

Situating Lived Experiences of State Power in Post-Genocide Rwanda

Because the dissertation differs from much of the post-genocide Rwanda literature, it does not take the genocide as its starting point of analysis. Instead, it focuses on the everyday activities of ordinary people living in southern Rwanda in their efforts to perform the requirements of the programme of national unity and reconciliation.¹ To do so, the dissertation draws primarily on theories of power, notably Foucauldian and feminist critiques of state power, alternate theories of power which focus on the “weak”, as well as theories of resistance to dominant forms of power. These literatures combine to provide powerful conceptual tools to access the externally invisible “infrapolitics of the powerless” (Scott, 1990: xiii). The key to analysing the “weak” is to recognise that they are not truly weak and to appreciate that power is relational in seeking to surveil and discipline those subject to it (Carroll, 1972; Foucault, 1977; 1980; Janeway, 1980; Scott, 1976).

The work is first and foremost a contribution to the Rwanda literature, which I read prior to and re-read after fieldwork.² This approach allows me to prioritise the voices of ordinary people in my analysis in situating the dissertation within the burgeoning literature on post-genocide Rwanda. When post-genocide Rwanda is no longer seen solely through the lens of ethnicity, an examination of the different subject positions of the ordinary Rwandans that participated in the research becomes possible.

¹ There is a growing body of knowledge on politics in post-genocide Rwanda, much of it ethnographic in approach. See, Ansoms (2007, 2008); Burnet (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009); Chakravarty (2006a, 2006b); Hintjens (2008); Ingelaere (2006, 2007b); and, Waldorf (2006, 2007). Conducting fieldwork on politically sensitive topics is becoming increasingly difficult as the government seeks to maintain control of the flow of information in and about Rwanda (Thomson, 2009a). For analysis of the government’s information management tactics see Pottier (2002: 109-129).

² Others have used this approach as well; for example, Cohen *et al.* (2001: 12-13); Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: 34); and, de Lame (2005a: 6-12).

Contextualising their narratives through the literature helps us delve more deeply into the range of choices and options that ordinary individuals have at their disposal in the post-genocide period. With this goal in mind, there are many published works on the 1994 genocide that provide useful empirical signposts for understanding individual lived experiences of the genocide. Before assessing their value, it must first be said that a copious amount of scholarship has been produced that focuses on the causes of the genocide and/or its aftermath, many of which are substandard in their approach and analysis; they will not be cited.³

Much of what has been written about Rwanda since the genocide either lacks critical depth or fails to take into account the rich pre-genocide literature on Rwandan society.⁴ Many academics and journalists “new” to Rwanda relied on Maquet’s heavily criticised and long since invalidated (by scholars writing in both English and French) study *Le système des relations sociales dans le Ruanda ancien* (1954, translated as *The Premise of Inequality: A Study of Political Relations in a Central African Kingdom in 1961*). Maquet’s statist interpretation of Rwandan society as a feudal kingdom that was highly centralised and stratified by caste-like ethnic groups became the field guide for scholars new to the region, and they consequently based their analyses on his static interpretation of Rwandan society. These works offer truncated analyses, as

³ A number of recent publications that uncritically praise the RPF for its post-genocide successes, notably restoring peace and security. These works are grounded in a “Tutsi” version of history that plays into the desire of the RPF to craft a specific historical narrative about the root causes of the genocide, which in turn justifies their oppressive post-genocide policies. For analysis of a cross-section of these substandard works see, de Lame (2004b: 280); Pottier (2002: 1-8, 53-108); Vansina (1998: 37-45); and Waldorf (2006: 30-34, 37, 44-48, 52).

⁴ Some works are noteworthy and important for their balanced and historically grounded analysis. For example, Des Forges (1999); Guichaoua (2005); Kagabo and Vidal (1994); Jefremovas (1997); Lemarchand (1998); C. Newbury (1995); C. Newbury and D. Newbury (1995); Reyntjens (1995); Vansina (2004); Willame (1995). My analysis relates to the English-language literature. Bishikwabo and Newbury (1980) identify more than 4000 documents in the canon of research on the Great Lakes Region as of 1980. Cf. the bibliography prepared by d’Hertefeldt and de Lame (1987).

consideration of individual lived experiences of genocide are sublimated in favour of themes that are directly linked to the genocide itself – state power, élite politics, the socio-psychological features of the killers, and the failures of the international community (see Ingelaere, 2006; Uvin, 2001 for a review of the literature). This has the effect of continuing the longstanding academic tradition of ignoring key elements of Rwanda’s history, notably “the interaction of local agency with élite policy” (D. Newbury and C. Newbury, 2000: 833).

