

## Remembering the Humanity: Accounting for Resisting Genocide in Rwanda in 1994

Ernest Mutwarasibo

### About the author

Ernest Mutwarasibo is a PhD researcher in Peace and Development, University of Gothenburg (Sweden). He is currently a lecturer and researcher at the College of Arts and Social Sciences (CASS), University of Rwanda. He has a number of publications which include “Rwanda 1994 expliqué à mes enfants: récits et réflexions sur un génocide”, a book published in 2016. .

### Acknowledgments

This paper was jointly supported by the Aegis Trust’s programme for Research, Policy and Higher Education (RPHE) and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID). Particular thanks go to Dr Nicola Palmer, Dr Phil Clark, Mrs Audrey van Ryn and two anonymous reviewers. They provided us with instrumental comments, without which the paper would not be in its present form..

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### Abstract

This paper draws on ten semi-structured interviews with Rwandan Hutu, who, in 1994, resisted the genocide then targeting their fellow Tutsi, to explore how and why such a critical response was possible in the context of extreme violence. The empirical material suggests three types of resistance: physical violence, argumentation and avoidance. Together with the motivations that drove them, tactics of resistance in the context of genocide in Rwanda expand Hannah Arendt’s claim regarding the centrality of critical thinking. For resistance to genocide to be possible, the research suggests that it concerns individuals’ choice about being able to live with themselves, combined with their concerns about being able to live with others. Building on the centrality of critical thinking, violent and non-violent tactics, added to faith-based and socio-professional motivations, to enabled respondents to resist. Overall, the paper’s findings suggest that Rwandan research, and genocide studies more broadly, need to move beyond the binary notions of either being a victim or a perpetrator to include other types of possible identity formation.

### Keywords

Genocide – Resistance - National Identity - Identity Formation.

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## Introduction

This paper departs from Rwanda's case of genocide in 1994 to explore tactics and motivations for resistance in the context of high levels of genocidal violence. It draws on semi-structured interviews with ten people, who, constructed as Hutu Rwandans in 1994, opposed, in various ways, campaigns of exterminating their fellow citizens targeted due to their Tutsi ethnicity. A typology of resistance is developed, along with the motivations and constraints at play while exercising such an alternative action. The paper identifies three types of resistance: physical violence, argumentation and avoidance, to build an overall argument that highlights resistance as an important aspect of genocide, particularly in terms of how the practice conveys the possibility that there are multiple responses to the call to commit violence.

Studies of genocide, in Rwanda and more broadly, emphasise bi-polar notions of either being a victim or a perpetrator (Totten & Parsons, 2009; Waller, 2007; Ternon, 1995; Sémelin, 2007; Mennecke, 2007). Increasing testimonies and writings indicate, though, that other choices were possible, and one of these was to resist. Within the scholarship interested in these alternative responses, writings tend to emphasise the rescuing of potential victims as both a means of resistance and an end in itself (Nechama, 1986; 2013; Sémelin, 2011; Monroe, 2008).

In this study, the interviewed Rwandan Hutu people related strategies and motivations of resisting genocide from a more nuanced perspective. Their accounts do point to the rescue of the potential victims of genocide as a major feature of the resistance against it. Beyond that, however, respondents narrated experiences through which alternative identities were formed at both the individual and community levels that enabled a wider possible set of responses to the call to violence, one of which was resistance. A better exploration of these alternative response and means of constructing identities in response to the call to genocide can lead to a deeper understanding of the genocidal violence itself.

The paper's theoretical framework draws on Hannah Arendt's 'critical thinking' as an explanation for why some individuals chose not to participate in large-scale state-supported violence (Arendt, 2003: 63-65). This study shows how the critical thinking required to resist manifested in both violent and non-violent strategies, allowing it to take account of the self-defence devices that respondents put forward as to both how and why they resisted. Respondents drew on individual capacities and community dynamics, such as gerontocracy and other family ties, to enact their resistance. In so nuancing and deepening our understanding of resistance, this study contributes to both genocide and resistance studies, suggesting a shift to focus on actions, effects and identities beyond existing binary classification as either a perpetrator or a victim.

