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Title of the thesis:

The experiences of Rwandan secondary schools' history teachers in teaching the Genocide against the Tutsi and its related controversial issues

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Summary

This study is qualitative in nature and based on field research done in Rwanda where interviews were conducted with 11 participating secondary school history teachers in Kigali City and other provinces. They included different categories of history teachers such as experienced and non-experienced, trained and non-trained, genocide survivors, and history teachers from well-equipped and poorly-equipped schools. The participants' experiences were presented by means of career life stories constructed from photo-elicitation, semi-structured and self-interviews. Each story was composed of a short biography, the participant's description of the commencement of teaching the Genocide and its related controversial issues, the content taught, teaching methods, resources used and a short concluding commentary.

The study used a series of emergent research methods such as drawings, photo-elicitation, semi-structured and self-interviews, chosen in view of deflecting participants' emotions from a very controversial subject. For analysing the data, positioning theory and a blend of controversial issues theories were used.

From the theorisation of the findings, it was found that the participatory approach teaching approach was not frequently used. The prevalence of teacher centeredness was due, not only because of the sensitivity of the topic, but also out of fear of using the history class as a venue for propagating ideas of hatred or Genocide denial. In addition, learner centeredness could contradict official narratives on the Genocide which can be considered as a crime in Rwandan context. As a result the participating history teachers complied with official narratives on the Genocide for educating good citizens. In so doing their socio-political experiences of Rwandan society pushed them to work towards the Government of Rwanda's key objective of unity and reconciliation. This was done by generally adopting teacher centeredness as a teaching approach. They also avoided the actual Genocide by focusing on topics such as the pre- and post-colonial histories of Rwanda. Consequently, most the controversial issues were raised by learners. A range of sources of evidence at

learners' disposal, such as media and communities' information, allowed the latter to identify gaps in the history teachers' pedagogies.

Teaching resources such as certain films were rejected by some of the participating history teachers because they traumatised learners. In the same way electronic sources were also carefully used as they were, at times, suspected of containing either traumatising or divisive information. These choices tended to contradict the idea of using multiple sources of evidence for deep historical understanding. No history teacher took the risk to teach the Genocide and its related controversial issues so that learners could have a comprehensive multi-perspective understanding. This happened despite the curriculum recommending a participatory approach.

The participating history teachers' educational experiences allowed them to understand that certain teaching methods were better suited than others in teaching certain aspects of the Genocide and its related controversial issues. Occasionally, learner centeredness was used to enhance learners' critical understanding and to develop transferable skills. The use of resource persons gave first-hand information and dealt with local experiences to show that Genocide was real. But using learner centeredness was the exception rather than the rule. An exception was one history teacher who decided to organise a school-wide debate on the Genocide in view of awareness and prevention, a unique and visionary practice.

In teaching the Genocide and its related controversial issues certain positions such as indoctrination, peace-making, avoidance, Socratic cross examiner and a balanced approach were adopted. Indoctrination was used in most cases because teachers presented certain topics in a one-dimensional way. By depicting the Rwandans living peacefully in precolonial period, all teachers who participated in this study were pushed to help the Government of Rwanda to present a common understanding of the past.

What was also found was that the history teachers' positions kept changing. The changing positions can be explained by the complexity of teaching the Genocide and its related controversial issues. Consequently the history teachers adopted a position of compliance for self-care. They navigated between the recommended curriculum teaching approaches to create patriots, to work for the "never again" and to create imagined critical citizens.