This dissertation partially addresses this gap in seeking to understand the life worlds of ordinary Rwandans since the 1994 genocide. Specifically, it analyses the interactions with state power of 37 ordinary Rwandans at the lowest rungs of society – notably the vulnerable (*abatindi*) and the poor (*abekene*). Taken together, the *abatindi* and the *abakene* represent approximately 66% of Rwanda’s peasantry (Howe and McKay, 2007: 200).⁵ Such an approach does more than bring the lived experiences of ordinary Rwandans into the frame of analysis; it also provides a basis from which to analyse the post-genocide political order from the bottom up. The analysis that follows also underscores the historical continuities in both the nature of social hierarchy and governance in Rwanda to show that the programme of national unity and reconciliation

⁵ Eighty-seven percent of Rwanda’s entire population live in rural areas and are considered by the government to be peasants. The Rwandan peasantry is made of four categories of differing degrees of poverty. Lowest in the socio-economic hierarchy are those living in abject poverty (*abatindi nyakujya*, sing., *umutindi nyakujya*), next highest are the vulnerable (*abatindi*, sing. *umutindi*); above them are those identified as poor (*abakene*, sing., *umukene*). Taken together, these three categories represent “the poorest of the poor” in Rwanda and make up, in socio-economic terms, the majority of those living in rural areas. The fourth and highest category of the peasantry is the poor with means (*abakene wifashije*, sing., *umukene wifashije*) which is the socio-economic class of many elected local officials. *Abakene wifashije* represent about 14% of the peasantry (Howe and McKay, 2007: 200). The socio-economic context in which these individuals live their lives is discussed in detail in Chapter Six at pp. 195-208.

does not represent “a new way forward to assure peace and security for all Rwandans since the genocide” (President Paul Kagame quoted in Jha and Yadav, 2004: 69).⁶

Usefully employing the genocide literature as a tool to understand the range and diversity of individual experiences during the genocide requires a critical read of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial histories as well as local power relations across these time periods. de Lame links these two themes in reviewing the ethnographic literature, to reveal the “distortions in Rwandan historiography and [...] the contribution of the colonial powers to a myth of racial superiority that was to further legitimate the local power in place (de Lame, 2005a: 3). She cautions against anything but a prudent reading of Rwandan history, noting its historical lacunae – rural life in general and peasant experiences in particular – as well as its dominant themes: royal and state power, the presumption of political unity, and élite manipulation of European views of Rwandan history, notably its socio-political lineages and ethnic distinctions (de Lame, 2005a: 3-12).

de Lame’s concern with a cautious reading of history remains relevant in post-genocide Rwanda, where the programme of national unity and reconciliation has imposed a hegemonic view of Rwandan history to the exclusion of meaningful alternative interpretations. As in the past, other viewpoints are dismissed as “politically motivated” or the work of “opposition politicians intent on destabilising Rwanda’s peace and

⁶ A careful reading of the pre-colonial, colonial and pre-genocide literature highlights the deep historical roots of the programme of national unity and reconciliation. The complex machinery of tactics, hierarchies and direct and indirect instruments of control all ensure the integrity of the state system. The programme of national unity and reconciliation has its roots in the pre-colonial governance structures, and it highlights the ethnic unity of Rwandans under Tutsi monarchs with no regard for the intrigues of the court (Des Forges, 1972; Vansina, 2004). The programme also adopts an official history that starts with an already established Tutsi monarchy which both glosses over Rwanda’s distant origins and romanticises the ethnic harmony of the pre-colonial period. It also effectively erases the presence of ethnic Twa in Rwandan history and undermines their legal standing as an indigenous population (fieldnotes, 2006).

security” and can result in public denunciation, imprisonment, intimidation, disappearance and even death (Amnesty International, 6 July 2004; BBC, 2004; Frontline, 2005; P. Kagame, 2004; Médecins sans frontières, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Reporters sans frontières, 2001; Reyntjens, 1999a, 2004a, 2004b; Senate of the Republic of Rwanda, 2007; USIP, 2001, 2003). Still, there are a number of critical works that provide meaningful insight into the lived realities of ordinary Rwandans resident in the south so long as the reader is able to situate individual experiences in broader historical context. Readers must also be aware of the political uses of competing historical interpretations of the past without relying on racist representations of Rwandan society created largely by outsiders, and manipulated by local élites for their own gain (de Lame, 1995, 2004a; Eltringham, 2003a, 2003b; Jefremovas, 1995; D. Newbury and C. Newbury, 2000, particularly 854-866; Vansina, 1998).

