# From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda

**ELISABETH KING**
*Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, Canada*

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# Introduction

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, which left approximately 800,000 people dead and a country devastated, Rwanda's young people are vested with great hope and responsibility. With nearly 43 percent of Rwanda's population under the age of fourteen, it is easy to see why this would be the case.[1] As a representative of Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) explained, "It's easier to transform youth than it may be to transform someone who is fifty years old."[2] Schooling plays a key role in the country's transformation. The Rwandan government is currently investing significantly in schools and placing tremendous faith in the power of education as a tool of unity and reconciliation. One young teacher at a girl's school in northern Rwanda told me, "We teach about reconciliation. We teach to never again take the same actions as in the past and to find ways to bring everyone together, to foster friendship, and to not dream of killing others."[3] The last panel on display at Rwanda's main genocide memorial sums up the beliefs of many: "Education has become our way forward."

Indeed, many Rwandans, the Rwandan government, and some scholars tend to explain intergroup conflict, and especially the genocide, by a lack of education. I heard repeatedly in my interviews that a lack of formal education resulted in societal ignorance.[4] Nearly 88 percent of Rwandans interviewed by the senate for its report, *Genocide Ideology*, thought that ignorance played

[1] CIA, 2012.

[2] Author's interview, National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Kigali, March 29, 2006. Most interviews were conducted in French, and quotes are the author's translation. Quotes from other French-language sources have also been translated by the author.

[3] Author's interview, female of unknown ethnicity, northern Rwanda, March 21(A), 2006. The letters after the dates, such as A here, distinguish, wherever appropriate, multiple interviews that took place on the same date.

[4] See also Gourevitch 1998, p. 180; Njoroge 2007. On the prominence of this narrative, see Longman and Rutagengwa 2004; Zorbas 2009.

a "high" or "very high" role in the genocide.[5] These explanations reflect the common view that education leads to better understanding between members of different, often hostile, groups.

Yet, as this book shows, the education system in Rwanda has and continues to play a more harmful role in intergroup relations. I spoke with a Tutsi teacher, who had lost most of her family in the genocide, about the relationship between schooling and conflict. Having been a student in the 1970s and 1980s under a Hutu-dominated government, whose hard-liners ultimately orchestrated the genocide, she reflected:

> I think that education contributed a lot [to violent conflict] because from primary school, from the youngest age, you had to differentiate the Hutu and the Tutsi. Every time Tutsi were the minority in relation to the Hutu. We were also taught in history that the Tutsi had in some way been exported, that they came from the north near the Nile river, that they met Twa and Hutu here [in Rwanda] and that they sort of colonized the country. They said all this and we learned it from a very young age. I think that it is normal that there be hatred between Hutu and Tutsi starting from this very young age.
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> … My little sister would tell me that at primary school, they asked you to stand up (because even in class they would ask "Hutu get up, Tutsi get up") and from a certain moment my little sister didn't want to get up because she found that they were just two [Tutsi] in class. Every time she would ask, "Why aren't I like everyone else?" She felt a bit marginalized. And then, you grew up with this as if you are born of an ethnicity that colonized the other. And then, as you grow up, you don't feel comfortable at school with the other students. And the Hutu were proud because they were the majority, and moreover that they were the indigenous, those that should be in the country. The others [Tutsi] shouldn't be in the country.
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> Then, at the end of primary school, we did an exam that we call in Kinyarwanda, *iringaniza* [rough translation: social justice], to share the places in secondary school. You had to have, I don't remember quite well the percentage, I think it was something like 2 percent Tutsi, 98 percent Hutu, 1 percent Twa, something like that. And they taught us that. You had to have an ethnic equilibrium. You studied, even if you were first in your class, all the while knowing about *iringaniza*. Even if you had a lot higher grades than a Hutu, the Hutu had to pass first. And we had that in our heads, the Hutu's right to study. Tutsi felt [left out], even if at a certain moment we came to accept that. You told yourself that that was the way it was and that it could not be otherwise. As we are the minority, the majority had to go to school. The minority would come afterwards. And we thought this from a young age.
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> … Even from the youngest age you learned that … [Tutsi] found Rwanda and thought it was a nice country, so they settled, and little by little they took the land of the Hutu who were there. Well, they taught us that in primary school. They taught us that in history. And you had to learn it by heart because you were asked

[5] RoRa 2006, pp. 99 and 156.

