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Agaciro, or what Rwanda thinks of development

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ABSTRACT

Against a background of highly polarised research on Rwanda, emerges a promising scholarly interest in Agaciro – a worldview, means of livelihood and a political project that centres ideals of individual and collective dignity and self-worth.^a This paper explores: in what ways does Agaciro influence Rwanda’s economic development? This is examined through two key determinants: (1) the extent to which Agaciro affects state-society mutuality, and (2) the extent to which Agaciro supports Rwandan agency in international trade, by employing the Social Identity Theory of Leadership (SIT-L). Designed as a qualitative, desk-based research of primary and secondary material, especially that which focuses on the 2016 second-hand clothing ban, this article reveals Agaciro’s key role in determining ‘the content, strategies and modalities of development’^a in Rwanda. It calls for more serious academic engagement with endogenous knowledge for better understanding of the nature of mutuality, leadership dynamics, and development processes in Rwanda.

Keywords: Rwanda; Development; Agaciro; Social Identity Theory; Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

Agaciro has been a prominent feature of the post-genocide discourse in Rwanda. Its significance was particularly affirmed in 2012 when the Government of Rwanda (GoR) established a sovereign fund in its name—the *Agaciro* Development Fund (AgDF). The word *Agaciro* itself carries various meanings depending on its usage. In this paper, however, *Agaciro* refers to the philosophy that emphasises individual and collective

‘self-determination, dignity, and self-reliance’ that has been traced back to precolonial Rwanda.¹ In precolonial Rwanda, it served as a means of livelihood based on values, *Indangaciro*, and interdictions, *Kirazira*, which were orally transmitted through generations.² More recently, *Agaciro* has been deployed to guide several nation-building, global engagement, and development strategies in Rwanda (See, for example, Behuria, 2016; Bolin, 2021; Beloff, 2023). It has been associated with Rwanda’s defiant stance in defining moments, such as

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¹ Rutazibwa (2014), “Studying Agaciro: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda,” 292.

² Heylen (2024), “Ownership and Mutual Benefits, a Trade-Off? Lessons from Rwanda’s Philosophy of ‘Agaciro’ for Team Europe.”; Nzabatsinda (1997), “The Aesthetics of Transcribing Orality in the Works of Alexis Kagame, Writer of Rwanda.”; Bolin (2019), “A Country without Culture Is Destroyed: Making Rwanda and Rwandans through Heritage.”

the Rwanda-France relations crisis when GoR removed French as its administration language and medium of instruction for schools,³ as well as the phasing out of Second-Hand Clothing (SHC) at the expense of preferential trade benefits from the US.⁴

However, academic engagement with *Agaciro* remains limited, perhaps due to the prevailing narrative that it is a mere tool for consolidating power for GoR (See, for example, Ansoms,⁵ Thomson,⁶ and Reyntjens⁷). By denying its conceptual significance, academics are able to keep Rwanda as a consumer of knowledge from other societies.⁸ Indeed, these are futile efforts, since overlooking *Agaciro* and Rwanda's knowledge systems only exposes more the exhaustion of Western theories⁹ to explain—let alone predict—Rwanda's development strategy. Another consequence has been high polarisation among scholars that has rendered 'meaningful dialogue... difficult.'¹⁰ Many scholarly perspectives adopt either of the competing depictions of Rwanda as the 'Singapore,' 'Switzerland,' and 'Pyongyang' of Africa.¹¹ Not the obvious, 'Rwanda' of Africa.

This study is an attempt to de-silence and 'complexify' knowledge and experiences in Rwanda.¹² Through a leadership lens, it highlights the role of endogenous knowledge (i.e., *Agaciro*) in the conceptualisation and actualisation of development in Rwanda. A leadership analysis is warranted, specifically by the wide disregard of context and social interactions in characterising Rwanda's transformative economic development. For

the purpose of this research, 'leadership' is understood as a dynamic, interactive process within groups, characterised by exchange of influence between members in pursuit of common goals.¹³ Thus, in answering the research question, '*In what ways does Agaciro influence Rwanda's development?*' I consider two determinants. One is the extent to which *Agaciro* is a factor in fostering mutuality (the degree to which there is a shared purpose and a common understanding of the problem) between GoR and the wider society.¹⁴ Two is the extent to which *Agaciro* underpins GoR's agency in international trade relations. That is 'the ability to wilfully determine and pursue [its] ... own priorities, including the ability to reject external ideas.'¹⁵

This work, being of an 'insider' researcher,¹⁶ is subject to two equally important sets of criteria: one from the academy, which is concerned with the paper's rigour, robustness, and reliability; and another from the community, which asks for respectful, useful and empowering research.¹⁷ The present study, therefore, aims to centre value and knowledge systems, as well as experiences in Rwanda, to understand the development phenomenon. This aligns with the interpretivist epistemology, that phenomena vary across cultures.¹⁸ To give detailed analysis, this paper then reflects on a single case, of the second-hand clothing ban in Rwanda, which offers the potential to interrogate mainstream rational-choice explanations¹⁹ on Rwanda's development strategy.

³ Beloff (2023), "French-Rwandan Foreign Relations: Depth and Rebirth of Diplomatic Relations."

⁴ Wolff (2020), "The Global Politics of African Industrial Policy: The Case of the Used Clothing Ban in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda."

⁵ Ansoms (2009), "Re-Engineering Rural Society: The Visions and Ambitions of the Rwandan Elite."; Thomson (2011), "Whispering Truth to Power: The Everyday Resistance of Rwandan Peasants to Post-Genocide Reconciliation."

⁶ Thomson (2011), "Whispering Truth to Power: The Everyday Resistance of Rwandan Peasants to Post-Genocide Reconciliation."

⁷ Reyntjens (2016), "(Re-)Imagining a Reluctant Post-Genocide Society: The Rwandan Patriotic Front's Ideology and Practice."

⁸ Wa Thiong'o (1986), *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018), "Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization."

⁹ Ndushabandi and Rutazibwa (2019), "Agaciro."; de Sousa Santos (2014), "Nuestra America: Postcolonial Identities and Mestizajes."

¹⁰ Hintjens (2015), "As If There Were Two Rwandas," 133.

¹¹ Jones (2012), "Between Pyongyang and Singapore: The Rwandan State, Its Rulers, and the Military."

¹² Rutazibwa (2014) "Studying Agaciro: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda," 292; Purdeková (2008), "Building a Nation in Rwanda? De-ethnicization and its Discontents" cited in Benda (2019), "Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to Ndi Umunyarwanda," 194.

¹³ Northouse (2009), *Leadership: Theory and Practice*; Thomas, "Re-Imagining Framework for Leadership Analysis."

¹⁴ Northouse (2009), *Leadership: Theory and Practice*; Cornell (2019), "Mutuality on a Spectrum: Ownership and Buy-In."

¹⁵ Grimm (2013), "Aid Dependency as a Limitation to National Development Policy? The Case of Rwanda," 81.

¹⁶ Smith (2012), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; Rowe (2012), "Positionality."

¹⁷ Smith (2012), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*; Porsanger (2004), "An Essay about Indigenous Methodology."

¹⁸ Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), "A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism vs Interpretivism."; Nickerson (2024), "Interpretivism Paradigm & Research Philosophy."

¹⁹ George and Bennett (2005), *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*.

By centring endogenous knowledge, this paper is compatible with decolonial methodologies. A key task in this regard, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni explains, is to ‘de-Europeanise the world’ while ‘deprovincializing,’ or ‘moving to the centre’ African knowledges,²⁰ which *Agaciro* is part of. Qualitative research methods are adopted to collect and analyse both primary and secondary data, including use of local songs and poems, although the lack of fieldwork is an admitted limitation to the validity of the arguments presented herein. The paper nonetheless provides a refreshing perspective and illuminates some possibilities that can be unlocked by serious engagement with *Agaciro* and endogenous concepts, in general. For instance, it opens space for exploring the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of citizen participation in development, especially when understood as a self-defined and identity-driven process, rather than as a universal concept. In doing so, the paper also demonstrates the utility of a leadership lens to explain development processes and outcomes in Rwanda.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: following this introduction, I explore the link between the main themes of this research, while the third section presents the case study in detail and conducts a SIT-L leadership analysis. The paper proceeds to discuss the main interpretations of the analysis in regard to the proposed determinants, domestic mutuality and international agency, in its fourth part. Lastly, the conclusion reemphasises *Agaciro*’s influence on domestic leadership dynamics and on GoR’s ability to act assertively against external prescriptions.

2. THE LINK BETWEEN AGACIRO, DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Rutazibwa argues that the disregard for Rwandan perspectives on the *good life* legitimizes Western interventions, which are based on assumed universal ideals of development.²¹ She highlights *Agaciro* as a critical counter-narrative to this interventionism – both as a collective understanding of ‘being agents of our

own change’ and as a guiding principle behind the Rwandan government’s campaigns toward donor independence.²² Building on this, Mwambari underscores *Agaciro*’s role in fostering ‘collective relationship-building’ and serving as a moral foundation in resisting hegemonic influence.²³

Other perspectives find *Agaciro* significant in the Rwandan state’s vision of the future, especially when juxtaposed against a tainted past.²⁴ This is especially supported by evident efforts in Rwanda to preserve not only more recent memories of colonialism and violence but also its precolonial history characterised by harmony and unity.²⁵ Sundberg categorises these into ‘the golden era’ (pre-colonial Rwanda) and ‘the dark ages’ (colonial and post-independence Rwanda), in addition to the ongoing ‘renaissance.’²⁶ Despite their contrasts, these historical periods are argued to have converged into ‘a driving force towards the nation’s development’ and the pursuit of a more *Agaciro*-consistent identity. As both a means and an end, *Agaciro* offers not only an explanatory framework but also a blueprint ‘through which we consciously create ourselves.’²⁷ This highlights its practical significance beyond symbolism.

