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Pietro Sullo

Beyond Genocide: Transitional Justice and *Gacaca* Courts in Rwanda

The Search for Truth, Justice
and Reconciliation



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A mio padre

Foreword

During a few months in the spring of 1994, some 800,000 Rwandan citizens, primarily Tutsis, were killed by Hutu militias and ordinary people. Despite the fact that the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary and Extrajudicial Executions, Bacre N'Diaye, had in 1993 warned the United Nations about the rapidly spreading hatred and violence and the danger of an imminent genocide, the world organization neither prevented nor stopped the genocide. On the contrary, rather than enforcing the mandate and strength of the UN peacekeeping troops stationed at that time in Rwanda, the United Nations decided to withdraw this Assistance Mission (UNAMIR) as soon as the first Belgian peacekeepers had been deliberately killed by radical Hutu militias. The Tutsis were tragically abandoned by the international community, and the genocide was finally stopped with military force by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by the current President Paul Kagame and supported by Uganda.

His newly established Government was faced with the enormous task of dealing with the past and healing the wounds by introducing some form of transitional justice and fostering a process of reconciliation between the two groups of people, who had been constructed as two different “ethnic” and social groups by the Belgian colonial administration. It was the new Rwandan Government which requested the UN Security Council in 1994 to establish an International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, similar to the one that had in 1993 been set up for the former Yugoslavia. However, the ICTR, which was soon thereafter established in Arusha, could only bring to justice some of the key perpetrators. The infrastructure of the ordinary criminal justice system in Rwanda was broken down, and many judges were killed and the prisons in a most deplorable state. Nevertheless, more than 100,000 suspected *génocidaires* were arrested and kept under inhuman conditions in pre-trial detention. These were the circumstances when the Government decided to entrust a mechanism of traditional African justice, the *gacaca* courts, with the task of providing justice according to local culture and finally achieving reconciliation and peace in the country.

The purpose of the present book by Pietro Sullo is to assess whether the *gacaca* courts have achieved this highly ambitious goal. He describes in detail the mandate and functioning of these community-based courts with lay judges and arrives at the conclusion that the original aims were certainly overambitious. On the other hand, he finds that “the attempt to abide by the principle of duty to prosecute (all) the perpetrators of genocide-related crimes as well as its participatory, community-based approach, made *gacaca* the most courageous effort ever in the search for post-genocide justice” and the “most ambitious prosecution experiment ever”, under the slogan of “mass justice for mass atrocities”. He makes this positive assessment by comparing the achievements in Rwanda with the few Nazi criminals who were prosecuted in post-World War II Europe, the limited results of the current efforts by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and similar situations in Guatemala or Darfur. On the other hand, he also points at the obvious shortcomings and problematic features of the *gacaca* courts, if assessed against the principles of the international rule of law and fair trial. He also strongly criticizes the intrusion of the state, which deprived the people of Rwanda to some extent of their ownership of this important mechanism to redress the painful consequences of the genocide. Overall, Pietro Sullo provides an excellent and balanced analysis of the *gacaca* courts, which should be taken into account by other countries and peoples when faced with a similar challenge.

Vienna, Austria
March 2018

Manfred Nowak

Manfred Nowak is Professor of International Human Rights at Vienna University and Secretary General of the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice. He served as UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and currently leads the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty.

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This book is both the result of my interest for the issues surrounding human rights and genocide, and the happy end of a journey through transitional justice in Rwanda begun several years ago when I started an internship at the ICTR in Arusha under the supervision of Silvana Arbia. In these years, the intricacies connected with Rwandan *gacaca* courts have constantly occupied my mind. Fortunately, I was not alone in my journey and several persons have accompanied me in different capacities, giving me advice and helping me to overcome obstacles and to keep my motivation. It would be impossible to mention all of these fortunate encounters. I am indebted to Prof. Giorgina Alessi who invited me to join her chair of legal history at the University Federico II at the beginning of my career and illuminated the years spent in Naples with her knowledge, acumen and irony. I am very thankful to the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna di Studi Universitari e Perfezionamento in Pisa and in particular to Prof. Andreas de Guttry, which offered me a generous Ph.D. scholarship to spend a considerable amount of time in Rwanda and other post-conflict settings. I also benefitted from a research stay at the International Centre for Transitional Justice in New York under the supervision of Priscilla Hayner in 2007 which has expanded my knowledge in the field of transitional justice. In New York, I also met Valeria Izzi, my dear “grillo parlante”, whose maturity and wisdom remain an example for me. My research work in Rwanda has been facilitated by Avocats Sans Frontières mission to Rwanda, which helped me to orient myself in the complexities of the *gacaca* world. To the Rwandans I have met and interviewed during my research work goes my deepest gratitude. My stays in Kigali were also the occasion to meet Enrico Rampazzo and Elisa Radisone, whom I thank for their friendship.

