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# The Rwandan Patriotic Front and Nation-Building in Post-Genocide Rwanda: A Survey

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## Abstract

This survey paper critically examines the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) nation-building strategies in post-genocide Rwanda through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET), emphasizing identity formation and cultural reconstruction. The RPF's efforts to promote a unified national identity, transcending ethnic divisions, are central to its governance model. This paper explores the multifaceted approaches employed by the RPF, including cultural narratives, gender policies, and youth engagement, to foster social cohesion and political stability. Cultural artifacts, such as liberation songs, play a significant role in reinforcing the RPF's ideological narrative, contributing to national identity and societal interactions. Despite notable achievements in economic development and urban modernization, the RPF faces critiques regarding socio-economic disparities, political repression, and human rights concerns. The paper highlights the complexities of suppressed testimonies and international perceptions, underscoring the need for comprehensive reconciliation and inclusive governance. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of the genocide on regional stability, the role of youth in narrative evolution, and the psychological challenges faced by ex-combatants. The applicability of SET in understanding state-social relations and the reassessment of key figures like Kagame are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Rwanda's historical narrative and future governance. This survey provides insights into the successes and challenges of the RPF's nation-building efforts, offering a nuanced perspective on the ongoing journey towards peace and stability in Rwanda.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Significance of the Rwandan Patriotic Front

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has been instrumental in shaping post-genocide Rwanda, serving as a political and ideological foundation for nation-building. Rather than merely responding to the genocide, the RPF proactively redefined Rwanda's socio-political landscape, constructing narratives of self-defense against genocidal threats that legitimized its authority and guided national recovery and unity [1]. Central to the RPF's approach is the obliteration of ethnic divisions, promoting a unified national identity over ethnic distinctions [2].

The RPF's ideological framework, rooted in its liberation struggle, continues to influence Rwanda's development by aligning material incentives with national unity and reconciliation goals [3]. Cultural artifacts, such as liberation songs, have significantly contributed to these reconciliation efforts by fostering a shared history and collective identity [4].

Additionally, the RPF emphasizes centralized governance, a shared language, and a robust civil society as vital components for political cohesion and stability [5]. Initiatives like the Youth Connect Dialogue (YCD) reflect the RPF's commitment to engaging youth in nation-building, addressing historical narratives, and facilitating intergenerational dialogue [6].