> it on an exam. Imagine what that does in the head of a child. Yes, I think [education] really contributed [to conflict].[6]

The post-genocide, Tutsi-led government has likewise blamed pre-genocide schooling for failing the nation.[7] Yet allegations of the links between education and conflict do not stem from Tutsi alone or from only the pre-genocide period.[8] I heard variants on the key themes that this teacher raised from Hutu and Tutsi who were educated in both the colonial period and since the genocide. Teasing out the various roles of schooling in peace and conflict is essential for moving forward with educational scholarship and practice. Moreover, insight into education's nuanced role is crucial for understanding the genesis of ethnic conflicts in Rwanda's past and for thinking carefully about the country's future.[9]

## Key Questions

We are faced with conflicting narratives about the effects of education on conflict. Some praise schooling for its role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, while others blame schools for fomenting violent conflict. How can these accounts be reconciled? To address this dilemma, I pose several questions in the context of Rwanda: How has formal education in Rwanda contributed to intergroup conflict and/or its mitigation? Through what channels? What does Rwanda's experience teach us about the role of education in conflict and peacebuilding more generally?

## A Conversation between Education and Peace and Conflict Scholars

Answering these questions involves much needed cross-disciplinary dialogue between scholars and practitioners of education and those who work on peace and conflict. The education literature is stronger in its understanding of the importance of education and its potential for peace, but weaker in explaining how education contributes to violent intergroup conflict, especially at a societal level. In contrast, the peace and conflict literature has stronger theories on violent intergroup conflict (which I shorthand as "conflict" throughout, recognizing more generally, of course, that not all conflict is violent), but is weak in terms of appreciating the importance of education, as well as how a

[6] Author's interview, female Tutsi, Kigali, February 8(G), 2006.

[7] RoR 2002b p. 5; RoR 1995 pp. 5, 16, 25, 44, 56.

[8] Following the practice of numerous scholars, I do not pluralize the nouns Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa by adding an "s". Some have alleged that this practice collectivizes Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa individuals. In contrast, I found that it most often reflects Rwandans' own usage of these terms in English and French.

[9] While I recognize, in this book, some common roots of different forms of violent conflict and genocide, I am not contending that they have all of the same underlying causes, or proximate causes, or that they manifest themselves in the same way.

nuanced understanding of education illuminates conflict and the potential for peace. The dialogue in this book addresses these weaknesses and thus advances both fields.

First, the same educational trends that I heard in Rwanda are common the world over, particularly in mainstream educational conversations. The dominant view is that education contributes to building peace. When wars end, the international community rallies to get children back into schools. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, for example, reopening schools was a top priority for the foreign forces, and the world cheered the return of three million children, including girls, to classrooms. As the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated, "Education … will enable us to move from a culture of war, which we unhappily know only too well, to a culture of peace."[10] The UN's *Education for All* action reports also present education as one of the best means of averting conflict and overcoming violence.[11] Similarly, at a special session of the UN General Assembly on education in conflict-affected contexts, the representative from Iraq commented that "[l]ack of education is a more deadly weapon than the most destructive arms."[12] In the past fifteen years, a significant subfield of "education in emergencies" has developed, centered on short-term educational responses to conflict and the importance of educational service provision as part of humanitarian action.[13]

