Uwamariya Goreth

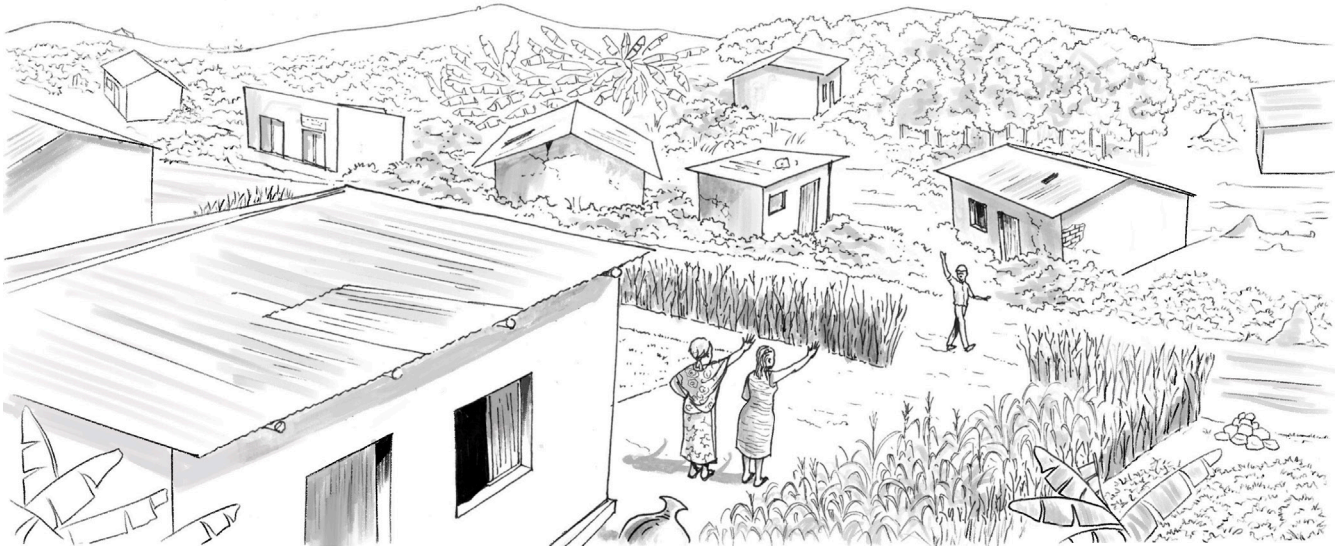

Illustration by Chris Rutayisire

When my fiancé, Pascal Muhozi, came to our house to meet my mother for the first time I was terrified. It was around three in the afternoon on a Wednesday. My brothers, aunt and uncles were also waiting for him inside our home. As we offered him food and drink, I looked around the room at their expressions, anxious.

After he left, I searched my mother's face. When she finally spoke, I almost fell over. 'I like him,' she said. It was the shock of my life. This was in March 2022.

Growing up, my mother taught me to hate Tutsis. She told me that they were the reason my father had been jailed. She said they'd made up lies to lock him up because Tutsis were cruel, vindictive people who wanted to destroy Hutus. I remember that when I was eight years old, my best friend Jeanette once came to our house to play. After she left, my mother gave me such a spanking. I was never to play with Tutsis again. The trouble was that I didn't know how to spot them. Mama told me they had long thin noses. That was in 2002.

Whenever I visited my father in prison, he told me to ignore the government ideology that all Rwandans were the same. I was to be Hutu and proud of it. The first thing he said to my brother when he announced that he was getting married was, 'I hope your fiancée is not one of them.' Imagine my surprise when in 2006, my father wrote a letter to our neighbour, Sophia, admitting to killing her husband and five children. He also said that he had looted her house and stolen her bicycle. He asked Sophia for forgiveness. One day, Sophia asked my mother if they could visit him in prison together. She forgave him in person. He, in turn, sold part of our land as compensation and gave her the rest to grow crops to feed her family.

To me that was proof that Tutsis really were going to take everything Hutus owned. That land was my inheritance. I still have trouble believing that my father is guilty.

And yet here we were, years later. My mother had accepted my marriage to a Tutsi man. A genocide survivor at that. And she wasn't putting on a performance for the neighbours. I know her well enough to know that she had changed. Maybe that's what happened to my father too. Maybe he confessed because he had changed.

It's hard for me to unlearn all that I was taught. I still see nose size. It's impossible to articulate the shame I carry because of my father's crimes.

I honestly have no idea how I fell in love with my husband. He knows everything about me and my family but doesn't care. His family accepts me as well. Each day with him, I feel less Hutu and more Rwandan.

As told to Eric Murangwa Eugene and Uwababyeyi Honorine. Written by Jo Ingabire Moys.

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Summary

Uwamariya Goreth's story about her life after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda reflects on how she was taught to hate the Tutsi and how difficult unlearning these beliefs has been. Uwamariya's family's views about the Tutsi have changed. Her fiancé, a genocide survivor, is welcomed into the family. This testimony can support learning about discrimination, remorse, forgiveness and changes in identity, beliefs and behaviour. It is best suited for learners aged 13–16.