As the development field advances from rigid ties to GDP, industrial output and consumption levels, which once veiled important social dynamics, scholars such as Ntibatirwa and Ake stress the need for ‘content, strategies and modalities of development’²⁸ that are rooted in ‘what people believe and value.’²⁹ Furthermore, they should be sensitive to their ‘material, social and spiritual wellbeing.’³⁰ Imposing external models, they argue, produces alienation and disconnection.³¹ This reaffirms the relevance of endogenous knowledge systems, organically shaped by context-specific experiences, in crafting meaningful development strategies.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in this process. Khan, for example, demonstrates the role of ideological

²⁰ Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), “Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization.”

²¹ Rutazibwa (2014), “Studying *Agaciro*: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda.”

²² *Ibid.*, 297.

²³ Mwambari (2021), “*Agaciro*, Vernacular Memory, and the Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda.”

²⁴ Bolin (2019), “Dignity in Death and Life: Negotiating ‘*Agaciro*’ for the Nation in Preservation Practice at Nyamata Genocide Memorial, Rwanda.”

²⁵ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship; Bolin (2019), “Dignity in Death and Life: Negotiating ‘*Agaciro*’ for the Nation in Preservation Practice at Nyamata Genocide

Memorial, Rwanda.”; Ndushabandi and Schmidt (2021), “The Deconstruction of Ethnic Identity: Germany, France, and Rwanda.”

²⁶ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship.

²⁷ Moshman (2004), “Theories of Self and Theories as Selves: Identity in Rwanda,” 184.

²⁸ Ake (1991), “Building on the Indigenous,” 14.

²⁹ Ntibatirwa (2009), “Cultural Values, Economic Growth and Development,” 298.

³⁰ Rwabyoma (2016), “Terrains of Globalisation Struggles: Home-Grown Initiatives and Endogenous Development in Rwanda,” 320.

³¹ Ake (1991), “Building on the Indigenous.”

possessions of the ruling elites in shaping development outcomes, calling for a deeper engagement with the social contexts in which policies exist.³² According to the Social Identity Theory of Leadership (SIT-L), effective leaders are those who are perceived as most proximate to the group's identity, also referred to as 'prototypical members.'³³ Leaders and their proposals must reflect the group's shared attributes and aspirations, reinforcing internal cohesion while differentiating from outgroups.³⁴ As Haslam, Reicher, and Platow argue, leadership is most effective when it advances collective interests ('doing it for us'), shapes shared identity ('crafting a sense of us') and translates these ideals into material reality ('making us matter').³⁵

This research will rely on this SIT-L framework for two key reasons: first, SIT-L has been helpful in several studies on both intra- and intergroup dynamics (e.g., Schmidt *et al.*,³⁶ Hogg, Meehan and Farquharson,³⁷ and Foster³⁸). It holds that 'what happens within groups is inextricable and fundamentally affected by what happens between groups, and vice versa.'³⁹ Secondly, since development is conceived of in this paper to transcend economic growth, an explicit effort is necessary to reveal how mutuality may (or may not) be conditioned by the presence of shared psychosocial development objectives. Again, SIT-L would strengthen the analytical quality of this paper due to its attention to the 'psychology of leader-follower relationships.'⁴⁰

3. SIT-L ANALYSIS

3.1. Case Study Background

In 2016, the East African Community (EAC) issued a directive to phase out Second-hand Clothing (SHC) and footwear imports to promote regional textile manufacturing.⁴¹ As a first step, it doubled the Common External Tariff (CET) to USD .40 per kg for SHC. Considering that SHC imports were around USD 151m in 2015,⁴² the new CET would have a significant impact on the trade.

The US, the leading SHC exporter (approximately USD 950m annually), opposed this initiative and initiated an out-of-cycle review of the African Growth and Opportunity Act⁴³ (AGOA) for EAC members—Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda.⁴⁴ With the prospect of losing duty-free access to the US market that the trade program offers, EAC members, except Rwanda, reverted the tariff. Conversely, Rwanda maintained and progressively increased it to USD 5 per kg.⁴⁵ By 2018, SHC imports had reduced by 97 per cent while local output had increased to USD 70.6 million in 2017 from 2015's USD 59.5 million.⁴⁶ Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) dominate the industry, accounting for approximately 98 per cent of Rwanda's textile production.⁴⁷

This case presents two paradoxes. First, it exemplifies infant industry protectionism, which has been widely associated with 'developmental' states of East Asia.⁴⁸ Yet, Rwanda's development approach is generally characterised by 'ultra-market-friendly'⁴⁹ policies which

³² Khan (2010), "Political Settlements, Political Stabilization and Implications for Growth-Enhancing Governance."

³³ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments."; Turner (1987), "The Analysis of Social Influence."

³⁴ Hogg (2001), "A Social Identity Theory of Leadership."

³⁵ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power*.

³⁶ Schmid *et al.* (2009), "Antecedents and Consequences of Social Identity Complexity: Intergroup Contact, Distinctiveness Threat, and Outgroup Attitudes."

³⁷ Hogg, Meehan, and Farquharson (2010), "The Solace of Radicalism: Self-Uncertainty and Group Identification in the Face of Threat."

³⁸ Foster (2023), "Leadership Dynamics in Foreign Interventions: Russia and France in Mali 2012-2022."

³⁹ Hogg (2016), "Social Identity Theory."

⁴⁰ Bartel (2011), "Alexander S. Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher, and Michael J. Platow: *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*," 477.

⁴¹ EAC (2016), "Joint Communiqué: 17th Ordinary Summit of the East African Community Heads of State."

⁴² Gambino (2017), "'It's about Our Dignity': Vintage Clothing Ban in Rwanda Sparks US Trade Dispute | Lauren Gambino."

⁴³ Burundi, however, had already been suspended from AGOA on 1st January 2016 (The White House, 2015)

⁴⁴ Olingo and Esiara (2024), "The End of Secondhand Clothes."; USTR (2018), "President Trump Determines Trade Preference Program Eligibility for Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda | United States Trade Representative."

⁴⁵ OTEXA (2024), "Textile and Apparel Market Report - Worn Clothing Requirements."

⁴⁶ Essa (2018), "Politics of Second-Hand Clothes: A Debate on 'Dignity.'"

⁴⁷ MINICOM (2017), "Made in Rwanda Policy."

⁴⁸ Amsden (1989), *Asia's next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*; Woo-Cumings (1999), "Introduction: Chalmers Johnson and the Politics of Nationalism and Development."

⁴⁹ Gaudreault and Bodolica (2024), "Africanization of Developmental State Model: On Rwanda's Industrial Policy and Institutional Arrangements," 360.

almost emulate the neoliberal model.⁵⁰ From an economic perspective, one can be frustrated by such an ‘incoherent’ approach.⁵¹ Second, although Wolff finds the ban to have been facilitated by GoR’s ‘superior holding power,’⁵² numerous studies have also insisted on a marked vulnerability of political elites in Rwanda. Notably, researchers have indicated that GoR’s consistency in delivering social benefit *is a means of maintaining its legitimacy*.⁵³

Yet, GoR had anticipated that this ban would have some far-reaching negative effects on consumers, retailers, SHC importers, and AGOA-beneficiary exporters,⁵⁴ thereby deepening its vulnerability. According to the political vulnerability perspective, it is clear that phasing out SHC would have been a self-defeating endeavour. Nevertheless, the then-Rwandan minister of EAC affairs, Rugwabiza, expressed GoR’s commitment to ‘the idea of dignity in *Agaciro*’, against which SHC markets operate.⁵⁵ In the following leadership analysis, which explores how *Agaciro* influences Rwanda’s development strategy, these ideas of incoherent emulation and political vulnerability are effectively re-examined.

3.2. Identity entrepreneurship: The (re)making of ‘us’ in Rwanda

In 2003, Rwanda adopted a new constitution that establishes that the ‘eradication of discrimination and divisionism... as well as promotion of national unity’ is among the country’s ‘fundamental principles.’⁵⁶ This was, foremost, a responsive and preventive measure to the genocide. But secondly, it was an effort to ‘promote national culture and restore *dignity*.’⁵⁷ Thus, among the

central undertakings for GoR has been the ‘*Ndi Umunyarwanda*’ (‘*Rwandaness*’) campaign,⁵⁸ supported by the promotion of ‘*Indangagaciro*’ (‘*Agaciro* ideals,’ or as broadly understood ‘cultural values’), especially through civic education programs, ‘*Itorero*.’⁵⁹

This section explores the exchange of influence between state and societal actors in defining the notion of ‘us.’ As Grint argues, the ability to persuade ‘*me* and *you* to become *us*’⁶⁰ greatly determines the effectiveness of prototypical leaders. Historically, though, *Rwandaness* was the original identity in precolonial Rwanda, while the ethnicization of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa was a colonial imposition.^{61,62} The population shared similar traditions and language, and believed in the same God — ‘*Imana*,’⁶³ also referred to as ‘*Imana y’i Rwanda*’ (God of Rwanda).⁶⁴ As Moshman notes, ‘Rwandans were first and foremost Rwandan.’⁶⁵ This Rwandan identity, as echoed in a poem by Uwamahoro and Rugamba, gives foundation to *Agaciro*:

‘Agaciro, it’s in you; it always has been. And no one can ever take away what Imana himself has given to you.’⁶⁶

The poem then proceeds to lament the loss of *Agaciro* during the ‘dark ages’⁶⁷ but also hints at its significance on ‘who we are’ and ‘what we stand for:’

For a while, we lost it; we forgot who we were and what we stood for...

⁵⁰ Behuria (2015), “Learning from Role Models in Rwanda: Incoherent Emulation in the Construction of a Neoliberal Developmental State.”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Wolff (2020), “The Global Politics of African Industrial Policy: The Case of the Used Clothing Ban in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda,” 1320.

⁵³ Mann and Berry (2015), “Understanding the Political Motivations That Shape Rwanda’s Emergent Developmental State.”; Behuria (2015), “Between Party Capitalism and Market Reforms – Understanding Sector Differences in Rwanda.”; Chemouni (2018), “The Political Path to Universal Health Coverage: Power, Ideas and Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda.”

