



Indangamuntu 1994: *Ten years ago in Rwanda this Identity Card cost a woman her life*

by Jim Fussell (1) In 1994 genocide in Rwanda began, an ID card with the designation "Tutsi" spelled a death sentence at any roadblock. (2) Along with the prior training of militias, stockpiling of weapons, direction of the massacres by hate radio, the prior existence of ethnic ID cards was one of the most important factors facilitating the speed and magnitude of the 100 days of mass killing in Rwanda.

Most writers on the 1994 Rwandan genocide note the introduction of group classification on ID cards by the Belgian colonial government in 1933, an action most significant because it introduced a rigid racial concept of group identity where it had not previously existed. Of great significance also, however, was the repeated decision by the post-colonial Rwandan authorities to retain the group classifications on ID cards.

Prior to independence, nine Hutu leaders declared their intention to retain such classifications in the *Hutu manifesto* of March 24, 1957, writing: "we are opposed vigorously, at least for the moment, to the suppression in the official or private identity papers of the mentions 'muhutu', 'mututsi', 'mutwa'. Their suppression would create a risk of preventing the statistical law from establishing the reality of facts." By "statistical" the authors meant dominance by the Hutu majority population group. One of the nine authors of the 1957 *Manifesto*, Gregoire Kayibanda, became the first president of Rwanda in 1961 and under his leadership the Rwandan *carte d'identité* continued to display the "ubwoko / ethnique" group affiliation of the card bearer. (3)

His successor, after a 1973 coup, President Juvenal Habyarimana also retained the cards until on November 13, 1990. On that day, at the same time he announced a new multi-party system, President Habyarimana announced his intention, which he never acted upon, to abolish ethnic identity cards. He was later encouraged in April 1991 to follow through with this statement by United States Ambassador Robert A. Flaten, but according to Philip Gourevitch the French ambassador opposed the plan. Alison De Forges reports that in July 1991 independent consultants encouraged France and other governments giving aid to Rwanda to require the removal of group affiliation from ID Cards be taken as a prerequisite for assistance, but those governments failed to take that advice. (4)

In massacres northwestern Rwanda in early 1993, ethnic categories on ID cards facilitated the identification of victims. When this event occurred negotiations were in progress for power-sharing under a Transitional Government. Among the provisions in the August 4, 1993 Arusha Accords was the following, " The Broad-Based Transitional Government shall, from the date of its assumption of office, delete from all official documents to be issued any reference to ethnic origin." (5) This continued presence of group classification on ID cards, even after their role in facilitating genocidal massacres in 1993, shows that both moderates and future killers recognized in advance the important function these cards might play in ethnically targeted mass killing, such as later ensued in April 1994.

The Rwandan genocide was systematic and organized and not a indiscriminate or wanton slaughter as it was sometimes later portrayed. The killing process was sometimes even segmented into multiple distinct steps, with persons involved as administrative accomplices as well as direct killers. The testimony of one witness concerning the actions of Captain Ildéphonse Nizeyimana, a man who is a fugitive at large, underscores the bureaucratic nature of the task.

"Soldiers had orders to take identity cards from those whom they killed. According to one witness, Nizeyimana regularly received these cards from his men as they reported on the progress of the killings. They often appeared at his house shortly after a volley of gunfire was heard and handed the cards to the captain with the report, "Mission accomplished." In the captain's absence, his wife received the cards." (6)

In addition to facilitating the identification of Tutsi victims, another role of ID cards in the genocide was that of psychologically distancing the killers from their victims and from the nature of their task as killers.

Document Analysis

Rwanda - - - Name and Document form: Indangamuntu, Carte d'identité, National ID card; **Year established:** 1933, continued in 1964; **Status:** discontinued in 1996.

Categories and groups : "Ethnicity" ("Ubwoko" in Kinyarwanda and "Ethnie" in French) appeared immediately beneath the cardbearer's photograph as the uppermost item on page two of the Rwandan ID card. Four possible "ethnic" categories appeared with the issuing official striking a line through all but the applicable category, for example "Ubwoko (~~Hutu~~, Tutsi, ~~Twa~~, Naturalisé)". The term "Naturalisé" applied to naturalized citizens.

Footnotes

1) Jim Fussell is the Executive Director of Prevent Genocide International. "Indangamuntu" is the Kinyarwanda word for ID Card. This webpage contains excerpts from a longer paper presented on June 10, 2001 as "Group Classifications on National Identity Cards as a Facilitating Factor in Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, and Massive Violations of Human Rights" to the International Association of Genocide Scholars Conference, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA. A revised and expanded version of that paper was presented on November 15, 2001 as "[Group Classification on National Identification Cards as a factor in genocide](#)" to the Seminar Series of the Yale University Genocide Studies Program. The comparison between the Nazi and Rwandan ID cards and a call for further research on this topic was made by Henry R. Huttenbach in an article entitled "The letter of the Law and the Mark of Cain: When "J" was and "T" is lethal," *Genocide Forum*, year 1 (1994), no. 5

2) Prosecutor vs. Jean-Paul Akayesu, (Case No. ICTR-96-4-T), Judgement, 2 September 1998, paragraph 123; Alison