## Empirical context and methodological approach

Between April and July 1994, Rwanda fell into genocide, targeting the then constructed Tutsi ethnicity. The violence had many effects, which included more than 1 million human lives wasted and hundreds of thousands of people wounded, and plunged into misery. Like in other genocides, the 1994 genocide, which targeted the Tutsi ethnic group, largely drew from a state-supported discourse that sought to constrain all Hutu to conform to the extermination of Tutsi as a means of their own survival and/or wellbeing. Starting in 1992-1993, the 'Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines' – RTLM, Kangura (no. 6, 1990; no. 46 - 48, 1993; no. 58-59, 1994) and *Le Courrier du Peuple*, among other channels of information, actively contributed to establishing ethnicity as a dominant identity of good citizenship. Political speeches made it possible to perceive a situation of threat emanating from the entire Tutsi ethnic group (Omar, 2011; Mugesera, 2004; Mironko, 2006; Rutembesa & Mutwarasibo, 2017: 117-150). Drawing on sensitive issues such as security, the 'inflammatory discourse' (Sémelin, 2007: 32-44) led to a wide belief that there was a strong reason to choose between the binary classification of either killing or being killed (Chrétien, 1995; Mutwarasibo, 2016b).

As of April 1994, more than a million Hutu people turned against their fellow Tutsi citizens: doctors against patients, teachers against students, priests against their followers, parents against children, etc. Perpetrators of genocide largely perceived it as a legitimate means of self-defence at the disposal of Hutu, to get rid of Tutsi, as the latter were portrayed as an obstacle to the former's well-being and security (Straus, 2006; Hintjens, 1999; Chrétien & Kabanda, 2013; Mamdani, 2001; Kimonyo, 2008; Mutwarasibo, 2016a: 227-239). Leaders and other Hutu people then suspected of opposing or not supporting genocide were also murdered

(Rutembesa & Mutwarasibo, 2009: 71-79; Guichaoua, 2005: 262-265). However, some of these opponents to the genocide did survive and were able to both resist participating in the violence and rescue some of its potential victims. Understanding their actions and choices is a key part of the overall account of the genocide.

Employing a post-structuralist view of knowledge as a subjective construction of meaning, this study is based on qualitative interviews in an attempt to understand how and why individuals say they resisted. Their accounts should be understood from a temporal perspective, which cannot be seen as solely conveying a historical account of what actually took place, but, rather, offers access to how they are making sense of their own choices. Respondents were purposively selected from two research sites: the former National University of Rwanda (NUR), currently in Huye District, and a rural farming community in Bugarura cell, now in Nyanza District. The primary basis for the selection of respondents was that strategies and motivations of resisting could vary in relation to their social and/or geographical positions.

The accounts from the Bugarura people do not represent all of the rural farmers who may have experiences relevant to understanding resistance, nor do they make claims about the wider prevalence of the practice of resistance. In the same vein, NUR staff's and students' views do not speak for all intellectuals. The study sought to develop knowledge through the 'co-construction' of meaning with the respondents in the study and the researcher (Padgett, 1998: 29; Bryman, 2012: 159-160). Nonetheless, the differences in the social and geographical positions of the respondents were important, as they allowed for an examination of whether rural farmers and intellectual elites acted upon different motivations.

The Bugarura cell occupies a marginalised space between the then Butare and Gitarama prefectures (now in the Southern Province of Rwanda). The region is of particular interest due to the astonishing collective practices of rural farmers, who actively challenged their fellow countrymen, then committing genocide in and outside the locality. Six rural farmers, herein referred to as BA, BB, BC, BD, BE and BF<sup>1</sup>, were selected from the cell for the purpose of this study. They are part of the group of 40 men and women, who, during April and May 1994, carried out collective practices of resisting genocide. The semi-structured interviews were limited to four men (BA, BB, BC and BF) and two women (BD and BE), with a focus on the depth of their accounts rather than on reaching a breadth of respondents.