The works of C. Newbury and D. Newbury provide locally grounded and historically contextualised analyses on the ideological uses of competing versions of history (C. Newbury, 1998; D. Newbury, 1997; D. Newbury and C. Newbury, 2000), the continued superiority of state authority over local forms of knowledge (D. Newbury and C. Newbury, 2000), the political dynamics of ethnicity and the evolution of the Rwandan state (C. Newbury, 1978, 1980, 1988, 1995; C. Newbury and D. Newbury, 1995; D. Newbury, 1980, 1991, 1994, 1997), and reveal contested views on the 1994 genocide (C. Newbury and D. Newbury 1999).⁷ These writings provide an excellent foundation for interpreting how the RPF draws on its own specific version of Rwandan history to justify its policy of national unity and reconciliation, as well as its claims to be the “rightful

⁷ Other historical sources of note include Chrétien (1981, 1985, 1991, 1992, 2006); Codere (1973, 1993); Des Forges (1972); de Lame (1990); Lemarchand (1970); Linden and Linden (1977); Louis (1963); Reyntjens (1985); Vidal (1969; 1974; 1984; 1985).

rulers of Rwanda” (Office of the President, 1999b: 17). They also provide much needed historical signposts when reading the rest of the pre-1994 genocide Rwanda literature.⁸ Jefremovas sums up their contribution beautifully: “the writings of David Newbury and Catharine Newbury...have the distinction of making extremists of both groups [Hutu and Tutsi] unhappy through their forthright and complex analyses” (Jefremovas, 2000: 300).

Historical analyses such as those produced by the Newbury’s are also important tools to reveal and assess the experiences of ordinary Rwandans with state-led processes of national unity and reconciliation. Individual experiences of the 1994 genocide are tied to both personal histories and the grand narrative of national unity and reconciliation. Understanding these individual experiences is important as there are multiple and sometimes contradictory layers of victimhood and perpetrator-hood that go back for decades among individual Rwandans, which do not mesh with government-imposed initiatives of national unity and reconciliation. Most notable of these is the RPF’s focus on creating a unified Rwandan identity or “Rwandan-ness”. Rwandan-ness is the official rejection of ethnic identity – of being Hutu, Tutsi or Twa – in favour of creating “one Rwanda for all Rwandans”. In attempting to wipe away ethnicity, the programme produces two broad simplifications where all Tutsi (whether they were in Rwanda during the genocide or not) are innocent victims or “survivors” and all Hutu (whether they participated in the genocide or not) are guilty perpetrators and “violent killers who need to be re-educated (on what it means to be “Rwandan”)” (NURC, 2007d; 2007e; 2007f).

A focus on the lived experiences of ordinary Rwandans reveals the danger of government efforts to impose a single version of national unity and reconciliation as it

⁸ Straus critiques Kagame’s claim that the RPF are Rwanda’s rightful rulers at a 2005 panel on the theme of “Taking Stock in Post-Genocide Rwanda” (USIP, 2005).

opens up the possibility to identify and contrast the seemingly irreconcilable standpoints of survivors, perpetrators, survivors of RPF-led killings, bystanders and witnesses, those who hid during the genocide, those who returned after the genocide, Rwandans in the diaspora, and so on, regardless of their ethnicity. One's experience of the genocide (or lack thereof) speaks directly to one's historical location. For example, an English-speaking man who grew up as a refugee in southern Uganda and returned after the genocide will recall an entirely different life history than a Kinyarwanda-speaking woman who grew up in Rwanda and lived through the genocide.