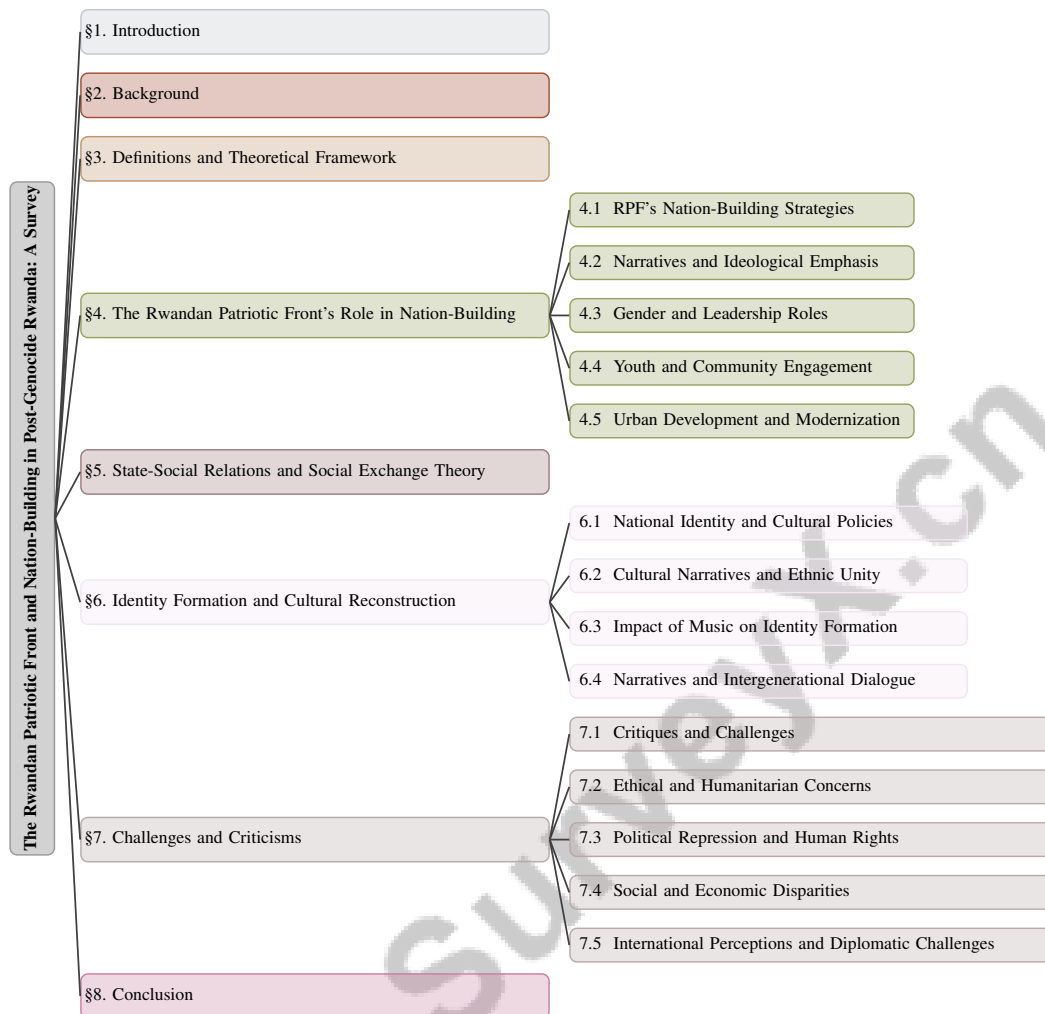


Figure 1: chapter structure

Despite these achievements, critiques challenge the official narratives surrounding the genocide and figures like Paul Kagame [7]. Such critiques reveal the complexities of the RPF's role, suggesting its influence extends beyond governance to shaping national memory and identity. The RPF's enduring impact on Rwanda's nation-building process underscores its centrality in the country's journey towards peace and stability [8].

## 1.2 Social Exchange Theory as an Analytical Lens

Social Exchange Theory (SET) serves as an effective framework for analyzing the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) nation-building strategies, illuminating the reciprocal relationships between the state and its citizens. The dynamic nature of RPF ideology, as explored by Chemouni [3], is understood through SET, emphasizing unity and collective identity as essential components of the social contract between the RPF and the populace.

Ahmad [9] highlights the evolution of SET across various fields, emphasizing psychological perspectives that are crucial in the Rwandan context. The RPF's strategies cultivate a sense of belonging and mutual obligation among citizens, thereby strengthening state-social relations. This application of SET enables a nuanced understanding of how RPF policies are perceived as beneficial exchanges that enhance national stability and cohesion.

Judi [8] directly applies SET to the RPF's nation-building efforts, illustrating the interactions characterized by exchanges where the state provides security and development opportunities, and citizens

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reciprocate with loyalty and participation. These exchanges are integral to embedding the RPF's ideological narrative within Rwanda's social fabric.

Chemouni's exploration [10] of the RPF's coherent narrative, emphasizing unity and an idealized vision of Rwanda, further illustrates SET's application. Liberation songs, as cultural expressions, reinforce ideological exchanges between the RPF and the citizenry, communicating shared values and goals. This approach not only solidifies the RPF's legitimacy but also enhances its capacity to advance the nation-building process.

### **1.3 Structure of the Survey**

This survey systematically analyzes the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) role in nation-building and state-social relations in post-genocide Rwanda, employing social exchange theory as an analytical framework. The introduction establishes the significance of the RPF and the theoretical lens of social exchange theory, followed by a background section that contextualizes the Rwandan genocide, the emergence of the RPF, and the socio-political landscape that shaped initial nation-building challenges.

Subsequent sections clarify definitions and theoretical frameworks, elucidating key concepts such as nation-building, state-social relations, identity formation, and cultural reconstruction. Theoretical perspectives on governance provide a foundation for understanding the RPF's strategies. The core analysis examines the RPF's nation-building strategies, including narratives, gender roles, youth engagement, and urban development initiatives, which collectively contribute to Rwanda's modernization.

The exploration of state-social relations through social exchange theory emphasizes the reciprocal dynamics between the Rwandan state and its citizens, highlighting themes of national unity, the RPF's self-portrayal, adversarial characterization, and international engagement, articulated through pre-genocide mobilization songs. Additionally, the influence of civil society and language policies on these dynamics reveals how the RPF's ideology serves as both a political tool and a framework informing its post-genocide interests and policies [3, 4]. The survey discusses identity formation and cultural reconstruction, focusing on national identity, cultural narratives, and the roles of music and intergenerational dialogue.

Challenges and criticisms faced by the RPF, including political repression, human rights concerns, and international perceptions, are also addressed. The concluding section reflects on the effectiveness of the RPF's nation-building strategies and the applicability of social exchange theory, suggesting areas for future research. This structured approach ensures a thorough exploration of the RPF's impact on post-genocide Rwanda, providing insights into both the successes and complexities of its nation-building efforts. The following sections are organized as shown in Figure 1.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Emergence and Ideology of the Rwandan Patriotic Front**

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) emerged from a complex interplay of historical, ideological, and socio-political factors, significantly shaping its role in post-genocide Rwanda. Its founding principles emphasize national unity and a multi-ethnic identity, countering the ethnic divisions that have historically plagued Rwanda [4]. This stance is a proactive effort to reshape Rwanda's socio-political landscape by fostering a cohesive national identity [2]. The RPF's ideological framework incorporates narratives of self-defense, legitimizing its authority while addressing issues of national security and human rights [1]. These narratives highlight the multifaceted nature of the RPF's political strategies, guided by ideological influences that reflect broader patterns in African governance [3].

