to show that she saw him not as a mere economic resource but as a neighbour or friend. Whether Charles' performances are received as intended, however, is another matter. On the one hand, his clients may spread his reputation for generosity and bolster his "Hutu" concern for redistribution, access to education and equal sharing of the benefits of modernity, a positive outcome with its own double edge since this increases the number of supplicants who arrive on his doorstep. Indeed, I heard town residents characterize Charles as someone who has sympathy for the poor because he was not born into urban privilege. On the other hand, Charles'

patron role and his effort to downplay it potentially increase his vulnerability to the social dangers of "Tutsi" wealth and privilege. He is open to the accusation that, like a "Tutsi," he wants to trick clients into servitude with overtures of friendliness, a possibility that is captured in comments I routinely heard from Butare residents of all income levels about how the wealthy will give only if they think they can get something in return. Hence, shared Hutu heritage between Charles and his neighbour is not enough to level the hierarchy of patron–client exchange, and it must be performed in ways that can either succeed or fail.

In the first social situation, umuganda, relations of work brought out Charles' "Hutu" capacities for physical labour. To have a reputation as someone who, despite wealth and privilege, "knows how to work hard,"[6] Charles recognizes the significance of shared physical work in forging good relationships. Indeed, the criticisms levelled at those who passed the workers without joining in attest to umuganda's importance. Given the history of umuganda being co-opted to serve elites and given that the *chef du quartier* worries about completing the work because many residents opt out of participating, Charles can perform the positive qualities bound up with his Hutu descent category and set himself apart from Tutsi stereotypes of a lazy, exploitative elite. To share in physical work with low-income town residents is an act of moral agency whose value rests on the vision of social equality between good "peasant citizens" first glorified by PARMEHUTU and its supporters.

However, Charles' participation in umuganda may not have a singular interpretation because his Hutu heritage is not sufficiently powerful to conclusively define what "kind" of person he is. He, along with the other affluent neighbourhood residents at umuganda, worked separately from their low-income neighbours. The humble act of taking part in shared agricultural work was complicated by the act of setting themselves apart from the urban poor (although it is worth noting that the urban poor may have chosen to separate themselves from the affluent). The ambiguities of these acts are symbolically well captured in affluent residents' pairing of brand-name athletic clothing with the knee-high rubber boots typically worn by cultivators, as well as in their teasing about each other's lack of agricultural skills. Here, it is the social-relational dimensions of ethnicity that place limits on how Charles can perform the admirable traits marked by his inherited Hutuness. Indeed, as a Hutu by descent and someone who grew up cultivating with his family on a rural hill, Charles might be well positioned to fit in with his low-income neighbours and perform solidarity with them through shared work.

However, his class and status ultimately limit his capacity and, perhaps, also his desire to be "of" the low-income majority. As the priest remarked above, one is easily perceived as "more Tutsi than Hutu" if one is close to power.

Be that as it may, it would be a mistake to read ethnic descent categories as always flexible or open to question in Rwanda today. As much as social agents know how to put the ambiguity and flexibility of ethnically marked categories to work, the politics of the violent past simultaneously produce rigid ethnic boundaries that in some situations make inherited ethnicity difficult to escape. Charles must contend with the suspicion that has been cast on all Hutu men in the post-genocide moment, since RPF politics paint all those occupying the status of Hutu male as potential *génocidaires*. Indeed, Charles' mindfulness of these dangers demonstrates that his descent category can never be completely overcome by the ethnic markings of his class position. Even though Charles lost a close family member to the violence of 1994, he cannot publicly mourn that loss (see Burnet 2009; Vidal 2004). He attends the annual genocide commemorations but must do so as a mourner for Tutsi victims, not for his Hutu father or, at least, not openly so. He knows the importance of situating himself on the side of RPF unity and reconciliation initiatives, and so he participates in conferences and *sensibilisation* meetings aimed at understanding and preventing future violence. And even as his participation in these initiatives and his own scholarship help to legitimate today's official narratives of Rwandan history and ethnicity, his reticence about his activities during the period of the civil war through the genocide belies anxieties surrounding the questions that Rwandans so often wonder about with regard to each other: Where were you in 1994, and what were you doing? How are you situated in terms of "citizenship categories" (Doughty 2011) of victim, perpetrator, returnee, "moderate Hutu" or survivor? As others have shown (e.g., McLean Hilker 2009:90), these questions are ways that Rwandans know how to "get at" ethnicity in its rigid, descent-based manifestations, just as they know how to make "ethnic" commentaries on situational conduct through reference to stereotypes based on wealth, status or behavioural traits.