⁵⁴ Akwei (2017), “Rwanda’s Kagame Sticks to Used Clothes Ban despite U.S. Threats.”; Olingo and Esiara (2024), “The End of Secondhand Clothes.”

⁵⁵ Ndushabandi and Rutazibwa (2019), “*Agaciro*,” 80.

⁵⁶ GoR (2015), “The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 2003 Revised in 2015,” 34.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁸ Sentama (2022), “National Reconciliation in Rwanda: Experiences and Lessons Learnt.”

⁵⁹ Bolin (2019), “A Country without Culture Is Destroyed: Making Rwanda and Rwandans through Heritage.”; Gierszewska and Sinining (2023), “Civic Education in Rwanda: The Impact of the Itorero Program.”

⁶⁰ Grint (2010), *Leadership: A Very Short Introduction*, 68.

⁶¹ Moshman (2004), “Theories of Self and Theories as Selves: Identity in Rwanda.”

⁶² Ndushabandi and Schmidt (2021), “The Deconstruction of Ethnic Identity: Germany, France, and Rwanda.”

⁶³ Muzungu (1974), *Le Dieu de Nos Pères: Une Réflexion Théologique Sur Les Données de La Religion Traditionnelle Du Rwanda et Du Burundi*, 58.

⁶⁴ Ndushabandi and Schmidt (2021), “The Deconstruction of Ethnic Identity: Germany, France, and Rwanda,” 198.

⁶⁵ Moshman (2004), “Theories of Self and Theories as Selves: Identity in Rwanda,” 2.

⁶⁶ IGIHE (2023), “*Agaciro*; a Poem by Angel Uwamahoro and Winnie Rugamba at Rwanda Cultural Day San Francisco.”

⁶⁷ Sundberg (2016), *Training for Model Citizenship*.

*We forgot that we were dignified, and forgot what that signified.*⁶⁸

Here, the poem shows that identity entrepreneurship, – ‘crafting a sense of us’ – involves not only the process of defining social category boundaries but also the content: ‘values, beliefs, and priorities.’⁶⁹ With this in mind, it might be appropriate to focus on *Ndi Umunyarwanda* (Rwandaness) as the definition of ingroup boundaries and *Indangagaciro* as an expression of shared values within *Agaciro*.

3.2.1. *Ndi Umunyarwanda (Rwandaness)*

Ndi Umunyarwanda is a broad campaign that has shaped numerous identity re-categorisation policies and programs.⁷⁰ Its core principle – that there are no ethnic distinctions among Rwandans – GoR suggests, is a ‘path for pursuing previously lost *Agaciro*.’⁷¹

Ndi Umunyarwanda is predominantly framed as a solely top-down policy, probably due to the misconception that a leader’s agency automatically negates the agency of followers, and vice versa, in identity entrepreneurship – that agency is a ‘zero-sum’ game.⁷² Yet, this framing provides inadequate, or sometimes contradictory, evidence. Alternatively, Benda investigates the inception of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* and reveals that *Ndi Umunyarwanda* was conceived during grassroots-level dialogues⁷³ that brought to the fore debates on identity among youth from diverse backgrounds.⁷⁴ Pertinent challenges emerged, such as inherited senses of guilt and victimhood (associated with Hutu and Tutsi, respectively) among the post-genocide youth.⁷⁵ Bamporiki, founder of the ‘Art for Peace’ organisation, advocated for greater youth agency: ‘we need to step out of our parents’ shadows.’⁷⁶

Such calls culminated in a ‘public narrative that political authorities could not ignore.’⁷⁷ Reflective of this, President Kagame’s speech during the 2014 commemoration ceremony rhetorically asks, ‘If we succeed in forging a new, more inclusive national identity, would it be a bad thing?’⁷⁸

From a SIT-L perspective, two observations emerge on this ‘process of convergence’ between youth organisations and GoR.⁷⁹ First, the construction of *Ndi Umunyarwanda* has been characterised by a process of ‘reflecting,’ whereby GoR assumed the role of the follower.⁸⁰ During this stage, which precedes ‘representing’ (prototypicality) and ‘realising’ (advancement), leaders ‘listen..., watch..., [and] learn about the group,’ thereby increasing their ability to assess what identities matter to the group⁸¹. This thus leads to the second observation that group identity can be a product of the ‘collective agency in which leaders and followers are partners.’⁸²

However, determining the effectiveness of identity entrepreneurship in Rwanda remains a challenge. Blouin and Mukand found low salience of ethnic identities in their study with 438 farmers across 52 villages⁸³ while Purdeková and Mwambari highlight the lingering presence of such identities in popular culture and social media spaces.⁸⁴ The latter also find contradictory systemic reproduction of ethnic divisions, such as in the ‘*Miss Rwanda*’ competitions, where participation criteria included a minimum height of 1.70 metres (5ft 7in).⁸⁵ Despite being a ‘common practice in beauty pageants globally,’ the requirement reinforces colonial associations of certain physical attributes with Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.⁸⁶ Undeniably, there are still gaps in achieving the desired ‘more inclusive national

⁶⁸ IGIHE (2023), “*Agaciro; a Poem* by Angel Uwamahoro and Winnie Rugamba at Rwanda Cultural Day San Francisco.”

⁶⁹ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power*.

⁷⁰ Ndushabandi and Schmidt (2021), “The Deconstruction of Ethnic Identity: Germany, France, and Rwanda.”

⁷¹ NURC (2023), “*Ndi Umunyarwanda, Inzira Nyayo Yo Gushakisha Agaciro Abanyarwanda Batakaje*.”

⁷² Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005), “Social Identity and the Dynamics of Leadership: Leaders and Followers as Collaborative Agents in the Transformation of Social Reality,” 247.

⁷³ Benda (2019), “Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*.”

⁷⁴ Kimenyi (2013), “We Need to Step out of Our Parents’ Shadows – Poet Bamporiki.”

⁷⁵ Ibid; Benda (2019), “Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*.”

⁷⁶ Kimenyi (2013), “We Need to Step out of Our Parents’ Shadows – Poet Bamporiki.”

⁷⁷ Benda (2019), “Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*,” 203.

⁷⁸ Kwibuka Rwanda (2014), “*Kwibuka 20 - Keynote Address* by President Kagame - Amahoro Stadium, 07 April 2014.”

⁷⁹ Benda (2019), “Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to *Ndi Umunyarwanda*,” 203.

⁸⁰ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power*, 206.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005), “Social Identity and the Dynamics of Leadership: Leaders and Followers as Collaborative Agents in the Transformation of Social Reality.”

⁸³ Blouin and Mukand (2019), “Erasing Ethnicity? Propaganda, Nation Building, and Identity in Rwanda.”

⁸⁴ Purdeková and Mwambari (2021), “Post-Genocide Identity Politics and Colonial Durabilities in Rwanda.”

⁸⁵ Ibid; Taarifa Rwanda (2020), “*Miss Rwanda Revises Weight & Height Standards*.”

⁸⁶ Purdeková and Mwambari (2021), “Post-Genocide Identity Politics and Colonial Durabilities in Rwanda,” 27.

identity,⁸⁷ especially considering the impactful events of colonialism and mass violence, both of which Rwanda has experienced. Nevertheless, *Ndi Umunyarwanda* allows expanded identity boundaries, thus facilitating the mobilisation of mass efforts required to shape economic and social reality.⁸⁸

3.2.2. *Indangagaciro*

While *Ndi Umunyarwanda* affects 'who will be mobilised,' it is the content associated with this Rwandaness, SIT-L argues, that 'will determine what they will be mobilised for.'^{89,90} With the reinvigoration of *Agaciro* in its development and nation-building agendas, GoR devised the education of *Indangagaciro* ('*Agaciro* ideals,' or as broadly understood, 'cultural values'), and their opposite, *Kirazira* ('interdictions,' or 'taboos').⁹¹ The most intentional instrument through which these are disseminated is the *Itorero* civic education program, which was introduced in 2007.⁹² Its prototype-making potential, that is, building *Rwandaness in content terms*, is clearly articulated by President Kagame's use of 'Rwandan' in singular form during the closing ceremony of its 2018 edition:

*'The Rwandan culture provides [a] means of building – building a Rwandan, building Rwanda.'*⁹³

Kagame's statement highlights two key points. First, he points towards a cultural significance, hence a connection with familiar aspects of the Rwandan identity of *Indangagaciro* and *Itorero*. Second, the link made between 'building a Rwandan' and 'building

Rwanda'⁹⁴ may allude to the importance of Rwandaness in the future imaginary (development) of Rwanda, which reciprocally influences the Rwandan identity. Here, a social identity can influence social realities and vice versa.⁹⁵ These two suggestions are explored in more depth below.

Itorero served as 'the principal education institution' (for male youth; female youth attended '*Urubohero*') during precolonial Rwanda,⁹⁶ where successful graduates, '*Intore*,' would be recruited into the prestigious royal army.⁹⁷ *Itorero* was eventually replaced by missionary education as part of Belgium's *mission civilisatrice*.⁹⁸ The modern-day *Itorero* inherits some of its original features, but there are two main differences. First, *Itorero* is open to both genders but with a focus on those aged between 18 and 35.⁹⁹ Second, and most relevant to this discussion, is that *Intore*, instead of his/her membership of the royal army, is now defined by an embodiment of *Indangagaciro*, such as '*ubutwari*' ('heroic courage') and '*ubupfura*' ('nobility').¹⁰⁰

President Kagame remarks that *Intore* are expected to be the 'guardians' of *Agaciro*.¹⁰¹ He then urges this responsibility to guide, 'every day..., your thoughts, words, and above all, deeds.'¹⁰² Resonant with the idea of *ubutwari*, President Kagame states that in upholding *Agaciro*, 'you are not afraid to question assumptions.'¹⁰³ At the same time, *Ubutwari* invokes a spirit of entrepreneurship and resourcefulness¹⁰⁴ that President Kagame says 'is part of *us* now.'¹⁰⁵

⁸⁷ Kwibuka Rwanda (2014), "Kwibuka 20 - Keynote Address by President Kagame - Amahoro Stadium, 07 April 2014."