The RPF distinguishes itself through leadership transcending traditional ethnic boundaries, positioning itself as a transformative force in post-genocide Rwanda. This transformation is evident in the rise of women leaders who have played critical roles in peacebuilding and societal reconstruction post-1994 [11]. Chemouni's analysis of liberation songs [10] offers insights into the RPF's ideological framework, revealing values and aspirations underpinning its nation-building initiatives. Judi's articulation of the RPF's foundational principles [8] underscores its commitment to creating a unified national identity and achieving political integration in a diverse state marked by ethnic, racial, and

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regional differences [5]. Despite challenges such as opposition party harassment and governance narrative manipulation, the RPF remains pivotal in Rwanda's pursuit of unity and stability.

## **2.2 Post-Genocide Socio-Political Landscape**

Post-genocide Rwanda has undergone significant transformations driven by the RPF's nation-building efforts. Clarifying responsibility for the missile attack that killed President Habyarimana remains a contentious issue with profound implications for understanding the genocide's origins and subsequent political dynamics [12]. The reintegration of ex-combatants into society is crucial for long-term peace and stability, with the psychosocial challenges faced by these individuals being essential considerations [13]. The transgenerational transmission of guilt and stigma, particularly affecting the children of perpetrators, complicates their reconciliation within the national narrative alongside genocide survivors [6].

Urban transformation is a strategic focus in Rwanda's rebuilding efforts, with urban planning serving as a tool for national recovery and modernization [14]. This approach reflects the RPF's commitment to reshaping Rwanda's socio-political fabric through economic development and infrastructural growth, promoting a cohesive national identity and mitigating ethnic divisions via shared economic progress. However, international diplomacy complexities and political leaders' reluctance to engage in humanitarian interventions unless aligned with national interests complicate the socio-political landscape [15].

Despite these efforts, gaps remain regarding Hutu casualties and the motivations behind Kagame's regime's actions [7]. These gaps underscore ongoing tensions and the necessity for a comprehensive reconciliation process addressing all dimensions of the genocide's legacy. The RPF's ability to maintain legitimacy and effectiveness depends on its capacity to confront these issues transparently and inclusively, ensuring all Rwandans are integrated into the nation's future trajectory.

## **3 Definitions and Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1 Key Concepts in Nation-Building**

Nation-building in post-genocide Rwanda is characterized by a shift from ethnic-based divisions to a framework of civic citizenship, central to the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) efforts in forging a unified national identity [2]. The RPF's ideology prioritizes national unity, as expressed through liberation songs that encapsulate its vision and promote a shared history among Rwandans [4]. This ideology is further supported by the psychological dynamics between the state and its citizens, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility essential for a stable nation [9]. The reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life exemplifies the psychosocial challenges encountered during nation-building, as these individuals often face mental health issues that impede their full participation in reconstruction efforts [13].

Political cohesion and national identity are pivotal in overcoming historical divisions, with the RPF focusing on mitigating ethnic and regional disparities through strategic alliances [5]. The narratives of the past play a crucial role in shaping national identity, particularly in the context of transitional justice and reconciliation, where collective memory supports national unity [6]. The RPF's initiatives in urban planning and ecological modernization are integral to post-genocide reconstruction, emphasizing urban greening and state-led development to foster economic growth and infrastructure [14]. These efforts are critical for achieving long-term peace and stability, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the RPF's nation-building strategies and their socio-political implications.

### **3.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Governance**

Post-genocide Rwanda's governance is informed by theoretical frameworks guiding the RPF's policies. "Developmental patrimonialism" is a key concept, emphasizing state-led development to achieve rapid economic growth and national reconstruction, often prioritizing these goals over democratic norms [3]. This model involves centralized authority in key economic sectors, aligning with the RPF's vision of national unity. Social exchange theory further explains the reciprocal relationships between the state and citizens, highlighting mutual benefits and obligations crucial for social cohesion

and political stability [9]. The RPF's governance is viewed as an exchange where the state provides security and development opportunities, and citizens respond with loyalty and participation [8].

The concept of "post-conflict authoritarianism" underscores the need for power consolidation to maintain order and prevent violence recurrence, reflecting the tension between stability and constraints on political freedoms and human rights [16]. The RPF's centralized governance and suppression of dissent illustrate this perspective, prioritizing state security over democratic processes. Ideology plays a significant role in governance, guiding the RPF's policies with an emphasis on unity and collective identity as key elements of the social contract [3]. Cultural expressions, such as liberation songs, reinforce this ideology, fostering a reciprocal relationship based on shared values [10].

These theoretical perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of governance in post-genocide Rwanda, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by the RPF in its nation-building efforts. The interplay of developmental patrimonialism, social exchange theory, post-conflict authoritarianism, and ideological influence illustrates both achievements and challenges, emphasizing how pre-genocide ideologies continue to shape policies and actions. Additionally, the significant role of women in peacebuilding and national reconciliation is underscored, contributing to the ongoing transformation of Rwandan society [3, 4, 11].