Others focus on the relationship between education and violent conflict. Usually, when we hear about education and conflict, the causal arrow points from conflict to education, examining how conflict disrupts the provision of education. Graça Machel emphasizes the interruption of schooling in her well-known report, *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, and the 2011 *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* identifies the impact of armed conflict on education as a "hidden crisis."[14] Indeed, conflict is likely to hinder the achievement of universal education targets significantly; while conflict-affected and fragile states are home to 18 percent of the world's children of primary school age, they account for 42 percent of the world's out-of-school children in this age group.[15] Among educators, there is also acknowledgment that schools themselves become sites of violence. Recent reports note widespread attacks and threats against students, teachers, and schools around the world.[16]

[10] Quoted in Harber 1996, p. 151.
[11] Education For All Global Monitoring Report team 2004.
[12] Author's notes upon attending.
[13] See, for example, Aguilar and Retama 1998; Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies & UNESCO 2004; Nicolai and Tripplehorn 2003; Pigozzi 1999.
[14] Education For All Global Monitoring Report team 2011; Machel 2001.
[15] Education For All Global Monitoring Report team 2011, pp. 2 and 15.
[16] O'Malley 2010; UN General Assembly 2011; UNESCO 2010b.

In contrast, scholars have only infrequently reversed the arrow of causation to investigate the link from education to violent conflict – an imbalance this book seeks to address. This reversal, which considers the potentially fraught relationship between education and conflict, can be placed alongside the broader move in development practice, initiated largely after the Rwandan genocide, to reassess initiatives previously assumed socially neutral or positive. Thus, scholars and practitioners began to question the role of "ordinary," everyday education and to acknowledge that education's role in conflict has "two faces" – one positive, one negative.[17] Alongside the more common "positive face," the "negative face" of education recognizes the harmful effects of inequitable distribution of schooling, cultural repression through schooling, and propagandistic textbooks that promote intolerance.[18] Yet, despite recent interest in "education and fragility" and more widespread, if still limited, acknowledgment of the "two faces" of education in conflict, our understanding of how, and to what extent, education may contribute to conflict remains limited. Education specialists know more about "education politics" – that is, issues internal to education systems – than about "the politics of education," which asks how schooling interacts with broader societal systems.[19] In other words, we still know relatively little about how and what types of formal schooling conduce to violent intergroup conflict at the societal level.[20] More than a decade after the idea of "two faces" was introduced, calls for better frameworks and stronger empirical research remain widespread.[21]

Meanwhile, in both peace and conflict studies and international studies – disciplines that specifically study the causes of violent intergroup conflict – education is relegated to the margins. To illustrate, I conducted a quantitative analysis of articles published in the two top peace and conflict journals (*Journal of Peace Research*, JPR; *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, JCR).[22] I also analyzed the five journals published by the International Studies Association (*International Studies Quarterly*, *International Studies Review*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, and *International Political Sociology*). Covering all articles from 1994, the year of the Rwandan genocide, to 2010, I did a broad search for the terms "schools" and/or "educat*" (thus including educate, education, educators, etc.) in the title, keywords, and/

[17] These include Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Davies 2004; Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Undated; Salmi 2000; Smith and Vaux 2003; Tawil and Harley 2004; Williams 2004; Williams and McGill 2004. See also Paulson 2008.

[18] Bush and Saltarelli 2000.

[19] Bird 2009 p. 4; Novelli and Cardozo 2008.

[20] Davies 2004, p. 5; Kuppermitz and Salomon 2005; Salomon 2002.

[21] Bird 2009; Burde et al. 2010; Davies 2005; Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Undated, p.10.

[22] These are the top journals focusing on peace and conflict in the *Social Sciences Citation Index* (Thomson Reuters) *Journal Citation Reports*. By impact factor, they rank fifth and fifteenth, respectively, in the more general "political science" category. Thanks to Clark-Kazak 2011 for the inspiration.

or abstract.[23] Only 1.5 percent of the articles published in the peace and conflict journals (or 37 of 2,341 articles), and just 3 percent of articles published in the International Studies Association journals (or 76 of 2,500 articles) emerged from this search. Taken together, only slightly more than 2 percent of articles published in these seven journals referred to schools or education. When I dropped articles on curricula and pedagogical techniques targeted at universities in North America and Europe, as well as hits from terms like "schools of thought," education is even more clearly at the periphery. Only 1 percent of articles in JPR and JCR and only 0.5 percent of articles in the five International Studies Association journals address education substantively, or as a variable of interest, even if one among many.