⁸⁸ Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005), "Social Identity and the Dynamics of Leadership: Leaders and Followers as Collaborative Agents in the Transformation of Social Reality."

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 556.

⁹⁰ Wenzel, Mummendey, and Waldzus (2007), "Superordinate Identities and Intergroup Conflict: The Ingroup Projection Model."

⁹¹ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship; Bolin, "A Country without Culture Is Destroyed: Making Rwanda and Rwandans through Heritage."

⁹² Sundberg, Training for Model Citizenship (2016); Bolin, "A Country without Culture Is Destroyed: Making Rwanda and Rwandans through Heritage."; Gierszewska and Sinining (2023), "Civic Education in Rwanda: The Impact of the *Itorero* Program."

⁹³ Kagame (2018), "Closing Ceremony of *Itorero* Indangamirwa | Gabiro, 5 August 2018."

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Reicher and Hopkins (2001), Self and Nation; Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005), "Social Identity and the Dynamics of Leadership: Leaders and Followers as Collaborative Agents in the Transformation of Social Reality."

⁹⁶ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship, 41; Nzahabwanayo, Finchilescu, and Divala (2019), "What Are the Qualities of Good Citizenship in Post-Genocide Rwanda? High School Teachers Speak through a Q-Methodological Approach."

⁹⁷ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ NIC (2011), "Itorero Program Strategy."

¹⁰⁰ Dahlmans (2015), "New Community, Old Tradition: The *Intore* Warrior as a Symbol of the New Man. Rwanda's *Itorero*-Policy of Societal Recreation."; Basabose (2019), "Anti-Corruption Education: *Ubutwari* Model: The *Ubutwari* Project in Rwanda."

¹⁰¹ Kagame (2015), "Remarks by President Kagame at the Rwanda Youth Forum."

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Behuria (2016), "Countering Threats, Stabilising Politics and Selling Hope: Examining the *Agaciro* Concept as a Response to a Critical Juncture in Rwanda."

¹⁰⁵ Kagame (2015), "Remarks by President Kagame at the Rwanda Youth Forum."

*'Rwanda has very high ambitions and few resources, but we must get there because we have you. There are no apologies to be made about this. This is the mindset of a nation that has chosen Agaciro for itself.'*¹⁰⁶

This is especially emphasised in the *Itorero* curriculum since among the '10 *Intore* principles', the first two directly relate to this:

1. *'Intore never complains, (s)he seeks solutions;*
2. *Intore never gets lost, even in the thick jungle (s)he seeks a way.'*¹⁰⁷

Another 'central cultural value in the [Itorero] program curriculum' is *ubupfura*.¹⁰⁸ *Ubupfura* is often likened to integrity, nobility, and honesty.¹⁰⁹ An individual who displays such qualities is called *Imfura*, a term also given to a first-born child.¹¹⁰ This could explain its general association with wisdom and a greater sense of responsibility.¹¹¹ Like *ubutwari*, *ubupfura* can be seen to be emphasised in the *Intore* principles, particularly in the third and fourth:

3. *'Intore is a steward of accomplishments; they cannot be reversed under his/her watch;*
4. *Intore is never stalled, (s)he strives for exemplary work.'*¹¹²

Ubupfura's main significance, though, Basabose argues, lies in serving as an ethical foundation for incorruptibility and fairness.¹¹³ For example, Rwanda's anti-corruption framework of institutional preventive and punitive measures is shown to be underpinned by group values of 'Agaciro (dignity), and [a] strong sense of personal and social responsibility.'¹¹⁴

Overall, the relationship suggested by President Kagame between 'building a Rwandan' and 'building Rwanda'¹¹⁵ becomes most apparent in his probably most cited speech: 'After 1994..., we made three fundamental choices that guide us to this day. Choice one, we chose

to stay together... Choice number two, we chose to be accountable to ourselves... Choice number three, we chose to think big.'¹¹⁶ 'Staying together' points to inclusive group boundaries, while 'accountability' and 'thinking big' are arguably consequential of the identity content in which *ubupfura* (integrity, nobility, honesty) and *ubutwari* (heroic courage) are important. This argument can be supported by GoR's statement that *Itorero* was designed to favour Rwanda's socioeconomic development objectives, as were then outlined in the Vision 2020 development plan, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), and the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).¹¹⁷

This first section of my four-part analysis was concerned with uncovering the dynamic and complex process of identity formation in post-genocide Rwanda. It has highlighted the role of both GoR and the Rwandan society in defining identity boundaries, as well as GoR's employment of both Rwanda's history and its vision in determining identity content— its comparative frame. In both cases, GoR exerted a high level of influence, probably characteristic of greater informational power.¹¹⁸ However, Hogg, van Knippenberg and Rast's proposition that 'people look to their leaders to define their identity' proves to be only partially true.¹¹⁹ In Rwanda's case, people and their histories have facilitated the construction of a collective identity. There is a use of 'familiar strands' to create 'novel patterns.'¹²⁰

3.3. Identity prototypicality: An entrepreneurial GoR?

Identity prototypicality, as encountered earlier, refers to the quality of a leader as representative of the ingroup identity.¹²¹ A prototypical leader, however, is not simply the 'average' of the group, unlike 'typical' members.¹²² Rather, 'prototypical' members are representative of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ NIC (2014), "Imfashanyigisho Yo Gutoza Indangagaciro Yo Kwihesha Agaciro," 52.

¹⁰⁸ Sundberg (2016), *Training for Model Citizenship*, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Basabose (2019), "Anti-Corruption Education: Ubupfura Model: The Ubupfura Project in Rwanda."

¹¹⁰ Sundberg (2016), *Training for Model Citizenship*.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² NIC (2014), "Imfashanyigisho Yo Gutoza Indangagaciro Yo Kwihesha Agaciro," 52-53.

¹¹³ Basabose (2019), "Anti-Corruption Education: Ubupfura Model: The Ubupfura Project in Rwanda."

¹¹⁴ World Bank (2020), "Rwanda's Anti-Corruption Experience: Actions, Accomplishments, and Lessons."; World Bank and GoR (2020), *Future Drivers of Growth in Rwanda: Innovation, Integration, Agglomeration, and Competition*, xx.

¹¹⁵ Kagame (2015), "Remarks by President Kagame at the Rwanda Youth Forum."

¹¹⁶ Kwibuka Rwanda (2014), "Kwibuka 20 - Keynote Address by President Kagame - Amahoro Stadium, 07 April 2014."

¹¹⁷ NIC (2011), "Itorero Program Strategy."

¹¹⁸ Raven (1965), "Social Influence and Power."

¹¹⁹ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments," 264.

¹²⁰ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 132.

¹²¹ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments."

¹²² Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*.

both 'who we are' and 'who we want to be.'¹²³ To be clear, 'who we are' and 'who we want to be' are context-specific concepts, 'defined by both place and time.'¹²⁴ Prototypical leaders, therefore, emerge as a result of their ability to 'demonstrate, in the present, the practical adequacy of a vision for the society of the future.'¹²⁵ Three elements can, therefore, be identified: 'a cognitive dimension' (who we are), 'a normative dimension' (who we should be), 'and an instrumental one (the means to attain such an ideal)'.¹²⁶ For GoR, President Kagame suggests, *Agaciro* cuts across all of these:

*So Agaciro is simply central to everything we are doing, for our development... [it is] that being who we are and who we should be.*¹²⁷

He begins by linking *Agaciro* to the means ('everything we are doing') before illustrating its cognitive ('who we are') and normative ('who we should be') significance for GoR.¹²⁸ This section builds on the previous discussion to assess the nature and implications of GoR's prototypicality. It is also subdivided into two parts that focus on *Ndi Umunyarwanda* and *Indangaciro*.

3.3.1. *Ndi Umunyarwanda*

Ndi Umunyarwanda is a critical factor in determining GoR's prototypicality due to its intricate relatedness to *Agaciro*, which has been established earlier. By insisting on a superordinate Rwandan identity, *Ndi Umunyarwanda* diminishes the perception of GoR as mostly composed— and therefore representing the interests— of any specific subordinate group. *Ndi Umunyarwanda*, most importantly, counters the portrayal of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and members of its coalition as 'foreigners'. This categorisation as an outgroup characterised much of the

discourse before and during the genocide, where they were said to be of Ethiopian nationality (for example, in Mugesera's 1992 speech).¹²⁹

Cheng *et al.*'s experiments help us understand the significance of this on GoR's ability to mobilise support from followers.¹³⁰ In studying followers' reactions to procedural discrimination (bias towards vs against the ingroup), Cheng *et al.* find that, in both scenarios, followers tended to regard the prototypical leader as fairer than the non-prototypical leader (a member of an outgroup).¹³¹ Similarly, Kalshoven and den Hartog establish a positive relationship between prototypicality and trust.¹³² As such, the perception of GoR as an outgroup leader would likely cause low follower trust and support, thus inhibiting its effectiveness. This would be particularly apparent in phasing out SHC due to its immediate negative effects on a significant portion of the population. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) makes sure to list these in their report: 40 per cent of the consumers would not afford locally made new clothes; approximately 25,000 full-time jobs that sustain nearly 100,000 people would be lost; textile firms would lose access to the American 'high-end' market; and GoR itself would lose a considerable inflow of customs revenue.¹³³

Chemouni and Mugiraneza innovatively trace the RPF's efforts to challenge an outgroup status through an analysis of their 1990-94 liberation war songs.¹³⁴ For example, 19 out of 20 songs that their study identifies were in the Kinyarwanda language.¹³⁵ Through these, the common culture and the shared belief in *Imana* were celebrated as a means of relationship-building with Rwandans in the country and abroad. Chemouni and Mugiraneza note that the songs were particularly useful in 'identity expression and [stimulating] collective memory.'¹³⁶ This is because 'the creation of a compelling

¹²³ Ibid., 99; Halevy, Berson, and Galinsky (2011), "The Mainstream Is Not Electable: When Vision Triumphs over Representativeness in Leader Emergence and Effectiveness," 895

¹²⁴ Reicher *et al.* (2016), "Tyranny and Leadership," 72.

