
BOOK REVIEW: THE RWANDAN TUTSIS: A TUTSI WOMAN'S ACCOUNT OF THE HIDDEN CAUSES OF THE RWANDAN TRAGEDY. BY EUGENIE MUJAWIYERA

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Anyone who has ever been to a concentration camp or site of a civilian massacre has wondered what it is that brings people to a point of such incredible violence. That is particularly true in cases of genocide. We all ask ourselves what it was that could cultivate such hate in a group of ordinary people, and what could drive them to commit such horrors.

Eugenie Mujawiyera seeks to shed light on the historical conditions that led to the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi minority in Rwanda. In her first book, "The Rwandan Tutsis: A Tutsi Woman's Account of the Hidden Causes of the Rwandan Tragedy," Miss Mujawiyera details the history of the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa people of the Great African Lakes region, and the events that led the nation to self-destruct.

Miss Mujawiyera offers frank insights into the feudal tradition of Rwanda, chronicling both Tutsi history and tradition, and the hierarchal structure of Tutsi patrimony that governed race relations in the pre-colonial system. She describes how colonialism upset the delicate balance and how she believes "colonial enslavement" set in motion the events that would culminate in the 1994 massacre of the Tutsis by their Hutu countrymen.

The author's greatest successes in this book are in describing the sadness and individual loss associated with the genocide. She talks of the first killings of Tutsis in the immediate post-colonial period that drove her family into exile, and of her childhood as a

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refugee. Her narrative is saturated with the overpowering sense of disorientation that accompanies the loss of a homeland. Her connection is not only to the culture, but to the physical land as well, to its beauty and fertility, and her descriptions give credence to her need to return to a place she had never been.

Also, throughout the book, the historical account is peppered with stories of the author's friends and family. They range from the lively account of a maternal great-grandfather who protected his land with specially-trained attack dogs, to the tragic story of the death of her father during the genocide. The personal accounts, as graphic and disturbing as of them may be, offer a way for the reader to conceptualize the magnitude of the horror. Lost for many outsiders is the realization that each person that died, each person we see in the pictures of piled bodies, was a distinctive story, what Miss Mujawiyera terms "an end to a unique universe." By telling the individual stories of death, and of survival and hope, the reader gains a greater understanding of the fragmented pieces of the overall tragedy.

Where Miss Mujawiyera falls short, however, is in her description of why it was Rwanda that experienced this tragedy. In her rush to defend the Tutsis, she makes them almost blameless, casting them instead as formerly benevolent masters victimized by the colonizers. Her repeated comparisons of the Tutsis in Rwanda to the Jews in Holocaust era Europe, despite some merit to the argument, seem repetitious, as though if she says it enough the reader will be forced to accept it as truth. There were other countries colonized by the Belgians that experienced the same policies of divide and rule. While few are the picture of stability of today, none dissolved into the chaos that Rwanda did.

Eugenie Mujawiyera offers a poignant account from the eyes of a Tutsi woman refugee. Her story is at the same time proud of her history, angry at what her people have suffered, yet hopeful for the future. She offers some novel insights, such as how a nascent democracy can be manipulated. She wants to speak about subjects that have become taboo in a post-genocide society. But in her rush to defend the Tutsis her objectivity is called into question. What she portrays as journalism could probably be better described as a collective memoir. Admittedly, she must stand and look at the site of human tragedy and ask not "how did this happen?" but "how did this happen to us?" Unfortunately, her answer is a resounding and simple, "Ask them."