## 4 The Rwandan Patriotic Front's Role in Nation-Building

### 4.1 RPF's Nation-Building Strategies

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) employs a multifaceted approach to nation-building, emphasizing the creation of a national identity that transcends ethnic divisions [2]. Cultural narratives, particularly songs by RPF members, are pivotal in promoting unity and countering ethnic exclusivity, fostering collective belonging. Beyond cultural initiatives, the RPF's policies aim to enhance national unity and political stability, addressing the mental health needs of ex-combatants to facilitate their reintegration [13]. Youth engagement is crucial, exemplified by initiatives like the Youth Connekt Dialogue (YCD), which empower young people to engage with their histories and contribute to national rebuilding, ensuring the sustainability of nation-building efforts [6].

As illustrated in Figure 2, the RPF's nation-building strategies focus on cultural initiatives, psychological support, and youth engagement. This figure highlights the multidimensional approach to fostering national unity and stability in post-genocide Rwanda. These strategies collectively underscore the RPF's commitment to a unified and stable Rwanda through cultural, psychological, and youth-led initiatives [8].

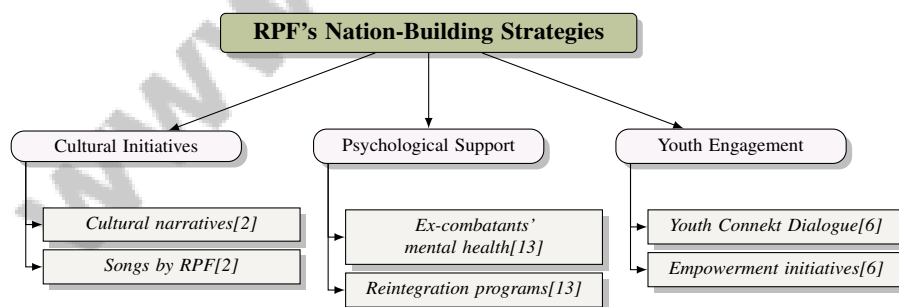


Figure 2: This figure illustrates the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) nation-building strategies, focusing on cultural initiatives, psychological support, and youth engagement. It highlights the multidimensional approach to fostering national unity and stability in post-genocide Rwanda.

### 4.2 Narratives and Ideological Emphasis

The RPF employs strategic narratives and ideological frameworks to unify the nation, focusing on a cohesive national identity beyond ethnic divisions. Liberation songs articulate themes of unity and shared purpose, serving as cultural artifacts that promote the RPF's vision of an inclusive Rwanda [4]. The ideological emphasis extends to political and social policies, reinforcing governance legitimacy and instilling loyalty to the national project [3]. Historical legacies of division are addressed through

narratives of reconciliation and shared national history, aiming to heal societal wounds inflicted by the 1994 genocide. This involves reforms such as removing ethnic labels from identity documents and overhauling the national education curriculum [3, 11]. The ideological approach is crucial for legitimizing the RPF's authority and mobilizing citizens toward a common vision for Rwanda's future [2].

### 4.3 Gender and Leadership Roles

Gender policies and leadership within the RPF's nation-building framework reflect a commitment to inclusivity and equality. The RPF has advanced gender policies to enhance its democratic image, elevating women's roles across various sectors [17]. Women's leadership spans civil society organizations, informal networks, and national policymakers, influencing legislation and governance practices supporting gender equality and women's rights [11]. Despite advancements, challenges persist in aligning feminist goals with the Rwandan state's authoritarian tendencies [17]. This integration of gender policies within the RPF's framework enhances legitimacy in the eyes of international donors and supports post-genocide recovery, evidenced by women's contributions to peacebuilding and community rebuilding efforts [3, 4].

### 4.4 Youth and Community Engagement

Youth and community initiatives are central to the RPF's nation-building strategies, emphasizing ownership and responsibility among younger generations. Programs like the Youth Connekt Dialogue (YCD) empower young people to engage with their histories and contribute to national development, promoting civic engagement and a sense of belonging [6]. Community engagement focuses on healing ethnic and regional divisions, fostering a collective national identity and purpose. This includes removing ethnic identifiers from national documents and reforming the education curriculum as part of reconciliation efforts [4, 2]. As illustrated in Figure 3, the hierarchical structure of youth and community engagement strategies in Rwanda highlights the interconnectedness of youth initiatives, community engagement, and holistic nation-building efforts. The emphasis on youth and community engagement reflects the RPF's holistic approach to nation-building, empowering all societal segments to contribute to Rwanda's development [3].

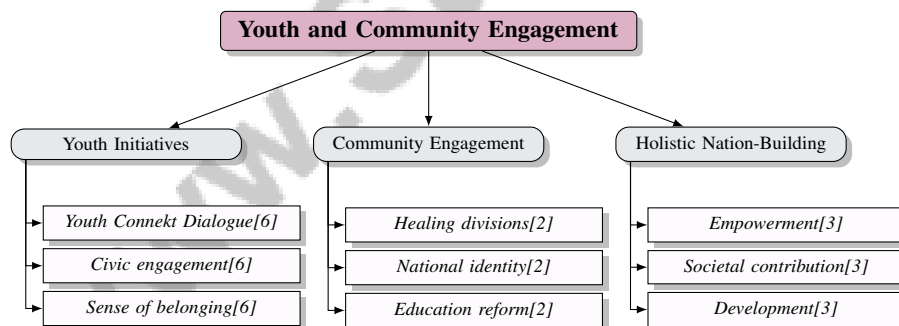


Figure 3: This figure illustrates the hierarchical structure of youth and community engagement strategies in Rwanda, focusing on youth initiatives, community engagement, and holistic nation-building efforts.