Themes: Discrimination, stereotypes, hate, remorse, forgiveness, identity

Context

Uwamariya recalls her mother telling her that her Hutu father was in prison because Tutsis lied, wanted to destroy Hutus and take everything they owned. She was told to identify Tutsis by their thin noses. Before the genocide Rwanda's population consisted of three ethnic groups: Hutu 85%, Tutsi 14% and Twa 1% (statistics from official records that are not fully reliable). In the pre-colonial period, these were social labels and could change depending on wealth and social status. However, under Belgian rule, the colonial administration fixed these categories, drawing on racial theories about physical appearance and intelligence. In 1933, the Belgians, who viewed the Tutsi as superior to the Hutu, introduced identity cards that stated ethnicity. These cards were used to inform killings of Tutsis that began in 1959, when a revolution sent the Tutsi monarchy into exile, and continued periodically up to the genocide in 1994.

Uwamariya's testimony refers to established stereotypes that were used to promote genocide ideology alongside dehumanising propaganda comparing Tutsis to cockroaches and snakes. For example, pre-genocide hate speech portrayed the Tutsi as liars. The 'Hutu Ten Commandments' published in Kangura newspaper in 1990 identified Tutsi men as 'dishonest' in business. Swayed by this hate speech and organised government mobilisation, hundreds of thousands of Hutus participated in the genocide as organisers, killers, accomplices, or beneficiaries of looting.

After the genocide, ethnic labels were removed from identity cards. The new government has focused on national unity and reconciliation. For example, programmes such as Youth Connekt Dialogue (YCD) and Ndi Umunyarwanda ('I am a Rwandan') have encouraged people to construct their political and social identity as Rwandans rather than by ethnicity. Uwamariya reflects on the reconfiguration of her identity.

Rwandan post-genocide justice mechanisms encouraged confessions, remorse and forgiveness. If a genocide perpetrator confessed and apologised at a gacaca community court hearing, they received reduced sentences. Christian churches also encouraged survivors and families of victims to forgive.

Lesson and activity ideas

Learning objectives

- **Understand group identities and belonging**
- **Have knowledge of the role of hate in genocide**
- **Reflect on unlearning harmful beliefs and change**

Ishami Foundation's materials on the history of Rwanda can be helpful if learners have no or little existing knowledge of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Starter

Ask learners to write a list of groups to which they belong. In pairs or small groups discuss why they belong to these groups. These lists can

include family, national, ethnic, religious, local, or hobby groups, amongst others. As a class, draw responses together, paying attention to different characteristics, attributes and interests that underlie these group identities, and celebrating this diversity.

Activity 1 – Uwamariya's story

Tell learners that in Rwanda different ethnic identities and stereotypes were used to instil hate and dehumanise the Tutsi. Share Uwamariya's testimony and give them time to read it. In groups of pairs, ask learners to consider the hateful beliefs Uwamariya grew up with. If needed, you can pause here to discuss what stereotypes are.

When unpacking learners' answers, share with them that genocides are based on classification of differences. These classifications are used to discriminate and dehumanise an ethnic, national, racial or religious target group in order to enable destroying this group. For further information on genocide and the Ten Stages of Genocide by Gregory Stanton, see genocidewatch.com/tenstages.

Activity 2 – Hate and changing beliefs

To continue to work with Uwamariya's testimony, ask learners to discuss in groups and/or write down their responses to the following questions on hate and change before exploring together.

Questions

- **Why did Uwamariya believe Tutsis were cruel and vindictive?**
  - *You can support learners to reflect further on whether they share beliefs with their parents, and where they have learnt how to treat other people.*
- **What made her question her beliefs?**
  - *Answers can include the government, her mother and father. You can encourage learners to reflect on whether their own beliefs have ever changed and what encouraged them to reconsider. What role did friends play?*
- **How did her beliefs change?**
  - *Note than changing beliefs is difficult. Uwamariya does not hate the Tutsi anymore but has not been able to unsee differences in nose sizes. Are there any beliefs learners find difficult to change?*
  - *If you have more time, you can expand on the role and significance of Sophia's forgiveness for Uwamariya's family. Do learners think this is important and why?*

Closing

Ask learners: What can you do if you notice that you or someone close to you has harmful beliefs about some groups of people? Learners can write three actions on the board or on post-it-notes to share how they can encourage their community to become less discriminatory.

Further reading and resources

- *Small Country by Gaël Faye,* translated by Sarah Ardizzone. A novel about a young Rwandan growing up in exile in Burundi, struggling with ethnic identity and polarisation.
- *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond,* edited by Phil Clark and Zachary D Kaufman. This collection includes chapters on memory, division and rebuilding after genocide.
- *Transforming Rwanda* by Jean-Paul Kimonyo. This is an account of Rwanda post-genocide by one of President Kagame's advisors.
- *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide* in Rwanda by Mahmoud Mamdani. A detailed historical account and analysis of events leading to the genocide and development of ethnic identities.

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