My qualitative examination of these articles shows that when education is studied in relation to conflict, it is addressed in particular ways. Education is most frequently considered in the context of peacebuilding, usually meaning nonformal education. Articles include studies of the impact of peace education programs on perceptions of peace, the importance of grassroots education in overcoming weaknesses in peace agreements, the role of public education in addressing the emotional and symbolic roots of conflict, and education's impact on one's propensity to forgive.[24]

When, in fairly rare cases, education is considered in the context of *conflict*, conflict is often studied as the independent variable with education as the dependent variable. Lai and Thyne, for example, find that civil war decreases education expenditures and enrollment and is "devastating" for education systems.[25]

When education is studied as the independent variable with conflict as the dependent variable, most studies examine the impact of net societal education rates on the likelihood of conflict or on individuals joining a rebellion. In a cross-national study of regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, Gudrun Østby and colleagues find that lower education levels increase the risk that a region will experience conflict onset – a finding that is statistically significant and strong. They posit that education likely represents the recruitment costs of conflict. An oft-cited study by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler also shows a positive correlation between low levels of education and the probability of conflict, focusing on male secondary education as a proxy for opportunity for rebel recruitment. Some case studies relying on individual-level surveys make similar claims. In examining the case of Nigeria, Aderoju Oyefusi finds that low educational attainment increases the probability that one joins a rebel group and suggests low opportunity cost for recruitment as the key mechanism. He discovers that moving from no education to completion of primary school, from completion

[23] Three of the journals (*International Studies Perspectives*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, and *International Political Sociology*) were searched back to their inaugural volumes in 2000, 2005, and 2007, respectively.

[24] Azar, Mullet, and Vinsonneau 1999; Biton and Salomon 2006; Kaufman 2006; Maney et al. 2006.

[25] Lai and Thyne 2007.

of primary school to completion of secondary school, or from completion of secondary school to completion of tertiary education reduces the odds of a person's willingness to join a rebel group by 36 percent. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein similarly found that in Sierra Leone, uneducated youth were nine times more likely to become rebels than people who had completed post-primary schooling.[26] Overall, in this rebel recruitment literature, lack of education is highlighted as a contributor to conflict, but is measured by its quantity. Schooling is treated as a simple binary variable without examination of its quality or heterogeneous effects.

Other scholars build and elaborate on the rebel recruitment thesis.[27] Clayton Thyne shows strong pacifying effects of both primary enrollment and secondary male enrollment on likelihood of conflict onset, and also suggests two additional mechanisms, aside from opportunity costs, by which education may reduce conflict likelihood. First, educational investment is a signal to citizens that their government is committed to improving their lives, thereby lowering grievances. Second, education provides people with the tools to resolve conflicts peacefully. This model thus includes the quality and content of education. Problematically, however, it virtually equates quantity with quality, making untenable assumptions about the content of education. Only a few articles that emerged in my search otherwise examine the impact of quality and content of education on conflict and violence.[28] These articles are preoccupied with Islamic madrassas and fundamentalist teaching, a focus that has also become popular in the press in the aftermath of September 11.[29]

In sum, education is marginalized in peace and conflict studies and international studies. When this literature considers education's role in conflict, it usually concentrates on a lack of schooling, not on how schooling itself can contribute to conflict. Schooling is generally treated as a black box without examination of who has access or of the educational and psychocultural processes going on in schools. In contrast, I argue that schooling itself can contribute to underlying conflict, and that unpacking the structure of schools, as well as the content of education, matters in this process. Understanding the role that schools play in conflict fills in important parts of an overall picture of intergroup conflict.