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction	2
1.1.1	Central Research Problems and the Delimitation of the Research Domain	8
1.1.2	Originality of the Research	11
1.1.3	Methodology	15
1.1.4	Key Terms: <i>Gacaca</i> , Traditional and Informal Justice Systems	17
1.1.5	Outline	20
	References	22
2	The Crime of Genocide and Its Contextual Features in Rwanda	27
2.1	Historical Development of the Crime of Genocide	28
2.1.1	The Origins	29
2.1.2	Versailles Treaty and Leipzig Trials	30
2.1.3	Lemkin’s Contribution to the Emerging of Genocide in International Law: ‘An Old Practice in Its Modern Development’	33
2.1.4	Developments Leading to the London Conference	34
2.1.5	UN General Assembly Resolution 96(I) 1946	35
2.2	The Genocide Convention	36
2.2.1	The Objective Element of the Crime of Genocide	38
2.2.2	The Subjective Element of the Crime of Genocide	42
2.3	The Rwandan Genocide	43
2.3.1	The Ancient Kingdom and the Origin of Hutu and Tutsi	45
2.3.2	The Hutu Social Revolution	47
2.3.3	The Unfolding of the Genocide	50
2.3.4	Challenges for Post-Genocide Justice	53

2.4 Political Transition in the Aftermath of the Genocide 56

2.5 Constitutional Transition and the Role
of Post-Genocide Justice 59

References 62

**3 A Framework for Post-Genocide Rwanda: Legal Imperatives
Concerning Transitional Justice 65**

3.1 Introduction 66

3.2 Transitional Justice and Constitution-Building Processes 67

3.3 The Right to Reparation in International Law 70

 3.3.1 Forms of Reparation 77

 3.3.2 Recent Developments in International Criminal Law 80

3.4 The Duty to Prosecute in International Law 82

3.5 The Right to the Truth in International Law 96

References 99

4 Post-Genocide Justice in Rwanda: Ordinary Courts 101

4.1 Domestic Responses to the Rwandan Genocide 101

 4.1.1 Organic Law 8/1996 103

 4.1.2 The Reform of the Code of Criminal Procedure
and Law 9/1996 109

 4.1.3 The Domestic Trials 118

References 122

5 National Responses to the Rwandan Genocide: *Gacaca* Courts 125

5.1 Traditional *Gacaca* from Precolonial Time to the Eve
of Genocide 126

5.2 The Legal Framework of *Inkiko Gacaca* 128

5.3 Organic Law 40/2000 132

 5.3.1 Compensation Fund 140

5.4 Organic Law 33/2001 141

5.5 Organic Law 16/2004 142

 5.5.1 Confession and Guilty Plea Procedure 145

 5.5.2 Sanctions 146

 5.5.3 Appeal 149

5.6 Organic Law 28/2006 151

5.7 Organic Law 10/2007 151

5.8 Organic Law 13/2008 152

5.9 Organic Law 04/2012 Terminating *Gacaca* Courts
and Determining Mechanisms for Solving Issues Which
Were Under Their Jurisdiction 154

References 156

- 6 Gacaca Courts Under Human Rights Scrutiny** 159
 - 6.1 Premise 160
 - 6.2 Principle of Non-Retroactivity of Criminal Law 162
 - 6.3 Fair Trial Standards 166
 - 6.3.1 Equality Before Courts and Tribunals 168
 - 6.3.2 The Prohibition Against Trial by Special Tribunals 170
 - 6.3.3 The Right to Be Tried by a Competent, Impartial and Independent Tribunal 173
 - 6.3.4 The Right to a Counsel and the Right to a Defence 177
 - 6.3.5 Presumption of Innocence 179
 - 6.3.6 The Burden and Standards of Proof 181
 - 6.3.7 Trial in Absentia 182
 - 6.3.8 Ne bis in idem 182
 - References 184
- 7 Gacaca Jurisdictions in Practice** 187
 - 7.1 Overview 188
 - 7.2 The Preparation of *Gacaca* Jurisdictions 190
 - 7.3 The Pre-*gacaca* 192
 - 7.4 The Election and Training of the Judges 194
 - 7.5 The Launch of *Gacaca* Courts 196
 - 7.6 The Judgement Phase 203
 - 7.6.1 The *Gacaca* Judgements: An Overview 204
 - 7.7 The Perspective of Women and Children 209
 - 7.8 Shortcomings of *Gacaca* Trials 213
 - References 220
- 8 The Reconciliation Process in Rwanda** 223
 - 8.1 Post-Violence Reconciliation: A Framework for Rwanda 224
 - 8.2 The Official Discourse 230
 - 8.3 Genocide Denial and Memory Wars 235
 - 8.3.1 Rwandan Policy on Divisionism, Sectarianism and Genocide Denial 238
 - 8.3.2 The Rwandan Law 18/2008 on Genocide Ideology 241
 - 8.4 The Meaning of Reconciliation According to Rwandans 253
 - 8.4.1 Questioning Rwandans 255
 - 8.4.2 Assessing Reconciliation 263
 - References 281
- 9 Conclusion** 285
 - References 291
- Bibliography** 293
- Index** 307

Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
ASF	Avocats Sans Frontières
AU	African Union
AVEGA	Association des Veuves du Génocide
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (United Nations)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa
FAR	Forces Armées Rwandaises
FARG	Fonds d'Assistance aux Rescapés du Génocide
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IER	Instance Equité et Réconciliation
IPEP	International Panel of Eminent Personalities
LDGL	Ligue des Droits de la personne dans la région des Grands Lacs
LIPRODHOR	Ligue Rwandaise pour la promotion et la defense des Droits de l'Homme
MRND	Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie et le Développement
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
OUA	Organization of African Unity
PRI	Penal Reform International
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RDR	Rassemblement Républicain pour la Démocratie au Rwanda

RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RTML	Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
SNJG	Service National des Juridictions <i>Gacaca</i>
SRSR	Special Representative of the Secretary General (United Nations)
TIG	Travaux d'intérêt general
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNAMIR	United Nations Mission in Rwanda
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMUR	United Nations Observer Missions Uganda–Rwanda
UNSC	United Nations Security Council