Recent studies have produced insightful theoretical work on individual motives to commit acts of genocide against neighbours, friends and family, to show that the genocide is not rooted in "long-standing ethnic hatred between Hutu and Tutsi" as the RPF contends (NURC, 2004a: 19). Instead, recent micro-level studies show that individual decisions to commit acts of genocide are grounded in intra-ethnic social pressure or personal grudges, and feelings of fear, insecurity and anger as well as poverty (André and Platteau, 1998; Fujii, 2006; Longman, 1995; Mironko, 2004; Shotsmans, 2000; Straus, 2006; Verwimp, 2005). As a whole, these analyses constitute a significant contribution to the micro-dynamics of mass violence grounded in both local knowledge and analysis of the prevailing social and political climate in a context of Rwanda's civil war (1990-1994). In particular, Fujii's research shows that the collective categories of killers, survivors, bystanders and rescuers are often incomplete, with individuals often inhabiting a variety of these categories. This has practical implications for how practices of justice and reconciliation play out at the level of the individual (Fujii, 2008). Straus's work challenges the wisdom of the government's post-genocide strategy of "maximal

prosecution” of ordinary Hutu men for crimes that many committed either under duress or as a survival strategy (2006: 244; Straus, 2004).

More importantly, together these works also speak to the climate of intimidation and fear on one hand and the coercive social pressures on the other that left ordinary Hutu with little option but to commit acts of genocide against their Tutsi brethren when instructed to do so by their political and military leaders. Read in conjunction with existing knowledge on the prevailing political climate and the RPF stratagems to gain state power, this micro-level research also challenges dominant government narratives about the genocide, and its role in both precipitating and stopping it (Dallaire, 2004; Mamdani, 2001: 159-184; Melvern, 2006: 13-132; Prunier, 1997: 356-389; Ruzibiza, 2005). Kuperman shows, in one-on-one interviews with senior members of the RPF’s inner circle, that genocide as a possible response of the Habyarimana regime to its demands for power-sharing were known and accepted, with the broader goal of state power trumping other considerations (Kuperman, 2004: 63).⁹ Ruzibiza’s contribution in recounting his role in downing the plane that killed then President Habyarimana, sparking the genocide which ended with the RPF taking state power, is particularly damning to the government version about its role in the genocide.¹⁰ The official government position is

⁹ This research becomes even more important as the post-genocide government amends its version of events, presumably for an uninitiated audience, about its role in the genocide (see Pottier, 2002 for analysis of the media *savoir faire* of the RPF). It is well documented that the genocide occurred in the context of civil war (1990-1994) and that the RPF entered Rwanda from Uganda on 1 October 1990 with the stated purpose of overthrowing the Habyarimana government, and to gain the right of return for Tutsi refugees. Recent government publications, notably tourist information, claim that the RPF entered Rwanda in April 1994 “to stop the genocide”. See, for example, ORTPN, 2004: 3; *The Eye Rwanda*, 2006: 16; and Republic of Rwanda, 2005: 7-8. Good examples of the government’s discourse on its role in stopping the genocide and rebuilding Rwanda “in its vision” are the “Culture”, “Politics” and “Security” links at the Rwanda Investment and Export Promotion Agency (REIPA) website: <http://rwandainvest.com/spip.php?rubrique23>.

¹⁰ Ruzibiza’s admission that he fired the rocket-propelled grenade that downed the Presidential plane is well documented. His broader account is considered to be an accurate and fair assessment of RPF activities before and during the genocide. His work has been well-received by Rwandanists. French magistrate Jean-

that Hutu extremists shot down the plane because they feared Habyarimana's apparent willingness to share state power with the RPF (CGC, 2003: 7; Gourevitch, 1996: 184-186; NURC, 2004a: 45; Reed, 1996: 480).

Research prepared by international organisations can also be productively read through an ethnographic lens in seeking out points of reference about why current state practices of national unity and reconciliation are so damaging for a large number of ordinary Rwandans. African Rights (1994) produced a significant volume that is grounded in local testimonies and eyewitness accounts, as did numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs) based in Rwanda (e.g., Cahiers Lumière et Société, 1995, 1996; Dialogue, 2004).¹¹ Combined these accounts provide useful empirical evidence on individual experiences of the genocide across time and space. African Rights continues to document individual experiences of genocide in its reports on the history of genocide in various sectors (African Rights, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e, 2003f, 2003g, 2003h, 2003i, 2006). The reports also reveal some of the silences that the recent administrative restructuring has created in showing how the *gacaca* jurisdictions do not necessarily overlap with pre-genocide administrative units. This is a significant development as the post-genocide government claims that it reconfigured Rwanda's