As I already suggested, a direct inquiry to Charles or other Butareans as to whether they were actively categorizing each other as Hutu or Tutsi in these situations would not receive an answer that a researcher could easily take at face value given today's strict state prohibitions on openly ethnic talk. And yet the interpretive problem remains. We can still wonder, Was Charles "thinking ethnically" in these situations, and

were his interlocutors? Indeed, what does it mean to "think ethnically"? Must one think or say the term *Hutu*, or is an oblique reference to Hutu traits enough, since people can always take what they want from it (see McAllister 2013)? In Charles' case, this problem is compounded by his status and position in the social world of Butare. While his relationships reveal especially starkly the complex operations of ethnic boundaries, his social position is not without constraints. Even though I had known Charles for five years at the time of my fieldwork and he trusted me not to inform on him to the state for using ethnic labels, he still took care to present himself to me as someone who, by virtue of his education and experiences in Europe, is "above" thinking in terms of "parochial" schisms like ethnicity. More generally, Butare residents take pride in the town's reputation as a bastion of peaceful inter-ethnic relations (Jefremovas 1997), and they cite the local resistance to the genocide for weeks after it had begun in Kigali as evidence that ethnicity "doesn't matter" in Butare the way it does elsewhere. Indeed, educated residents' desire to espouse liberal attitudes toward ethnicity, and the fact that their livelihoods depend on the legitimation of the RPF account of ethnicity, may go some way to explaining why other researchers (e.g., Fujii 2009; McLean Hilker 2009) found more frequent, open references to ethnicity, whereas Charles and other high-status Butareans carefully—compulsively, even—avoided them.

In light of these interpretive uncertainties, does studying ethnicity in Rwanda today inevitably mean arriving at an interpretive impasse? As Carlota McAllister (2013:110), drawing on Frank Kermode (1979), proposes, the impossibility of interpretive certainty is not necessarily a failure because of what we can learn from the problem of uncertainty itself. The world and its interpretations, Kermode (1979:145) reminds us, are "hopelessly plural." Even though I cannot be certain when Charles or others are thinking ethnically, the question is nonetheless worth pursuing because it places the researcher in the same practical ambiguities that Butare residents face, namely, the open-endedness of when ethnicity matters, how it matters and with what effects. While anthropologists have been aware of the complex intersection of rigid and flexible ethnic boundaries, especially in the context of post-colonial urban settings (e.g., Barth 1969; A. Cohen 1974), the Rwandan context is nonetheless an important site in which to revisit it. Indeed, the centrality of ethnicity in Rwanda's violent past renders the question of how one can be placed "ethnically" especially pressing, not only at the level of the state formation agenda, but also in everyday practice.

Conclusion

Ethnicity, Fujii (2009:111) writes, is not one "thing" but many. Ethnicity in Rwanda (and elsewhere) is compelling precisely because it is both fixed and flexible and therefore forestalls apprehension by frameworks with a singular focus on its absoluteness or its fluidity. People evaluate each other both in relation to the Hutu–Tutsi opposition of the violent past (Doughty 2011:24) and in relation to standards of moral regulation (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) that, as the brief discussion of state formation demonstrates, have much longer histories entangled with Tutsiness and Hutuness. Thus, even as rigid configurations of ethnicity take on special significance at certain historical moments—as in the crystallization of political parties around ethnicity at independence, in the genocidal constructions of the 1990s or in the RPF's rigid Tutsi/victim versus Hutu/perpetrator dichotomy—there has never been a single criterion that Rwandans can use to conclusively and in all situations resolve how they and others belong ethnically (C. Newbury 1988:51–52). Ethnicity during the Rwandan genocide had an unmistakable binary quality, but in everyday life it simultaneously matters in ways that exceed the question of heritage. Indeed, the forms of moral agency and self-presentation that Butareans deploy in everyday life—be it opting into umuganda, tempering patron–client hierarchies or being reticent about what one was doing in 1994—are marked by ethnic stereotypes and bound up with the intersection of both rigid and social-relational dimensions of ethnicity. These dual configurations of "the ethnic," coupled with the post-genocide moratorium on ethnic labels, render the question of how ethnicity matters today compelling, fraught and also elusive, not only for the ethnographer but also for Rwandans.

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Notes

1 These are abstractions commonly used in the literature (e.g., Burnet 2012; Fujii 2009; Lemarchand 2002) that refer to the shifting and hybrid loci of qualities (phenotypic, cultural, moral) that people perceive "ethnically" (Lemarchand 2002). They are not strict, reified dichotomies but conceptual tools for thinking about how everyday forms of social action are marked by ethnic stereotypes.

2 Identifying details have been changed to protect Charles' identity.

3 The valorization of "Hutu" visions of equality carried through to the Second Republic (1973–94) of President Habyarimana, who staked his legitimacy on development for the rural majority (see Verwimp 2000).

4 Ubuhake is the form of clientship on which the well-known rigid colonial formulation of Tutsi patrons (cattle owners) and Hutu clients is based. See Maquet 1961 for a classic formulation of this account.

5 It is important to note that these stereotypes do not imply that those who inherited Tutsi ethnicity through patrilineal descent never occupied the client role in a patron–client relationship, but what I focus on here are the ethnic markings of patron and client roles.

6 This phrase came up with remarkable frequency in routine conversation with Butare residents as they evaluated each other's moral worth and capacities for hard work.

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