### Arguments: Education as a Key Piece of the Puzzle

The concept of education is the linchpin of this book. By education I mean formal state-led schooling and use the terms "schooling," "formal schooling," and "education" interchangeably. I examine how ordinary, mass education at

[26] Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, p. 447; Østby, Nordås, and Rød 2009, p. 315; Oyefusi 2008.
[27] Thyne 2006.
[28] Some of these are Bar-Tal 1998; Borchgrevink 2008; Sullivan 2007.
[29] Borchgrevink 2008; Sullivan 2007.

primary and secondary levels contributes to wider conflict and peacebuilding processes. My focus is not on special activities or classes about peace and conflict resolution, nor is my focus on informal education, although this is complementary to formal schooling.

Schooling is widely believed to be a key element of socialization and, along with most work in the field of education, this book begins with the premise that schooling can shape understandings, attitudes, values, and the behavior of individuals. Education is regarded as an important agent of socialization and influence on social citizenship.[30] Nelson Mandela has called education "the most powerful weapon to change the world," and Barack Obama has referred to education as "the currency of the 21st century."[31]

International and domestic policies also reflect a faith in education's socializing ability. Prior to armed intervention in Iraq, the U.S. government sent out a tender to "de-Baathify" Iraq's schools.[32] During the Cold War, the United States considered formal education to be one of the most important methods to spread anticommunist ideology in Afghanistan.[33] After the Second World War, Germany and England embarked on textbook exchanges to minimize the most offensive images on both sides and to improve relations.[34] Examples abound supporting Ernest Gellner's quip that "[t]he monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence."[35]

Primary school is particularly important because it is the only level of education to which most young people have access in the Global South. Net primary enrollment rates in what the United Nations Childrens' Fund (UNICEF) calls the least developed countries are 76 percent for girls and 81 percent for boys, whereas net secondary enrollment rates are just 27 percent and 31 percent, respectively.[36] Furthermore, primary education is important for the questions of this book, because ethnic attitudes are formed early and, once formed, tend to increase in intensity with time.[37] According to theories of cognitive development, children develop perceptions of others and develop race and social class attitudes between ages seven and nine.[38] Secondary school is also important, because both early childhood and adolescence are critical periods in which significant events can have a greater impact on our understanding of history

[30] Anderson 2003; Gellner 1983; Green, Preston, and Janmaat 2006; Marshall 1965.
[31] Howe and Lewis 1990; Obama's comments at the University of Cairo quoted in Barbara Zasloff 2009.
[32] USAID, "Request for Proposals M/Op-03-Edu2 Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and Stabilization Education (Rise)," http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/pdf/web_education.pdf; Wurmser 2003.
[33] Spink 2005.
[34] Dance 1960.
[35] Gellner 1983, p. 34.
[36] UNICEF 2009, p. 26, statistical tables.
[37] Allport 1958; Padilla, Ruiz and Brand 1974 in Bush and Saltarelli 2000, p. 3.
[38] Oesterreich 1995, pp. 196–197.

than later on.[39] In addition, secondary education is correlated with access to employment and economic growth, especially in the Global South, making it highly sought after.

Moreover, schooling is particularly influential in the Rwandan case. European-style education is highly valued in Rwanda, and expectations for social advancement have, from the colonial period to today, followed directly. Many Rwandan students with whom I spoke were confident that schooling could help them improve their lives. Some children talked about their dreams of becoming doctors, pharmacists, and accountants, and of the important role of schooling in reaching their goals. One representative from an NGO explained to me that even the street children with whom she works feel excluded if they do not go to school. "Kids know that the possibility is there" for schools to help them achieve a better life.[40] Historically, too, Rwandans have been committed to education; successive Rwandan governments have spent more on primary schooling than their neighbors. School's messages may also have particular salience given the paucity of alternatives; for instance, Longman argues that during the colonial period at least, there were no published substitutes to the history that students were taught in schools.[41] Given Rwandans' great respect for formal education, they may be pre-socialized to be socialized by schooling. In this strong educational context, we might well expect schooling to yield the positive social cohesion and peacebuilding outcomes with which educational institutions have often been associated.