### 4.5 Urban Development and Modernization

Urban development and modernization, especially in Kigali, are integral to the RPF's nation-building strategies. The RPF's approach to urban transformation involves state-led initiatives positioning Rwanda as a model of ecological modernization and sustainable development [14]. Efforts to promote green urban development balance economic growth with environmental sustainability, addressing climate change and resource management challenges critical for long-term development [14]. Urban projects aim to foster social cohesion and economic integration by improving infrastructure and access to essential services, addressing socio-economic disparities, and promoting collective purpose among Rwandans [4, 11]. The transformation of Kigali into a modern metropolis symbolizes national progress and unity, reflecting the RPF's vision for a prosperous and inclusive Rwanda [10]. This

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focus on urban development intertwines national unity, economic ambition, and social transformation, positioning Rwanda as a developmental leader in Africa while addressing the political economy of urbanization [14].

## **5 State-Social Relations and Social Exchange Theory**

### **5.1 State-Social Relations and Political Behavior**

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) strategically cultivates state-social relations to promote political behavior and civic nationalism, particularly in the post-genocide era. By fostering a unified national identity that surpasses historical ethnic divisions, the RPF aligns its governance with ethnic denialism and civic nationalism, key themes in Rwandan nation-building research [2]. Central to this strategy are policies that enhance civic engagement and political participation, reinforcing the RPF's legitimacy and cultivating a sense of belonging and mutual obligation essential for national stability. The RPF's early ideological framework, emphasizing civic nationalism, prioritizes state interests over individual affiliations. Mobilization songs from before the 1994 genocide aimed to foster a collective national consciousness, reshaping material incentives for reconciliation and enhancing political power and social cohesion [3, 4, 5].

The RPF's commitment to national reconciliation and social cohesion is evident in policies erasing ethnic divisions and promoting unified citizenship, bridging ethnic and regional divides to foster a shared identity among Rwandans [3, 4, 2, 13]. Governance strategies reflect social exchange theory, emphasizing reciprocal relationships where the state provides security and development opportunities in exchange for citizen loyalty and engagement. This exchange underscores the RPF's ideology, prioritizing national unity and citizen participation in post-genocide reconstruction, despite critiques regarding human rights and political freedoms [3, 4, 11, 16]. The RPF's focus on civic nationalism and social cohesion reinforces its legitimacy and operational effectiveness, establishing a foundation for a unified national identity that continues to influence policies and social dynamics in post-genocide Rwanda [3, 4, 11, 13].

### **5.2 Ideological Influence on State-Social Relations**

The Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF) ideology significantly shapes state-citizen interactions, influencing governance and societal dynamics in post-genocide Rwanda. Rooted in anti-imperialist sentiment, the RPF views foreign powers as contributors to Rwanda's historical challenges, emphasizing national unity and self-representation. This ideological framework informs RPF policies and strategies, illustrating how ideology shapes political action and material interests [3, 4]. RPF ideology fosters reciprocal relationships between the state and citizens by promoting national sovereignty and collective identity, legitimizing its authority and strengthening the social contract with the Rwandan populace.

The RPF's influence extends to gender equality and women's empowerment, with notable increases in female political representation. Despite entrenched patriarchal structures posing challenges to transformative change, the RPF's gender policies reflect a commitment to inclusivity and equality, aiming to reshape societal norms and create a more equitable socio-political environment [17]. The RPF's ideological influence is evident in its efforts to foster national unity and resilience, articulated through pre-genocide songs and policies emphasizing societal order and strategic international relationships. This enduring ideology motivated the RPF's rise to power and continues to shape governance and reconciliation initiatives post-genocide [3, 4, 10]. By prioritizing national unity and self-determination, the RPF reinforces its legitimacy and cultivates a shared purpose among Rwandans, laying the groundwork for a stable society.

### **5.3 Role of Civil Society and Language**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and language policies are pivotal in fostering social cohesion in Rwanda, particularly post-genocide. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) utilizes CSOs to bridge ethnic divides and promote political integration, facilitating dialogue and reconciliation among diverse groups to advance nation-building objectives [5]. By engaging stakeholders in community initiatives, CSOs help create a shared identity and purpose, reinforcing the RPF's vision of a unified national identity.

Language policies are vital to this strategy, with Kinyarwanda as the primary medium of instruction and communication fostering national unity. This approach reflects the RPF’s historical focus on cohesion and identity, as demonstrated through cultural expressions like songs that mobilize support for a cohesive society [3, 4]. By promoting a common language, the RPF transcends historical divisions and enhances social integration among citizens. Moreover, the RPF’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment contributes to an environment conducive to social cohesion. The successful incorporation of women into leadership roles and the establishment of laws promoting gender equality reflect the RPF’s dedication to inclusivity, essential for fostering a cohesive society [11]. By empowering women and promoting equality, the RPF enhances citizen participation in nation-building and strengthens Rwanda’s social fabric.