Louis Bruguière, who controversially indicted Paul Kagame for Habyarimana's murder, relies upon Ruzibiza's account. Not surprisingly, Kagame's government reacted with vengeance to the indictment, declaring Ruzibiza a traitor and accusing Bruguière of attempting to destabilise the government in a "thinly veiled political attack". See, Rwanda Development Gateway (26 January 2007), *Rwanda Governments' [sic] Reaction to Judge Brugeire's [sic] Indictment Saga*. An English translation of the indictment is available at: <http://cirqueminime.blogspot.com/2007/10/completed-bruguire-report-translated.html>. See footnote 30 in Chapter Four for further analysis following Ruzibiza's recanting of his allegations in November 2008.

¹¹ The African Rights report was widely criticised for being too soft on the human rights abuses of the new government. Reports produced by domestic organisations immediately following the genocide painted the genocide as the result of deep-seated ethnic hatred between Hutu and Tutsi that was driven by media propaganda, an argument in direct agreement with the position of the post-genocide government (see Office of the President, 1999a; NURC, 2004a).

administrative boundaries to “decentralise the power structures that led to genocide” and to “foster ethnic unity as people will have to live together” (fieldnotes, 2006).¹² In practice, it appears more likely that the government has redrawn administrative boundaries to further consolidate its own power, and to enable it to deploy administrative and security personnel in all corners of the country (Reyntjens, 2004a: 187-194).

Human Rights Watch (HRW), in a meticulously prepared report under the supervision of Alison Des Forges (1999), produced the most complete and thorough analysis of the genocide and its historical antecedents, including analysis of the strategy of genocide from the inner circles of state power through the military and militia groups, down to the lowest level of administrative *fonctionnaire*. It continues to provide excellent locally-situated analysis of the causes of genocide as new evidence comes to light (e.g., HRW 2006a, 2006b), just as it has sought to understand the post-genocide social and political order and its impact on ordinary people, notably the rural poor (e.g., HRW 2000, 2001b). HRW maintains its “watchdog” practices in reporting on key developments, including the 2003 presidential elections and the political and social climate in its run-up (HRW, 2003a).¹³ Along with Amnesty International (AI), HRW has released a multitude of reports, press releases and briefing papers that are replete with

¹² In 1994, Rwanda was organised into the following administrative hierarchy: 10 préfectures, 106 communes, 154 secteurs, and 9201 cellules, with each cellule being further sub-divided into groupings of ten households called *nyumbakumi*. In 2001, Rwanda's administration was reorganised into: 11 provinces, plus the city of Kigali, 106 districts, 154 secteurs, and 9201 cells. In January 2006, the government again engaged in a sweeping administrative carve-up that reduced the number of provinces (from 11 to 4), districts (from 106 to 30), and secteurs (from 154 to 416). Government officials claim that *gacaca* jurisdictions do not have to conform to the new administrative boundaries (interviews with MIJESPOC, MINALOC, and MINIJUST officials, 2006). The African Rights (2006g) report suggests that this is not the case, as the re-drawing of commune boundaries has resulted in the omission of some of the events surrounding the genocide that ordinary Rwandans consider part of their experience.

¹³ For further analysis on the elections, see, International Crisis Group (ICG), 2002; and Mission d'observation électorale de l'Union Européenne, 2003. For the RPF version of events, see CGC, sous la direction de Charles Gasarasi, 2004.

locally grounded and historically contextualised collective and individual testimonies that speak to the everyday challenges of ordinary people as they seek to navigate the post-genocide social and political order.¹⁴ Read together, the reporting of AI and HRW not only paint a credible picture of the social and political milieu in post-genocide Rwanda, their publications also provide an inside track to the lived experiences of 37 ordinary Rwandans resident in the south as they seek to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of genocide.¹⁵

Accounts from journalists add nuance to understanding of how individuals survived the genocide, notably from the position of Tutsi survivors of the genocide. These accounts are not representative of individual experiences of the genocide, but instead are better interpreted for how they present the stories of individual Rwandans (e.g., Gourevitch, 1998; Keane, 1995; Koff, 2004). These accounts provide insight on the nature of the moral discourse surrounding the genocide that lumps all Hutu men into the category of evil perpetrators, and all Tutsi survivors as hapless victims. An ethnographic reading highlights both the folly of collectively victimising perpetrators and survivors, and reveals the many silences that such an approach entails.¹⁶ In addition, these journalistic accounts further complicate efforts to understand the multiple motivations that individuals had for killing and tend to conflate acts of genocide against Tutsi and politically moderate Hutu by militias, the military and some ordinary Rwandans with the killing of civilians in the course of the war between the *Forces Armées Rwandaises*

¹⁴ Some international organisations monitor specific elements of Rwandan politics. On press freedom see, RSF (2001; 2002).