Yet I argue that in Rwanda, ordinary, everyday schooling achieved the opposite result. Additionally, I argue that social-structural and psychocultural processes that transpired in schools help make sense of currently under-explained dimensions in the literature on conflict in Rwanda. Specifically, many leading accounts of violent conflict in Rwanda rely on a foundation of intergroup inequalities and psychocultural/identity processes (categorizing, collectivizing, and stigmatizing ethnic groups) as underlying factors explaining conflict at different times. These explanations, however, beg questions about *how* these underlying processes develop. I show that from the perspective of those inside the system, Rwanda's schools produced and reinforced horizontal inequalities and psychocultural processes, providing a fertile foundation for violent intergroup conflict. Schools were a key institution of the state and the church that ultimately helped foster interethnic conflict in both the colonial period and in independent Rwanda.

At the same time, I argue that schooling in Rwanda can and has contributed in some ways to peacebuilding, although these processes are a less dominant part of the story. I further argue that while positive strides are being taken today, schools are still dangerously replicating past trends. By highlighting and

[39] Devine-Wright 2003, p. 13.
[40] Author's interview, NGO representative, eastern Rwanda, March 9, 2006.
[41] Longman 2010, pp. 65–66.

explaining the ways in which Rwandan schools became implicated in violent intergroup conflict, I also hope to forward an understanding of the ways in which schools can alternatively oppose conflict and build peace.

## Opportunities and Challenges of Research in Post-Genocide Rwanda[42]

I develop my arguments through comparative historical analysis over three periods: colonial Rwanda (1919–1962), the Rwandan Republics (1962–1994), and post-genocide Rwanda (1994–present). Each of these periods is complex in distinct ways because different groups were in power. The first two periods ended in extreme violence along ethnic lines.

The argument presented in this book stems principally from seventy semi-structured, one on one interviews that I conducted in 2006 with Rwandans who attended or taught primary school in Rwanda from the colonial period to 2006, as well as five interviews with Belgian colonial administrators and missionaries. At the time of the interviews, some interviewees were still students or teachers while a number had moved on to become farmers, some worked with NGOs or were civil servants, several were unemployed, a couple were pastors, and a few were prisoners. Further information on the contributions and demographics of interviewees is detailed in the Appendix.

While I am confident that I gathered a good cross-section of opinions, it was a challenge to assemble a demographically diverse group of interview participants. While I was generally aware in advance of numerous identifying factors about a potential interviewee (gender, place of origin, current residence), I rarely knew his/her ethnicity, rendering balance on this feature very difficult to achieve. As I discuss in Chapter 4, public ethnic identification is barred in post-genocide Rwanda, and researchers cannot ask for this information. Neither can it be readily discerned from name or mere appearance. Nonetheless, I deemed it essential that I speak with people from different groups in order to fairly answer the research questions. In the end, many interviewees privately told me their ethnicity during the interview, while others often offered strong clues to allow me to identify them ethnically.[43] It is possible that I have made a few mistakes in attributing ethnicity either through personal error or through "ethnic faking," discussed more in Chapter 2, but I am also assured that I gathered a diverse range of perspectives.

Conditions in Rwanda also gave rise to a number of biases in my sample. For example, after encountering nearly exclusively Tutsi in Kigali, I turned to the predominantly Hutu north to seek opinions from what I presumed would be mostly Hutu Rwandans. Moving north did broaden the range of my

[42] This section builds on King 2009 in which the challenges and opportunities of this research are described in further detail. I gratefully acknowledge the editors of *African Studies Review* for permission to reprint sections of that article.

[43] See Samuelson and Freedman 2010 for details on such clues.