¹²⁵ Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005), "Social Identity and the Dynamics of Leadership: Leaders and Followers as Collaborative Agents in the Transformation of Social Reality," 561.

¹²⁶ Chemouni and Mugiraneza (2019), "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda," 118.

¹²⁷ Kagame (2011), "President Kagame at Africa Heads of State Forum - Kigali 9 February 2011."

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Fletcher (2014), "Words That Can Kill: The Mugesera Speech and the 1994 Tutsi Genocide in Rwanda."

¹³⁰ Cheng *et al.* (2009), "Reactions to Procedural Discrimination in an Intergroup Context: The Role of Group Membership of the Authority."

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Kalshoven and den Hartog (2009), "Ethical Leader Behavior and Leader Effectiveness: The Role of Prototypicality and Trust."

¹³³ USAID (2017), "Overview of the Second-Hand Clothing Market in East Africa: Analysis of Determinants and Implications," 10.

¹³⁴ Chemouni and Mugiraneza (2019), "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 120.

vision of identity', SIT-L explains, 'is achieved primarily through language.'¹³⁷

Reinstating unity (*ubumwe*), which remains GoR's ongoing project, stands out as the overarching theme across all songs.¹³⁸ In fact, Chemouni and Mugiraneza comment that 'the RPF appears [to be] obsessed by it.'¹³⁹ It is also important to highlight the unique meaning and operationalisation of unity in Rwanda. Instead of power-sharing¹⁴⁰ and 'ethnic quota provisions,'¹⁴¹ unity in Rwanda has been described to be based on 'ethnic amnesia'¹⁴² and restoration of an 'indivisible identity.'¹⁴³ Interestingly, the Kinyarwanda word for unity, *ubumwe*, can translate to 'the oneness of one.'¹⁴⁴ This form of unity, or more appropriately – oneness, favours GoR's prototypicality and (as a result) its referent power, regardless of its ethnic composition.¹⁴⁵

According to SIT-L, GoR, as an ingroup leader, would largely be perceived 'to behave in ingroup-serving ways that favour and promote the ingroup.'¹⁴⁶ The Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer (RRB), in its 2010 version, provides positive evidence for this; out of 3,000 respondents, over '90% strongly agreed or agreed that they can trust the country's leaders to do what is in their best interest.'¹⁴⁷ In the Gallup World Poll conducted in 2019, Rwandans showed even greater 'confidence in governmental institutions' – 99%, making it the top-ranking country globally on this metric.¹⁴⁸

3.3.2. *Indangagaciro*

Admittedly, prototypicality cannot exclusively explain follower trust reflected in the 2010 RRB. The phasing out of SHC was indeed accompanied by comprehensive and systematic efforts to minimise the impact of the decision. For example, GoR removed taxes on imported raw

materials (e.g., silk, hides and cotton), provided grants, and subsidised loans.¹⁴⁹ However, the motivations to search for alternative ways seem to be underpinned, to some extent, by *Agaciro* ideals, the *indangagaciro*. Here, it is worthy to recall President Kagame's comment:

*'[it] is the choice we find that we have to make... we might suffer consequences [but] even when confronted with difficult choices, there is always a way.'*¹⁵⁰

President Kagame's statement, especially in its second part, strikingly follows the *ubutwari* (heroic courage) logic, as articulated in the second *Intore* principle:

*'Intore never gets lost, even in the thick jungle, (s)he seeks a way.'*¹⁵¹

Behuria rightly points out that *Agaciro* helps in 'the creation of entrepreneurial citizens'¹⁵² (identity entrepreneurship) but critically foregoes any assessment of whether *Agaciro* has a similar effect on their leaders. This could be because of the assumption that leadership is a property of the leader, which frames influence as *linear* rather than as an *interaction*. In contrast, the adopted SIT-L suggests that leaders need to demonstrate 'identity-consistent behaviour' so as to ensure support from the group.¹⁵³ This corrects the analytical blind spot against the 'ship' in 'leadership'¹⁵⁴ that discounts followers' perceptions and their role in affecting leadership outcomes.

There is a wealth of evidence that suggests an entrepreneurial GoR as a result of its mutual influence with followers. In line with *ubutwari* specifically, '*kwishakamo ibisubizo*' (seeking solutions within) has been a guiding principle for GoR in overcoming

¹³⁷ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 148.

¹³⁸ Purdeková (2015), *Making Ubumwe : Power, State and Camps in Rwanda's Unity-Building Project*.

¹³⁹ Chemouni and Mugiraneza (2019), "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda," 122.

¹⁴⁰ However, Rwanda, under the 'consociational (consensus) democracy' model, is also governed by a coalition of political parties (Lijphart, 2012; Traniello, 2008).

¹⁴¹ Vandeginste (2014), "Governing Ethnicity after Genocide: Ethnic Amnesia in Rwanda versus Ethnic Power-Sharing in Burundi," 263.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴³ Rugira (2024), "Why Kagame Keeps Running," 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ntibagirirwa (2009), "Ubuntu as a Metaphysical Concept."

¹⁴⁵ Moss (2014), "Beyond Conflict and Spoilt Identities: How Rwandan Leaders Justify a Single Recategorization Model for

Post-Conflict Reconciliation.," French and Raven (1959), "The Bases of Social Power."

¹⁴⁶ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments," 266.

¹⁴⁷ NURC (2010), "Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer," 22.

¹⁴⁸ Clifton (2022), "A Letter to Rwandan President Paul Kagame."

¹⁴⁹ Msingi (2020), "Sector Mapping: Textile and Apparel Industry in East Africa."

¹⁵⁰ Akwei (2017), "Rwanda's Kagame Sticks to Used Clothes Ban despite U.S. Threats."

¹⁵¹ NIC (2014), "Imfashanyigisho Yo Gutoza Indangagaciro Yo Kwihesha Agaciro," 52.

¹⁵² Behuria (2016), "Countering Threats, Stabilising Politics and Selling Hope: Examining the Agaciro Concept as a Response to a Critical Juncture in Rwanda," 16.

¹⁵³ Hogg (2016), "Social Identity Theory," 11.

¹⁵⁴ Grint (2010), *Leadership: A Very Short Introduction*, 106.

complex challenges (or seeking a way through the thick jungle, in *Intore* jargon).¹⁵⁵ Perhaps the most studied case of 'seeking solutions within' is the *Gacaca* courts, but they also include others that have been collectively termed 'Home-Grown Solutions (HGS).'¹⁵⁶ These are prominently featured in Rwanda's new development plan for 2050, titled 'The Rwanda we want.'¹⁵⁷ It asserts that HGSs, together with *Agaciro* and the Rwandan identity, 'will remain at the heart of Rwanda's socio-economic development.'¹⁵⁸

Additionally, it might be suggested that *ubupfura* (integrity, nobility, honesty) compliments *ubutwari* in encouraging GoR to seek fair outcomes for different stakeholders—retailers, consumers, SMEs, factories, etc. Certainly, equity is difficult to achieve in this case since a variety of factors make the SHC ban more impactful to certain members of the group than others. Nevertheless, research shows that follower support is more dependent on a leader's identity-advancing behaviour (even if marked with favouritism) than on his/her even-handedness towards ingroup members.¹⁵⁹ Other studies have also linked the seemingly counterintuitive tendency whereby 'people choose to compromise their... material welfare' while pursuing 'positive ingroup emotions.'¹⁶⁰ This effectively affords the prototypical leader 'more leeway' in their identity advancement endeavours.¹⁶¹ Evidence of this in the SHC case is examined in the section that follows.

Thus far, what has been emphasised is that, as GoR actively constructs 'a sense of us,' it repositions itself to

maintain its prototypicality and capability to mobilise follower support.

3.4. Identity advancement: Questioning assumptions

While some theories view leadership as an inherent ability of the leader,¹⁶² SIT-L argues that prototypical leaders are products 'of both intra- and inter-group relations.'¹⁶³ The endorsement of leaders as doing 'the right thing' (but not necessarily 'the fair thing') by their group members transcends 'charismatic-inspirational' endowments,¹⁶⁴ and is influenced by social comparison tendencies, whereby ingroup members seek to 'establish positive distinctiveness from outgroups.'¹⁶⁵ As such, effective leaders are usually those who can enhance their group's 'positive identity,' in relation to outgroups.¹⁶⁶

From the intragroup perspective, follower support is higher for leaders who 'support those ingroup members who epitomise what makes 'us' different to 'them' and, [secondly,] whose actions imply 'we are better than them.'¹⁶⁷ It is clear that in this regard, Rwanda-based fashion SMEs are more influential than any other concerned actors, including larger textile factories that primarily manufacture basic clothing items for US markets.¹⁶⁸ For example, Mugabo, owner of the Rwanda Clothing brand, states that their motivations extend beyond 'wearing nice clothes and fashion' and links them to *Agaciro*, 'it's about our dignity.'¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Bisserbe, from the Asanti brand, shows that local designers are essential in identity advancement and in

¹⁵⁵ Bolin (2019), "A Country without Culture Is Destroyed: Making Rwanda and Rwandans through Heritage."; Ndagijimana (2021), "Kongerera Kwiubaka (Rebuilding Ourselves Again): Culturally Responsive and Contextually Relevant Collective Healing in Post-Genocide Rwanda."

¹⁵⁶ GoR (2020), "Vision 2050 Abridged Version."; Bolin and Nkusi (2021), "Rwandan Solutions to Rwandan Problems: Heritage Decolonization and Community Engagement in Nyanza District, Rwanda."; Ensign and Bertrand (2009), Rwanda: History and Hope.

¹⁵⁷ GoR (2020), "Vision 2050 Abridged Version."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Haslam and Platow (2001), "The Link between Leadership and Followership: How Affirming Social Identity Translates Vision into Action."

