

Ordinary Choices in Extraordinary Times

Resistance to the Genocide in Rwanda in 1994

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Abstract

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This study explores how and why, in their perspectives, persons identified as Hutu resisted genocide targeting the Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda in 1994. The violence involved more than one million victims murdered in private places such as houses and gardens as well as public places such as churches, hills, stadiums, schools, hospitals and offices. The pressure on the Hutu population to participate in the violence was strong and anyone who was critical could become a target. In spite of this, many Hutu Rwandans chose to resist the violence.

This thesis builds on 37 interviews with Rwandan Hutu who resisted genocide. It contributes to knowledge about how resistance could challenge both the dominant discourses and practices of genocide. It finds that people's resistance took both subversive and submissive forms. The thesis identifies a number of forms of covert resistance: avoidance, argumentation, the use of one's position, and false/faked compliance. Although these people did not openly challenge the perpetrators of genocide, they contributed on a small scale to undermine the violent practices of genocide. The study also discusses different forms of overt resistance to the genocide. These include open confrontation with genocide perpetrators and threats of resorting to violence. When resisting genocide, the respondents often made use of and were motivated by their own self-representations as Christian, Muslim, senior, woman/mother, and other identity positions. Such alternative identity positions helped blur the dividing lines that were central to the discourse of genocide, namely those between friend and enemy, killer and victim. By showing the broad repertoire of practices people used to resist, the study contributes to the field of genocide studies.

The study also discovers new practices of resistance that have not earlier been discussed in the context of genocide in Rwanda. These include the use of bribery and how people resisted through creative use of their professional or power positions. The great risks that under-resourced persons dared take to reject state-sponsored violence can be understood through an investigation of their motivations. The study finds that motivations were often connected to identity formation. People drew on different identity positions, all of which were not necessarily "subalterns", as is often assumed in resistance studies.

Keywords: Rwanda, Genocide, Resistance, Discourses/Practices and Identity