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, the processes of identity formation and cultural reconstruction have become pivotal in fostering national unity. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has employed various strategies to cultivate a cohesive national identity, which is essential for the healing and reconciliation of the nation. Figure 4 illustrates this hierarchical structure of identity formation and cultural reconstruction, emphasizing the interconnectedness of key concepts such as cultural policies, narratives, and the influence of music on identity. This figure not only categorizes these elements but also highlights their relationships, thereby underscoring the significance of intergenerational dialogue in promoting unity and reconciliation within Rwandan society. By visualizing these dynamics, we gain a clearer understanding of how cultural narratives and music contribute to the ongoing process of rebuilding identity in a post-genocide context.

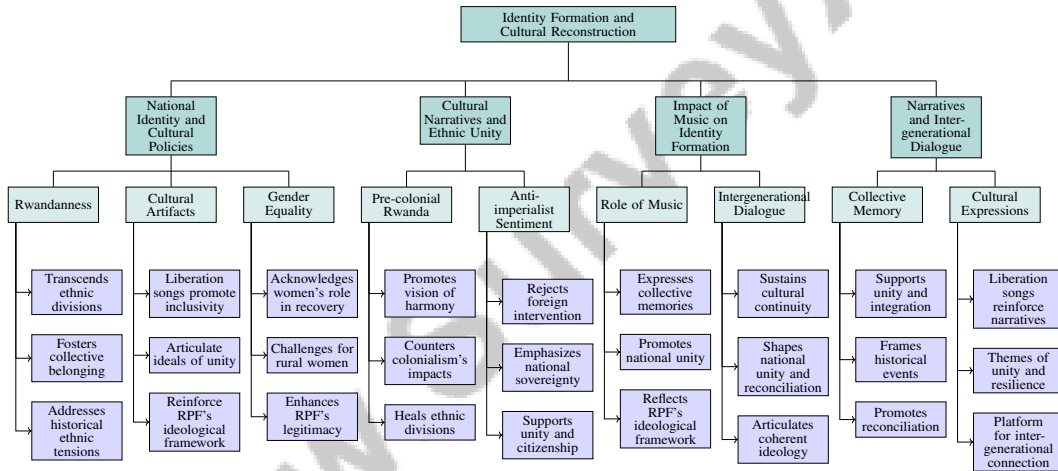


Figure 4: This figure illustrates the hierarchical structure of identity formation and cultural reconstruction in post-genocide Rwanda, highlighting the RPF’s strategies in fostering national identity, cultural narratives, music’s impact on identity, and intergenerational dialogue. It categorizes the key concepts and their relationships, emphasizing the role of cultural policies, narratives, and music in promoting unity and reconciliation.

## 6 Identity Formation and Cultural Reconstruction

### 6.1 National Identity and Cultural Policies

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has actively pursued policies to forge a cohesive national identity in post-genocide Rwanda, centering on the concept of ‘Rwandanness,’ which transcends ethnic divisions to foster collective belonging [2]. This identity addresses historical ethnic tensions and aims to create a unified socio-political landscape. Liberation songs serve as cultural artifacts promoting inclusivity, articulating ideals of unity and reinforcing the RPF’s ideological framework, contributing to nation-building [4]. The RPF’s emphasis on gender equality and women’s empowerment acknowledges women’s critical role in Rwanda’s recovery, though challenges remain, particularly for rural women and those outside formal political structures [11]. The RPF’s policies, advocating ‘Rwandanness’ and utilizing cultural expressions, enhance its legitimacy and operational effectiveness, promoting unity and stability in the post-genocide era [3, 4].



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## 6.2 Cultural Narratives and Ethnic Unity

The RPF employs cultural narratives as a strategic tool in nation-building, fostering ethnic unity and a cohesive national identity. By idealizing pre-colonial Rwanda, these narratives promote a vision of harmony, countering colonialism's divisive impacts and healing ethnic divisions [3]. These narratives, embedded with anti-imperialist sentiment, reject foreign intervention and emphasize national sovereignty through cultural expressions like liberation songs and public commemorations, reinforcing resilience, unity, and self-determination [3]. They help remove ethnic distinctions from national identity, supporting broader objectives of unity and citizenship through policies and educational reforms [4, 2]. By promoting values of unity and collective progress, the RPF's narratives counteract past legacies, supporting reconciliation and national integration for a stable Rwanda.

## 6.3 Impact of Music on Identity Formation

Music plays a pivotal role in identity formation and cultural reconstruction in post-genocide Rwanda, serving as a medium for expressing collective memories and values. The RPF strategically uses music, particularly liberation songs, to promote national unity and a cohesive identity, encapsulating ideals of resilience and unity [4]. These songs reflect the RPF's ideological framework, emphasizing anti-imperialism and national sovereignty, invoking historical narratives of pre-colonial harmony and resistance against colonial oppression [3]. Music fosters intergenerational dialogue and sustains cultural continuity, with RPF songs articulating a coherent ideology shaping national unity and reconciliation [4, 10]. By harnessing music's emotive power, the RPF bolsters its legitimacy and establishes a foundational narrative promoting unity and reconciliation, reflecting its commitment to fostering a cohesive society in both domestic and international contexts [3, 4].