¹⁶⁰ Theiler (2017), "The Microfoundations of Diversionary Conflict," 342.

¹⁶¹ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments," 266.

¹⁶² Bass and Riggio (2005), Transformational Leadership.

¹⁶³ Gleibs and Haslam (2016), "Do We Want a Fighter? The Influence of Group Status and the Stability of Intergroup

Relations on Leader Prototypicality and Endorsement," 558; Hogg, "Social Identity Theory."

¹⁶⁴ Bass and Riggio (2005), Transformational Leadership, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Hogg (2016), "A Social Identity Theory of Leadership."

¹⁶⁶ Foster (2023), "Leadership Dynamics in Foreign Interventions: Russia and France in Mali 2012-2022," 2.

¹⁶⁷ Turner (1975), "Social Comparison and Social Identity: Some Prospects for Intergroup Behaviour" cited in Hogg (2016), "A Social Identity Theory of Leadership," 186.

¹⁶⁸ Haslam and Platow (2001), "The Link between Leadership and Followership: How Affirming Social Identity Translates Vision into Action," 1471.

¹⁶⁹ Wolff (2020), "The Global Politics of African Industrial Policy: The Case of the Used Clothing Ban in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda."; England *et al.* (2021), "Africa Fashion Futures: Creative Economies, Global Networks and Local Development."; Comunian *et al.* (2023), "African Hub for Sustainable Creative Economies: Collaborative Activities and Shared Learning. An Impact Report."

¹⁷⁰ Gambino (2017), "'It's about Our Dignity': Vintage Clothing Ban in Rwanda Sparks US Trade Dispute | Lauren Gambino."

establishing a 'positive distinctiveness from outgroups.'¹⁷⁰

*'I emphasise the fact that... you wear something that you own, that fits to your identity, ... you will have this pride of being African.'*¹⁷¹

This ability to promote the shared positive distinctiveness translates into Rwandan brands' strong influence on GoR's development strategy. Rugamba, founder of Tayo Designs, illustrates their central (if not leading) role in GoR's SHC ban and industrial policy:

*'There is a combination of things; there is designers taking initiative, but then there is a receptive government.'*¹⁷²

Haslam and Platow underline that a leader's willingness to support ingroup members who challenge an outgroup identity, in turn, inspires collective action of the followers to realise his/her plans.¹⁷³ This might help explain the steady growth of the sector, from USD 59.5 million in output in 2015 to over USD 260 million in 2024,¹⁷⁴ in which a number of local designers upgraded their capacity in order to supply international markets as well.¹⁷⁵ The domino effect of this internationalisation of local designers is that it enhances Rwanda's identity and status in relation to other groupings through 'heritage diplomacy.'¹⁷⁶

In intergroup terms, identity advancement is said to be undertaken through two strategies, depending on a group's relative status.¹⁷⁷ First is the collaborative approach, which is usually adopted by a low-status group when intergroup dynamics are stable, and a high-status group during unstable conditions— when their prestige is threatened.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the competitive approach is usually adopted by a dominant group in a

stable environment, and a low-status group in an unstable intergroup environment.¹⁷⁹

The CNN headline 'the US is fighting one of the world's poorest countries over trade'¹⁸⁰ illustrates that the US is the dominant group and Rwanda (which is not even mentioned by name) is the low-status group. This understanding can be supported by an application of French and Raven's social bases of power¹⁸¹ to the two countries. The US possesses greater reward power, which is even indicated in the name 'African Growth and Opportunity Act' itself, depicting the US as a provider of economic opportunities to African countries in exchange for conformity to conditionalities. For some observers, 'this agreement [AGOA] is supposed to be some kind of aid,' especially given that its conditions were not negotiated among parties.¹⁸²

The US' coercive power is founded by its ability to limit or withdraw AGOA's benefits for Rwanda. Other countries such as Canada, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, and China that exported SHC to the Rwandan market¹⁸³ did not have a similar level of coercive power as the US. The comparatively higher expert power of the US, especially in the development area in this case, further widens the status gap between itself and Rwanda. For example, through AGOA, USAID provides 16 African countries, including Rwanda, with technical assistance in devising industry development plans, as well as 'AGOA utilisation strategies'.¹⁸⁴ USAID is one of 14 US agencies, institutions, and departments that share their 'specialised' knowledge and skills with AGOA beneficiaries, demonstrating the extensive nature of the US's expert power over Rwanda.¹⁸⁵

According to Gleibs and Haslam's, the high-status US government would adopt a competitive approach, while the low-status GoR would opt for a collaborative

¹⁷⁰ Foster (2023), "Leadership Dynamics in Foreign Interventions: Russia and France in Mali 2012-2022," 2.

¹⁷¹ CGTN Africa (2023), "A Look at Performance of Rwanda's Textile Industry since Ban on Second-Hand Clothing Import."

¹⁷² Business Daily Africa (2021), "Rwandan Designers Hope Kigali Will Become Africa's Fashion Capital."

¹⁷³ Haslam and Platow (2001), "The Link between Leadership and Followership: How Affirming Social Identity Translates Vision into Action."

¹⁷⁴ Essa (2018), "Politics of Second-Hand Clothes: A Debate on 'Dignity.'"; Statista (2024), "Textiles - Rwanda."

¹⁷⁵ Benissan (2022), "Can a Rwandan Manufacturing Facility Boost the 'Made in Africa' Movement?"

¹⁷⁶ Bolin (2021), "The Strategic Internationalism of Rwandan Heritage."

¹⁷⁷ Gleibs and Haslam (2016), "Do We Want a Fighter? The Influence of Group Status and the Stability of Intergroup Relations on Leader Prototypicality and Endorsement."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Fox and Kiernan (2018), "The US Is Fighting One of the World's Poorest Countries over Trade."

¹⁸¹ French and Raven (1959), "The Bases of Social Power."

¹⁸² RwandaTV (2018), "#InFocusRW: TO BAN or NOT BAN SECOND HAND CLOTHES?"

¹⁸³ USAID (2017), "Overview of the Second-Hand Clothing Market in East Africa: Analysis of Determinants and Implications."

¹⁸⁴ USTR (2022), "2022 Biennial Report on the Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

approach in their trade relations.¹⁸⁶ The case study only partially supports this. The US responded with a competitive approach, citing that:

"[the ban] could set a precedent for some of these other countries to say, 'OK, they've banned second-hand clothes – maybe we should ban [them] too'... It's just getting them to abide by the terms of the agreement."¹⁸⁷

However, Rwanda, despite being the low-status group and its peers adopting a collaborative approach, also demonstrated a competitive strategy against the dominant US by increasing the SHC duty by 2,400%. Although Rwanda here is a standout, its competitiveness strategy is coherent with President Kagame's remark that in upholding *Agaciro*, 'you are not afraid to question assumptions.'¹⁸⁸ A statement from a Rwanda Development Board (RDB) official pinpoints the assumption in the SHC case:

'Africa has been a dumping ground for so many things. [The US], as your elder, he should uplift you, not leave you in the mud.'¹⁸⁹

While, it has become somewhat of an accepted reality that wealthy countries restrict the long-term economic development of poorer countries,¹⁹⁰ GoR sources a form of moral obligation from *Agaciro*¹⁹¹ to contest this norm:

'There is no longer room for the powerful to impose their vision about how others ought to live... This must always be resisted, even when under pressure... What matters most to us is to see our people living safe, healthy, and dignified lives. This is imperative,

and it is a responsibility that you cannot evade or outsource.'¹⁹²

By demonstrating its steadfastness on *Agaciro*, GoR can not only be seen as 'doing it for us' (promoting economic development) but also—very important to SIT-L academics— doing it 'in terms specified by the group's own norms and values.'¹⁹³ Antecedent to this is a great level of cultural knowledge and understanding of the group,¹⁹⁴ which has been discussed in the two previous parts of this analysis. What follows, and concludes my analysis, discusses some of the strategies through which *Agaciro* is embedded, or eternalised, as an element of the Rwandan identity.

3.4.1. Identity impresarioship: 'It's in you'

Identity impresarioship refers to the various strategies employed by leaders to embed the shared identity into 'structures, events, and activities' that are part of the followers' lived experiences.¹⁹⁵ This contributes to ensuring the continuity of the group's identity.

Different to the usual examples of impresarioship (For example, see Haslam, Reicher and Platow on the Nazi Nuremberg rally in 1934¹⁹⁶), GoR seems keen on less impressive, but perhaps equally powerful, symbols of identity. These most notably include the monthly community work—Umuganda day.¹⁹⁷ While it transcends the SHC ban case, it can be seen to contribute in emphasising *Agaciro*, which GoR leveraged to gain support for the ban. Moreover, it has been borrowed from the precolonial 'golden era'¹⁹⁸ Rwandan state and readapted for contemporary development purposes as a Home-Grown Solution (HGS).¹⁹⁹ This exemplifies being

¹⁸⁶ Gleibs and Haslam (2016), "Do We Want a Fighter? The Influence of Group Status and the Stability of Intergroup Relations on Leader Prototypicality and Endorsement."

¹⁸⁷ Gambino (2017), "'It's about Our Dignity': Vintage Clothing Ban in Rwanda Sparks US Trade Dispute | Lauren Gambino."

¹⁸⁸ Kagame (2015), "Remarks by President Kagame at the Rwanda Youth Forum."

¹⁸⁹ Wolff (2020), "The Global Politics of African Industrial Policy: The Case of the Used Clothing Ban in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda," 1320.

¹⁹⁰ Chang (2002), Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective; Wade (2003), "What Strategies Are Viable for Developing Countries Today? The World Trade Organization and the Shrinking of 'Development Space.'"

¹⁹¹ Behuria (2016), "Countering Threats, Stabilising Politics and Selling Hope: Examining the *Agaciro* Concept as a Response to a Critical Juncture in Rwanda."

¹⁹² Kagame (2024), "Presidential Inauguration 2024 | Inaugural Address by President Kagame."