¹⁵ See their Rwanda web-links for particulars: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/africa/central-africa/rwanda>; and <http://hrw.org/doc/?t=africa&c=rwanda>.

¹⁶ See also Burnet (2005) on “amplified silences” in post-genocide Rwanda.

(FAR) and the RPF (1990-1994) and the killing of civilians (Hutu, Tutsi and Twa) by the RPF in the immediate post-genocide period (1994-1996).¹⁷

Equally subjective is the witness literature, meaning the corpus of personal stories written by individuals who survived the genocide (e.g., Aegis Trust, 2006; Hatzfeld, 2005a, 2007; Ilibagiza, 2006; Kayitesi, 2004; Mujawayo and Belhaddad, 2004, 2006; Mukagasana, 1997, 1999, 2001; Mukasonga, 2006; Rucyahana, 2007).¹⁸ Verging on a cottage industry for some, these works provide direct testimony of the experience of genocide and allow for a greater sense of context when interpreting individual experiences of genocide. Of particular value are testimonies that focus on the reconciliation process from the perspective of both survivors and perpetrators, including critiques of the *gacaca* court trials to show that what the government perceives as sincere reconciliation is actually forced co-existence between the two groups.¹⁹ Nonetheless, these accounts are to be read with caution, as most of the present individual stories of survival are not only designed to shock and horrify the reader, but also draw on simplified versions of history that make it sometimes difficult for the uninformed reader to situate these narratives in broader context. As a whole, these books are written by members of Rwanda's educated élite (save Hatzfeld, an outsider), who write

¹⁷ The RPF shut down the research of Davenport and Stam (2005) because of their typology of Tutsi deaths as genocide, the killings of Hutu opponents as politicide, and the remaining deaths of Hutu and Twa civilians as massacres. The RPF denounced their work as "revisionist" in 2004. See their reply to the government at: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/davenport/genodynamics/clarification.htm>.

¹⁸ Kinzer dedicates a chapter of his book to Rucyahana's work as an example of "where church and the country's political leadership [come] together to make a difference" (Kinzer, 2008: 304). I have criticised Kinzer's contribution to our knowledge on post-genocide Rwanda as a book that "many people seeking to understand Rwanda will read without realizing that it is little more than government propaganda" (Thomson, 2009b).

¹⁹ See also the survivor stories published by the international NGOs *Avocats sans frontières* (ASF) and *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF). See for example, ASF, n.d (a); ASF, n.d (b), MSF, 2003, 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2006d.

authoritatively of individual experiences without adequately situating their interlocutors within Rwanda's social hierarchy, and without due regard to other salient forms of identity (e.g., gender, occupation, class) that could have shaped one's chances to survive, and consequently enhance or constrain one's ability to reconcile with other Rwandans.

Testimonial accounts from Hutu voices add much-needed nuance about how many ordinary people lived through the genocide and about the diversity of their experiences of survival in its aftermath, when millions of Hutu quit Rwanda, sometimes forcibly, to refugee camps in neighbouring countries, notably in eastern Zaïre (now Democratic Republic of Congo). They were later returned to Rwanda, often against their will by the RPF and/or the United Nations (Hatzfeld, 2005b, 2009; Lyon and Straus, 2006; Umutesi, 2004). Umutesi's (2004) work is particularly powerful as her story is representative of the lived experiences of hundreds of thousands of individuals who fled the genocide in Rwanda only to find themselves trapped in crowded, unsafe refugee camps.²⁰ As such, it is an important antidote to the simplified historical narratives of Tutsi as the only legitimate "survivors". It provides a more complex version of reality, showing the multiple and fluctuating constraints that shaped individual options of survival. Umutesi's story is also representative of the everyday experiences that all Rwandans – Hutu, Tutsi and Twa alike – lived through before, during and after the genocide. Tutsi are rightfully and correctly survivors of genocide as they were targeted by virtue of their ethnicity, but all Rwandans are survivors of conflict, jostled and shaped by events over which they had no control. Umutesi's account also shows the folly of analysts new to the region who rely on stereotypical generalisations about ethnic conflict

²⁰ Umutesi's work is the subject of a special issue of the *African Studies Review*, 2005, 48(3). See in particular the comments of de Lame (2005b); Habimana (2005); C. Newbury (2005); Songolo (2005).

and simplified accounts that seek to explain the genocide in the language of atavistic ethnic enmity.