## 6.4 Narratives and Intergenerational Dialogue

Narratives are crucial in fostering intergenerational dialogue within the RPF's nation-building strategy. They bridge past and present, enabling engagement with the nation's history and identity [6]. Post-genocide narratives construct collective memory supporting unity and integration, framing historical events within resilience and progress [3]. The RPF's narratives address psychosocial challenges, particularly for children of perpetrators and survivors, promoting reconciliation and providing a framework for engaging with the past [6]. Cultural expressions like liberation songs further reinforce narratives, articulating themes of unity and resilience, creating a platform for intergenerational connection [4]. The strategic use of narratives by the RPF underscores their significance in promoting dialogue and cultural reconstruction, solidifying legitimacy and fostering unity and stability in post-genocide Rwanda, rooted in early ideological expressions through liberation songs [3, 4].

# 7 Challenges and Criticisms

## 7.1 Critiques and Challenges

The nation-building strategies of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) have significantly transformed post-genocide Rwanda but have also faced substantial critiques. Concerns have been raised about the RPF's gender policies, which are perceived as strategies to secure international aid and legitimize the regime, potentially suppressing civil society dissent and questioning the authenticity of gender empowerment initiatives [17]. Researchers face intimidation and attempts to delegitimize critical discourse, complicating the analysis of Rwanda's socio-political dynamics [7]. Moreover, studies often inadequately address ethnic identities and historical grievances, leading to a fragmented understanding of societal dynamics [2]. This is exacerbated by interpreting ideology merely as a reflection of material interests, neglecting its motivational role within the RPF's nation-building framework [3].

The RPF's rapid democratization strategies have been critiqued for inadequately addressing historical issues, challenging long-term stability and reconciliation [5]. Political repression and human rights concerns, including suppression of dissent and limited political freedoms, complicate the RPF's nation-building narrative [8]. Despite these critiques, research acknowledges Rwanda's governance strengths and economic achievements [16]. However, the lack of comprehensive data on the geno-

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cide's immediate impacts and long-term psychological effects on survivors remains a barrier to understanding Rwandan society's needs [15].

These critiques highlight the intricate challenges within the RPF's nation-building strategies, emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach that reconciles historical grievances with contemporary socio-political realities. The RPF's early ideology, reflected in pre-genocide songs, underscores its commitment to national unity and complex relationships with perceived adversaries, shaping its post-genocide policies [4, 2, 3, 5, 10].

## **7.2 Ethical and Humanitarian Concerns**

The ethical and humanitarian implications of the RPF's policies present significant challenges to the narrative of nation-building in post-genocide Rwanda. The marginalization of Hutu victims' experiences during the genocide skews historical narratives and hampers comprehensive reconciliation [7]. Allegations of unlawful killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions by state forces raise ethical concerns about the RPF's governance practices, suggesting a pattern of human rights violations that contradict its commitments to justice and reconciliation [16].

The RPF's management of international perceptions complicates its efforts to address humanitarian concerns, reflecting a longstanding ideological commitment to national unity and a complex relationship with domestic opposition and the global community. This dynamic is influenced by the RPF's historical narrative and self-representation through platforms like liberation songs [3, 4, 16, 10]. While the RPF has successfully attracted international support through development initiatives, the ethical implications of its governance strategies remain contentious amidst ongoing human rights concerns. A transparent and accountable governance approach prioritizing the rights of all Rwandan citizens is essential.

Addressing historical and ongoing issues of ethnic division and injustice is crucial for authentic reconciliation and ensuring future development is grounded in justice and inclusivity, as evidenced by the RPF's efforts to reshape national identity and eliminate ethnic affiliations post-genocide [4, 2].

## **7.3 Political Repression and Human Rights**

The RPF's governance has faced scrutiny due to allegations of political repression and human rights violations, posing significant challenges to its nation-building narrative. Reports of unlawful killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions raise concerns about the RPF's commitment to justice and human rights [16]. These allegations suggest repressive practices that undermine the RPF's objectives of reconciliation and unity.

Rwanda's political landscape under the RPF is characterized by limited political freedoms and suppression of dissent, often justified as necessary for maintaining stability and preventing violence recurrence. However, this approach has been criticized for stifling political pluralism and inhibiting civil society development, essential for a democratic and inclusive nation [8]. The RPF's centralized governance exacerbates concerns regarding the erosion of democratic norms and marginalization of opposition voices [7].