¹⁹³ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 119; Steffens *et al.* (2014), "Leadership as Social Identity Management: Introducing the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) to Assess and Validate a Four-Dimensional Model."

¹⁹⁴ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*.

¹⁹⁵ Steffens *et al.* (2014), "Leadership as Social Identity Management: Introducing the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI) to Assess and Validate a Four-Dimensional Model," 1005.

¹⁹⁶ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*.

¹⁹⁷ Verwey (2021), "Social Identity Recategorization: Comparing National Reconciliation Initiatives in Burundi and Rwanda."

¹⁹⁸ Sundberg (2016), *Training for Model Citizenship*.

¹⁹⁹ Ensign and Bertrand (2009), *Rwanda: History and Hope*.

'encultured and to employ culture' as an essential element of identity impresarioship.²⁰⁰ For instance, *Umuganda*, which originally referred to participating in the building of a traditional house, either for community purposes or for its member,²⁰¹ is now 'a day of contribution and *building the country by citizens themselves*.'²⁰²

GoR estimated *Umuganda's* economic value, between 2007 and 2016, to have been USD 127 million.²⁰³ But beyond the material benefits, *Umuganda* holds symbolic significance in two ways. Firstly, it draws on 'a common stock of cultural knowledge' to emphasise the idea of *ubumwe* (oneness) and working in unison, in the 'renaissance' period, as were in the 'golden era.'²⁰⁴ What I am trying to convey here is perhaps better expressed by Mona Ozouf when writing on the 'endless round of festivals of the French revolution.'²⁰⁵

*'The festival is therapeutic, a reconstruction, as in the utopias of the 18th century, of a social bond that has come undone.'*²⁰⁶

Although pertaining to a different temporal and spatial context, Ozouf's comments help in interpreting the significance of *Umuganda*, a 'golden era' activity, in restoring and sustaining a shared social identity in post-genocide Rwanda. This does not suggest that *Umuganda* is the panacea, though. For instance, Purdeková indicates that despite wide participation, there is notably little interaction between local populations and 'released prisoners serving commuted sentences in labour camps.'²⁰⁷

Secondly, *Umuganda* encapsulates *Agaciro's* principles of self-reliance and ownership over group circumstances:

*'It is expected that through Umuganda, citizens are empowered... [to] take ownership of development initiatives and processes.'*²⁰⁸

In anticipation of the 'full control of Rwanda by and for Rwandans,'²⁰⁹ *Umuganda* is used as, to borrow Haslam, Reicher and Platow's words, the 'miniature and in the here and now' demonstration of a self-reliant Rwanda.²¹⁰ *Agaciro* is, therefore, not only a 'big' state-level ideology of national dignity and self-reliance but is also embedded and naturalised through various aspects of ordinary Rwandan life. In particular, *Umuganda*, through its ritualistic character,²¹¹ reaffirms the *Agaciro* identity.²¹²

Several studies have shown similar embeddedness of *Agaciro* in other areas, such as in '*ubwishingane mu kwivuza*' (community-based health insurance schemes), commonly known in French as '*mutuelles de santé*.'²¹³ According to Chemouni, GoR opposed donors' proposals to sponsor free *mutuelles* for a majority of the population, due to their incompatibility with *Agaciro*.²¹⁴

*'Free [health] care has never been an option because it makes people subservient.'*²¹⁵

This confirms Rutazibwa's argument that paternalistic Western interventions, which are sometimes 'coated in a language of... care,'²¹⁶ are challenged by the *Agaciro* identity, which stresses the responsibility to '[be] agents of our own change.'²¹⁷ This means that, for Rwanda, the *good life* and the process to achieve it, may not be equated to poverty alleviation or better health care alone, but also encompasses dignity and self-reliance. Additionally, GoR may have been concerned that free health care would erode the *ubutwari* culture of *kwishakamo ibisubizo* (seeking solutions within) and 'question[ing]

²⁰⁰ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 153.

²⁰¹ RGB (2007), "Impact Assessment of Umuganda."

²⁰² RGB (no date), "Umuganda" cited in Moss and Marie (2014), "Beyond Conflict and Spoilt Identities: How Rwandan Leaders Justify a Single Recategorization Model for Post-Conflict Reconciliation," 436.

²⁰³ RGB (2007), "Impact Assessment of Umuganda."

²⁰⁴ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 153.

²⁰⁵ Ozouf (1988), *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 10.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Purdeková (2015), *Making Ubumwe: Power, State and Camps in Rwanda's Unity-Building Project*, 43.

²⁰⁸ MINALOC (2018), "Governance and Decentralization Sector Strategic Plan (2018/19 -2023/24)," 22.

²⁰⁹ Bolin (2021), "The Strategic Internationalism of Rwandan Heritage," 493.

²¹⁰ Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 155.

²¹¹ Barnhart (2011), "Umuganda: The Ultimate Nation-Building Project?"

²¹² Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*.

²¹³ Binagwaho *et al.* (2024), "Mutual Health Insurance and Its Contribution to Improving Child Health in Rwanda."; Ensign and Bertrand (2009), *Rwanda: History and Hope*.

²¹⁴ Chemouni (2016), "The Political Path to Universal Health Coverage: Elite Commitment to Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda."

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95

²¹⁶ Rutazibwa (2014), "Studying Agaciro: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda," 291.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.

assumptions²¹⁸ that eventually underpinned the SHC progressive ban. It is these domestic factors, Beswick suggests, that determine GoR's ability to mobilise support in pursuit of greater 'leverage and space for agency' at the international level (e.g., Rwanda-US trade relations).²¹⁹

While Rwanda's 'golden era'²²⁰ is arguably a 'symbolic reserve'²²¹ for GoR, *Agaciro* is simultaneously understood as a historical creation and an inevitable outcome of Rwanda's 'dark ages.'²²² For instance, during 2014's *Umushyikirano*, it was presented that:

'[Rwanda] was saved because, at that critical moment [the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi], either God, nature, fate, or whatever it was, intervened, and the international community ran away. And Rwandans fought and solved their own problems.

Two observations emerge here in regard to identity impresarioship. First, the invocation of 'God', 'nature,' and 'fate' may suggest the acceptance of self-reliance and ownership over group circumstances as a natural obligation, thus reifying *Agaciro* in a similar fashion as in the poem by Uwamahoro and Rugamba:

*'Agaciro, it's in you; it always has been. And no one can ever take away what Imana himself has given to you.'*²²³

This form of impresarioship has also been studied in the Scottish context where leaders sometimes drew on harsh climatic conditions to explain *Scottish* individualism and entrepreneurialism as inherent attributes.²²⁴ Second is the continuity of Rwanda's 'fear of abandonment' by the international community, which some argue to have motivated 'the nation's development and *Agaciro* identity.'²²⁵ Expectedly, the fear arises in GoR's rationale for citizens' financial participation in the *mutuelles de santé* scheme:

*'They [the donors] should not take our people hostage, not get them used to being fed, and when they are going to leave, they will let them with nothing.'*²²⁶

The scheme's ultimate success, recording 'the highest health insurance enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa' at 76.5 per cent²²⁷ may have encouraged greater persistence on *Agaciro* in GoR's subsequent interactions with foreign 'development partners.'

4. MAIN INTERPRETATIONS

To what extent does Agaciro affect the mutuality between GoR and the wider society?

As mentioned in the introduction, mutuality refers to the degree to which the group's objectives are interconnected.²²⁸ Since it can provide a foundation for collective and coherent efforts towards development, it should be a crucial factor in GoR's effectiveness. Another importance of mutuality is that it helps the leader to maintain their position since followers are more willing to provide their support.²²⁹ Mutuality is a spectrum, rather than a state, with two extremes, as identified by Cornell – 'ownership' and 'buy-in.' The latter can only mobilise passive follower support, arising from 'a lack of better options.'²³⁰ Ownership, on the other hand, is characterised by an active form of support, whereby followers engage in designing and realising the group's vision.²³¹ The SIT-L analysis above has produced some interesting points of discussion in this regard.

It presented mostly evidence of ownership and active followership instances, from youth organisations' 'convergence' with GoR in promoting *Ndi Umunyarwanda*,²³² to local fashion designers taking a

²¹⁸ Kagame (2015), "Remarks by President Kagame at the Rwanda Youth Forum."

²¹⁹ Beswick (2013), "From Weak State to Savvy International Player? Rwanda's Multi-Level Strategy for Maximising Agency," 159.

²²⁰ Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship.

²²¹ Reszler (1992), "L'Europe à la Recherche de Ses Symboles" cited in Haslam, Reicher, and Platow (2011), *The New Psychology of Leadership Identity, Influence and Power*, 153.

²²² Sundberg (2016), Training for Model Citizenship.

²²³ IGIHE (2023), "Agaciro; a Poem by Angel Uwamahoro and Winnie Rugamba at Rwanda Cultural Day San Francisco."

²²⁴ Reicher and Hopkins (2001), *Self and Nation*.

²²⁵ Beloff (2023), "French-Rwandan Foreign Relations: Depth and Rebirth of Diplomatic Relations," 444.

²²⁶ Chemouni (2016), "The Political Path to Universal Health Coverage: Power, Ideas and Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda," 92.

²²⁷ Chemouni (2016), "The Political Path to Universal Health Coverage: Elite Commitment to Community-Based Health Insurance in Rwanda," 96; Some studies report over 90 per cent enrolment (Binagwaho *et al.*, 2012).

²²⁸ Olonisakin (2018), "Towards Re-Conceptualising Leadership for Sustainable Peace."

²²⁹ Cornell (2019), "Mutuality on a Spectrum: Ownership and Buy-In."