Paul Rusesabagina's *No Ordinary Man* (2006) is an example of a "Hutu" version of events that the government actively tries to suppress in denouncing him as "a liar" and "a genocide revisionist" for his account of saving over 1200 Tutsi lives during the 1994 genocide (fieldnotes, 2006). His book, which was made into a movie, *Hotel Rwanda*, shows the importance of personal networks and the strategic use of resources as salient determinants of survival in narrating how he negotiated and bargained with senior members of the Habyarimana regime to save the lives of Tutsi who sought refuge at the Hôtel des Milles Collines in central Kigali. Much to the chagrin of the RPF, his account has been internationally acclaimed and Rusesabagina deemed a "hero" in North America and Europe for his actions during the genocide.²¹ He also uses international fora to speak out about the current political climate of authoritarianism in Rwanda and calls for a truth and reconciliation commission to bring RPF crimes committed during the genocide to book. The RPF responds by saying that those soldiers who broke rank and perpetrated revenge crimes against individuals are being dealt with "accordingly" (UNU, 2007). The RPF further contends that Rusesabagina is lying because "there are no *Milles Collines*

²¹ For example, Rusesabagina was awarded the (United States) Presidential Medal of Honor in 2005. There are rumours that Rusesabagina uses these international platforms to further his own political agenda, *viz.*, to return to Rwanda to contest the Presidency in the next election (currently scheduled for September 2010). It is unclear if Rusesabagina has political aspirations. Careful analysis of Rusesabagina's speeches to international audiences is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It would be useful to analyse his speeches to determine his use of history and to see if he manipulates it in the way that other Rwandan political leaders have done in the past, or to determine if he truly interested in "flipping evil's assets against itself", by which he means never again cultivating genocide as an option amongst Rwandans (Rusesabagina, 2006: 204). The movie *Hotel Rwanda*, and his book *No Ordinary Man* offer a simplistic account of the genocide and its historical antecedents. For analysis, see, Adhikari (2008).

survivors”²² and that his status as a hero is something that “only the people of Rwanda can decide” (fieldnotes, 2006).

Rusesabagina’s international notoriety and the government’s reaction to it matter because it is emblematic of how the RPF seeks to control the political landscape in post-genocide Rwanda. The RPF works hard to ensure that its version of “how things really are in [post-genocide] Rwanda” is the only one that circulates and it employs a variety of tactics to ensure that its version of everyday life in post-genocide Rwanda is the one presented to foreign audiences (interview with RPF official, 2006; see also Pottier, 2002, 151-178). Rusesabagina is considered “an enemy of the state” since his book and movie directly challenge “the moral authority of the RPF” to rebuild Rwanda in its vision of national unity and reconciliation (fieldnotes, 2006). The RPF continues to discredit Rusesabagina to international and domestic audiences alike, including sponsoring the publication of a book, *Hotel Rwanda or the Tutsi Genocide as seen by Hollywood* (Ndahiro and Rutazibwa, 2008). The book, which was written by President Kagame’s press secretary and a senior member of Rwanda’s Information Agency, alleges that Rusesabagina is “trading for personal riches” and that his account “distorts the true history of what happened during the genocide” (Kezio-Musoke, 2008: 1).²³

Ndahiro and Rutazibwa’s book is also part of the growing list of “approved by the RPF” publications that are produced by domestic think-tanks, non-governmental

²² He has been denounced by prominent members of the Rwandan government, most notably President Paul Kagame and Senator Odette Nyiramilimo. Both Kagame and Nyiramilimo gave their blessing to the movie as an important vehicle for educating the world about what “really happened” in 1994 when it premiered in the USA in October 2004 (fieldnotes, 2006). Nyiramilimo also recounts how Rusesabagina sent a car to carry her and her family to safety at the Milles Collines in Gourevitch (1998: 129-131), *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow we will be Killed with our Families*, which would seem to make her a “Milles Collines survivor”. Denunciation of Rusesabagina was ongoing during fieldwork.