The tension between maintaining political control and upholding human rights complicates the RPF's international image management. While garnering international support through development initiatives, the ethical implications of its governance strategies remain contentious amidst ongoing human rights concerns. The pervasive influence of the RPF in public life, harassment of opposition groups, and troubling human rights situation underscore the need for a governance framework emphasizing transparency and accountability, ensuring the rights and well-being of all Rwandan citizens are prioritized. Regional tensions with neighboring countries like Uganda and Burundi further complicate the landscape, highlighting the necessity for an inclusive approach addressing diverse population needs [4, 2, 16, 11, 10].

Addressing historical and systemic ethnic division issues is essential for fostering authentic reconciliation and ensuring national advancement is grounded in justice and inclusivity, as demonstrated by the RPF's efforts to erase ethnic identities from national discourse and promote a unified identity post-genocide [4, 2].

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## 7.4 Social and Economic Disparities

The RPF's urban development policies have highlighted significant social and economic disparities challenging nation-building efforts. A primary concern is the peripheralization and displacement of lower-income residents due to urban development projects prioritizing elite interests, exacerbating socio-economic inequalities where development benefits disproportionately favor wealthier segments [14].

The RPF's ambition to transform Kigali into a model city of ecological modernization and sustainable development has, at times, widened the gap between socio-economic groups. The focus on high-end infrastructure and urban aesthetics often neglects lower-income residents' essential needs, leading to displacement and limited access to vital services. This oversight is evident in urban transformation initiatives in Rwanda, where elite-driven urban policies exacerbate inequalities, impacting marginalized communities [4, 14, 10]. Such dynamics undermine social cohesion and pose barriers to achieving an equitable society.

An inclusive approach to urban planning and development is essential, prioritizing the needs and rights of all citizens and involving marginalized communities in decision-making processes. This inclusivity is crucial for addressing distributional impacts of urban transformation initiatives, particularly in post-genocide Rwanda, where elite-driven policies have often overlooked vulnerable populations in favor of ambitious developmental goals [4, 2, 14, 1, 10]. By ensuring equitable and accessible development initiatives, the RPF can enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness, fostering a more cohesive and resilient nation. Balancing modernization demands with promoting social justice and reducing economic inequalities is crucial for ensuring development benefits are shared broadly across Rwandan society.

## 7.5 International Perceptions and Diplomatic Challenges

International perceptions of Rwanda's political landscape and the RPF's governance strategies significantly impact diplomatic relations. The RPF's efforts to project stability and economic progress have garnered both support and skepticism from the international community. While Rwanda's rapid development and commitment to gender equality attract international aid and investment, concerns regarding political repression and human rights violations challenge the country's diplomatic standing [12].

Rwanda's historical narrative, particularly concerning the RPF's role in events surrounding the genocide, remains contentious in international forums. The pursuit of historical truth and accountability is vital for fostering genuine reconciliation, yet legal and political challenges often impede these efforts [12]. The RPF's narrative control and suppression of dissent complicate the international community's ability to engage in constructive dialogue with Rwanda.

Future research should focus on Rwanda's evolving political landscape and the role of international organizations in shaping diplomatic relations. Understanding how these entities can effectively contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation is crucial for developing policies prioritizing humanitarian intervention and preventing future conflicts [15]. Addressing these diplomatic challenges will enhance Rwanda's international standing and foster stronger, cooperative relationships with global partners.

The RPF's ability to navigate international perceptions and diplomatic challenges is essential for sustaining its nation-building efforts and ensuring Rwanda's progress is recognized and supported globally. The RPF faces the complex challenge of reconciling its commitment to national sovereignty with the necessity of adhering to international human rights standards. This balancing act is critical for the RPF to enhance its legitimacy and promote long-term stability in Rwanda, particularly considering its historical ideological foundations emphasizing national unity, adversary portrayal, and its relationship with the international community—all of which continue to shape its policies and governance approach in the post-genocide context [3, 4].

## 8 Conclusion

The nation-building strategies employed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) have played a transformative role in shaping post-genocide Rwanda, yet they are not without their complexities

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and challenges. A central tenet of RPF governance is the creation of a unified national identity, but enduring ethnic divisions highlight the ongoing need for reconciliation and inclusive policy-making. The application of Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a framework for understanding the psychological exchanges that underpin state-social relations, illustrating how mutual benefits and obligations contribute to social cohesion. Cultural artifacts, especially liberation songs, are instrumental in reinforcing the RPF's ideological narrative, thereby influencing national identity and societal interactions.

While the RPF has achieved significant progress in economic development and urban modernization, these efforts have also exacerbated socio-economic disparities, raising concerns about equitable access to resources and the implications for urban citizenship. Moreover, although the RPF's gender policies are often viewed as progressive, critiques suggest they may mask authoritarian tendencies rather than genuinely empower individuals, reflecting the nuanced complexities within the RPF's governance strategies.

Future research should delve into the exploration of suppressed testimonies and the role of international involvement, as these are critical for comprehending the long-term impacts of the genocide on regional stability. Longitudinal studies that examine intergenerational relationships and the evolution of narratives in post-genocide societies are particularly important, especially in understanding the role of youth in shaping these narratives. Additionally, comprehensive support programs designed to address the unique experiences of ex-combatants are essential, focusing on psychological challenges such as low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression that many continue to face.

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