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² Benda (2019), "Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to Ndi Umunyarwanda," 203.

central role in enhancing 'our identity,'²³³ and to ordinary citizens 'building the country' during *Umuganda*.²³⁴ All these instances seem to share a common theme of *Agaciro* – an insistence on individual and collective 'self-determination, dignity, and self-reliance.'²³⁵ Yet, it is this nature of *Agaciro* as a multilevel endeavour that makes state-society mutuality in Rwanda more dynamic. As Mwambari shows, there is no absence of tensions between grassroots and state-level assertions of *Agaciro*.²³⁶ However, where the sense of *Agaciro* at the individual level motivates that at the collective level, and vice versa, the mutuality between GoR and citizens tends to be high. For example, the individual-level desire to 'step out of our parents' shadows'²³⁷ aligned with GoR's ideology of national unity, which resulted in the bold and collaborative campaign of *Ndi Umunyarwanda*.²³⁸ Similarly, in the SHC case, the ideal state of 'wear[ing] something that you own, that fits to your identity'²³⁹ matched GoR's plan to reduce dependency on SHC imports and to rejuvenate the Rwandan textile and apparel industry. Again, this 'knot'²⁴⁰ favoured the mutuality between GoR and society members in shaping and achieving the objectives of the SHC ban.

To what extent does Agaciro support GoR's agency in international trade relations?

As seen in the analysis, Rwanda's determination and ability to pursue the ban against SHC is incoherent with the power disparity observed between GoR and the US. Therefore, *Agaciro* may be valuable in better understanding this assertion of greater agency than its power position affords it. Two observations stand out:

Firstly, by contributing to the definition of the *good life* in Rwanda,²⁴¹ *Agaciro* is seen as an essential (rather than a

luxury) in Rwanda's development. The desire to achieve an *Agaciro*-consistent identity fuels the pursuit of increased self-sufficiency through developing a 'manufacturing and knowledge-based economy' instead of the previous focus on the 'knowledge economy.'²⁴² In the first instance, trade that 'runs counter to the idea of dignity'²⁴³ is opposed – 'Africa does not need to be a dumping ground for... second-hand anything.'²⁴⁴ Therefore, *Agaciro* encapsulates Rwandan 'interests, values, and aspirations' that GoR is prioritising over prescribed 'content, strategies and modalities of development'²⁴⁵ This is highlighted in various public speeches, development plans, and even the constitution.

However, *Agaciro* also serves as the means to assert that agency, not just the end. This is reflected in Kagame's argument that:

*'It cannot be that there are people who have the right, and who have the capacity, to create others in their own image... I say 'no' to this. But again, I cannot just stop at saying 'no,' I must demonstrate it... Our people know what is good for them, we must endeavour to show it. We must be seen to be doing things that prove that... So Agaciro is simply central to everything we are doing, for our development.'*²⁴⁶

It also confirms Mwambari's²⁴⁷ suggestion that *Agaciro* 'informs collective struggles against hegemonic powers.' Of course, the perception of who are the 'hegemonic powers' is also dependent on the salience of the national identity – *Ndi Umunyarwanda*. Here, the overlap between international agency and domestic mutuality becomes apparent. In the absence of a national identity, there would have been increased

²³³ Gambino (2017), "'It's about Our Dignity': Vintage Clothing Ban in Rwanda Sparks US Trade Dispute | Lauren Gambino."

²³⁴ RGB (no date), "Umuganda" cited in Moss (2014), "Beyond Conflict and Spoilt Identities: How Rwandan Leaders Justify a Single Recategorization Model for Post-Conflict Reconciliation," 436.

²³⁵ Rutazibwa (2014), "Studying Agaciro: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda," 292.

²³⁶ Mwambari (2021), "Agaciro, Vernacular Memory, and the Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda."

²³⁷ Kimenyi (2013), "We Need to Step out of Our Parents' Shadows – Poet Bamporiki."

²³⁸ Benda (2019), "Promising Generations: From Intergenerational Guilt to Ndi Umunyarwanda."; Chemouni and Mugiraneza (2019), "Ideology and Interests in the Rwandan Patriotic Front: Singing the Struggle in Pre-Genocide Rwanda."

²³⁹ CGTN Africa (2023), "A Look at Performance of Rwanda's Textile Industry since Ban on Second-Hand Clothing Import."

²⁴⁰ Mwambari (2021), "Agaciro, Vernacular Memory, and the Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda."

²⁴¹ Rutazibwa (2014), "Studying Agaciro: Moving beyond Wilsonian Interventionist Knowledge Production on Rwanda."

²⁴² Behuria (2015), "Between Party Capitalism and Market Reforms – Understanding Sector Differences in Rwanda," 435.

²⁴³ Ndushabandi and Rutazibwa (2019), "Agaciro," 80.

²⁴⁴ Kagame (2018), "President Kagame Speaks at the Launch of Volkswagen Mobility Solutions | Kigali, 27 June 2018."

²⁴⁵ Ake (1991), "Building on the Indigenous," 141.

²⁴⁶ Kagame (2011), "President Kagame at Africa Heads of State Forum - Kigali 9 February 2011."

²⁴⁷ Mwambari (2021), "Agaciro, Vernacular Memory, and the Politics of Memory in Post-Genocide Rwanda," 616.

restrictions on GoR's agency, in the SHC case, created by 'a perfect storm of alignment'²⁴⁸ between a lack of cohesion and the external pressure from the US. However, due to the high mutuality between GoR and the wider society, and GoR positioning itself as a prototypical leader, it benefitted from 'more leeway' as it sought to advance the ingroup identity.²⁴⁹

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that *Agaciro*—as an endogenous philosophy of dignity, self-reliance, and collective identity—fundamentally shapes Rwanda's development strategy and leadership dynamics. Domestically, the operationalisation of *Agaciro* has strengthened the sense of shared purpose and common understanding between GoR and citizens by favouring development strategies that reinforce their values and identity. As demonstrated by the SHC ban, this mutuality enhances GoR's ability to mobilise active support, where citizens co-create development initiatives. For instance, local clothing brands demonstrated instrumental involvement by advocating for the policy and upgrading their capacities for domestic and international markets. Therefore, it is clear that this mutuality transcends passive 'buy-in,' but can also be affected by whether *Agaciro* at the individual and collective levels are in harmony.

Internationally, *Agaciro* empowers GoR to assert greater agency than its power position provides, as exemplified by Rwanda's defiance of US pressure during the ban. By understanding development beyond material concession, and as a pursuit of dignity, *Agaciro* has been both an objective and a method of rejecting externally imposed ideas.²⁵⁰ Crucially, this agency is sustained by domestic cohesion: GoR's prototypical leadership, rooted in shared identity, affords it greater legitimacy to navigate external pressures.

The presented case underscores the limitations of Western-centric development theories on Rwanda and highlights the transformative potential of endogenous knowledge. 'Meaningful dialogue' is possible if researchers interest themselves more in context and social interactions and advance from simplistic framing of Rwanda as a 'Singapore,' 'Switzerland,' or 'Pyongyang' of Africa.²⁵¹

I hope that this paper has contributed to the increasing efforts to 'complexify' such narratives. However, there are still opportunities for improving, or even challenging, the arguments presented. Future research could address some of the limitations acknowledged earlier, especially the lack of field work data.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AgDF</i>	Agaciro Development Fund
<i>AGOA</i>	African Growth and Opportunity Act
<i>CET</i>	Common External Tariff
<i>DMRS</i>	Domestic Market Recapturing Strategy
<i>EAC</i>	East African Community
<i>EDPRS 2</i>	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2
<i>GoR</i>	Government of Rwanda
<i>LasP</i>	Leadership-as-Process framework
<i>LMX</i>	Leader-Member Exchange theory
<i>MINALOC</i>	Ministry of Local Government
<i>NIE</i>	New Institutional Economics
<i>NURC</i>	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
<i>RDB</i>	Rwanda Development Board
<i>RGB</i>	Rwanda Governance Board
<i>RPF</i>	Rwandan Patriotic Front
<i>RRB</i>	Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer
<i>SHC</i>	Second-hand Clothing
<i>SIT-L</i>	Social Identity Theory of Leadership
<i>SME</i>	Small and Medium Enterprise
<i>UAE</i>	United Arab Emirates
<i>UNFCCC</i>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<i>USAID</i>	United States Agency for International Development
<i>USD</i>	United States Dollar

GLOSSARY OF KINYARWANDA TERMS

<i>Hutu, Tutsi, Twa</i>	Socioeconomic classes during pre-colonial Rwanda, which
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²⁴⁸ Beswick (2013), "From Weak State to Savvy International Player? Rwanda's Multi-Level Strategy for Maximising Agency," 169.

²⁴⁹ Hogg, van Knippenberg, and Rast (2012), "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments," 266.

²⁵⁰ Grimm (2013), "Aid Dependency as a Limitation to National Development Policy? The Case of Rwanda."

²⁵¹ Hintjens (2015), "As If There Were Two Rwandas," 133; ²⁵¹ Jones (2012), "Between Pyongyang and Singapore: The Rwandan State, Its Rulers, and the Military."; Campioni and Noack (2012), Rwanda Fast Forward.

	were later converted to distinct ethnic groups during colonialism
<i>Imana/ Imana y'i Rwanda</i>	God/ God of Rwanda
<i>Imihigo</i>	Performance contracts
<i>Indangagaciro</i>	values, <i>Agaciro</i> ideals
<i>Inyangarwanda</i>	Enemies of Rwanda, those who hate Rwanda (a term given to the RPF by the then-government in the early 1990s)
<i>Intore</i>	Graduates of <i>Itorero</i> , members of the royal army
<i>Itorero</i>	Education institution for male youth in precolonial Rwanda
<i>Kirazira</i>	Interdictions
<i>Ndi</i>	'I am Rwandan,' Rwandanness
<i>Umunyarwanda</i>	campaign
<i>Ubudehe</i>	Participatory development programs in which GoR finances community-selected projects
<i>Ubumwe</i>	Oneness
<i>Ubupfura</i>	Nobility
<i>Ubutwari</i>	Heroic courage
<i>Ubwishingane mu kwivuza</i>	Community-based health insurance
<i>Umudugudu</i>	Village
<i>Umuganda</i>	Community work, which is held on the last Saturday of each month
<i>Umushyikirano</i>	National Dialogue Council
<i>Urubohero</i>	Education institution for female youth in precolonial Rwanda

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