²³ Rusesabagina responded: <http://www.eux.tv/article.aspx?articleId=20114> (Rusesabagina, 12 April 2008).

organisations, and government offices (fieldnotes, 2006).²⁴ The RPF sees itself as the guardian of “Rwanda’s culture and destiny” and has subsequently made “its own contribution to the crafting of an intellectual image about [Rwanda] and its heritage” (Pottier, 2002: 109). To this end, once-exiled intellectuals, many of whom have returned to Rwanda since 1994, and who now hold positions of authority in government, universities and churches, have produced numerous publications. These publications have the RPF “seal of approval” and are useful as they reveal at length the RPF’s interpretation of Rwandan history and the causes of the 1994 genocide.

The substantive content of this body of work is remarkable only in the similarity of its message wherein ethnicity is de-emphasised and historical unity between Rwanda’s ethnic groups prior to the arrival of colonialists is invoked to justify current policies, notably the programme of national unity and reconciliation. The leading example of this is Kimonyo’s *Revue Critique des Interpretations du Conflit Rwandais* (2000), a Centre for Conflict Management (CCM) publication, and a document that numerous élites told me during my “re-education” that “I must read” as it is the “truth about how people came to kill one another”.²⁵ Other noteworthy examples include the *Cahiers Lumière et Société* series,²⁶ as well as the reports and surveys produced by the CCM²⁷, the Institute

²⁴ During my “re-education”, I was handed numerous publications that were considered “must reads” by the various members of the RPF that I met. My host would tell me that the publication in question is a “must read” because “it has been approved by the leadership”. A staff member at the *Ikirezi* bookshop in central Kigali told me that their collection of books on the 1994 genocide is approved by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MIJESPOC) before being shelved for sale. *Ikirezi* is the repository for government publications, and sales are reported to MIJESPOC on a quarterly basis (fieldnotes, 2006).

²⁵ Kimonyo is the chair of the Commission of Inquiry that the RPF created to investigate the role France might have played in the 1994 Genocide. His CCM publication is based on his doctoral thesis (Kimonyo 2002).

²⁶ See *Cahiers Lumière et Société* (1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 2000a, 2000b, 2003).

²⁷ See CCM (2002); CGC (2002a, 2002b, 2003). See also Gasana *et al.* (1999).

of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IDRP)²⁸, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC),²⁹ the National Service of Gacaca Jurisdictions (NSGJ),³⁰ the Human Rights Commission (HRC)³¹ and the Office of the President.³² Read together, these works reveal not only the official narrative of national unity and reconciliation but also point to reasons behind the paucity of published works from Rwandan academics on the causes and consequences of the 1994 genocide.³³ This is perhaps not surprising, given that “the issues are too fresh, the society too divided, the community of scholars too small, and the political situation too tense” (Uvin, 2001: 76).³⁴

²⁸ See IDRP (2003; 2005).

²⁹ See NURC (n.d., 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005, 2006a, 2008). Cf. Gasarasi and Musahara (2004) and Mutamba and Izabiliza (2005).

³⁰ See NSGJ (2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005/06, 2006). See also Gasibirege and Babagola (2001).

³¹ See RHRC (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). A review of these documents shows discrepancies in reporting between the French- and English-language versions. From 2005, I was only able to access the Kinyarwanda-language versions.

³² See Office of the President (1999a, 1999b).

³³ Indeed, the gatekeeping capacities of the RPF to ensure their version of history is the only relevant one extends beyond the academy to documentary films. During my “re-education”, I was alerted to the “misguided” efforts of foreign film-makers to understand the government’s vision of national unity. I was told to avoid most of them, and rely on “the one written by a Rwandan” (*Keepers of Memory*, 2005).

³⁴ This is not to suggest that there are no critical and objective Rwandan scholars, but only to highlight their rarity in the literature. I have been subject to the public wrath of Rwandan (and American) academics at conferences in the United States, who called my work “revisionist”, “pro-Hutu” and “baseless”, which perhaps explains in part why Rwandan scholars choose not to write on the politics of their homeland.