As the sole public higher learning institution, the selection of NUR provided access to respondents who sanctioned two strikingly different possible responses to ethnic-political violence in the early 1990s. On 22 September 1992, Dr Léon Mugesera addressed MRND<sup>2</sup> leaders and local people at Kabaya, giving a speech that called for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after its broadcast, the speech attracted a carefully drafted letter of protest from Mugesera's colleague, a professor at NUR, Dr Jean Gualbert Rumiya. Once broadly and deeply explored, the document alone nuances existing considerations over intellectual elites in general, and those at NUR in particular (Mutabazi, 2010). In the hope that his colleagues and students would follow Rumiya's practice, NUR offered a valuable site for exploring whether intellectual enlightenment might guide individuals towards a critical response to genocide.

In both cases, the selection of interviewees focused on accessing a deep account of their resistance, all the more so since the study is exploratory. Unlike the Bugarura residents' accounts, which were recorded in the same region, the NUR participants delivered accounts from relatively distant places. Genocide in 1994 broke out during the Easter holidays. Staff members and students were at home, although some were still near the institution's premises. This study draws on four respondents: one senior staff (IA) and three students (IB, IC and ID) and must be read while keeping in mind that spatial discontinuity, i.e. they reported on resistance that was being carried out in different regions from that of NUR. In both sites, interviews were conducted in Kin-

<sup>1</sup> 'B' symbolises the nickname of 'the Band,' which is the name the group members have been called since late 1991. Influential members of the Band, BA and BB, had been involved in various criminal offences, such as slapping and punching local citizens and leaders who they self-judged for doing wrong. The local authority considered such activities as rebelling against the official order and frequently arrested the group leaders. Since 1992, the security organisations, mainly the military police (gendarmérie) of Nyanza, caught and tried some members of the Band up to three times, and they were charged with threatening public safety.

<sup>2</sup> *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour la Démocratie* – ruling party founded in 1975 and ever since under leadership of the then President Juvénal Habyarimana.

<sup>3</sup> Extradited from Canada a couple of years ago, Dr Leon Mugesera has been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Kigali High Court, Rwanda, for direct and public incitement to commit genocide. His speech was found to have called for the massacre of 100 people from the locality of Kabaya and nearby.

yarwanda, the mother tongue for all involved in the study, and were then translated into English. Interpretation was then instrumental and a dynamic process in both the collection and analysis of the interview materials, as is consistent with the approach of co-constructing knowledge. These interviews form the empirical basis of this paper, from which I develop a typology of resistance that enables me to theoretically explore what constitutes resistance and how it is enacted.

### Theoretical perspectives

This study draws on existing theories to discuss and understand the different experiences and interpretations of resistance. The two central concepts: genocide and resistance, both entail talking about the exercise of power. Power seeks to change people's actions (Foucault, 1980: 89; Foucault, 1982; Vinthagen, 2015: 5 - 12) and the genocide proceeded with a discourse that downplayed the ordinary peaceful interrelations of people and pressured them to interrelate with violence (Straus, 2012). The particular forms of power that are embedded within genocide are 'sovereign power' and 'disciplinary power,' which seek subordination while severely repressing non-compliance. The 'sovereign power' claims the sovereign's monopoly over the use of violence and/or forcefully represses and controls behaviour (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014: 112). The 'disciplinary power' trains, controls, monitors and transforms individual people into mere subjects of power (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014: 114).

As they endeavour to exercise total control, 'sovereign power' and 'disciplinary power' entail zero tolerance towards resistance. The latter needs to break through these oppressive devices. For the 'sovereign power,' resistance is generally seen as only being possible by 'breaking commands or repressions' with 'hidden or disguised ways' in order to overcome the sovereign surveillance and control of that dominant power (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014: 113). For 'disciplinary power,' resisting is found through "either openly refusing to participate in the construction of new subjectivity or the transformation of such social construction into something else – something not useful for power interests. The power of discipline is met by forms of resistance that challenge through avoiding, rearticulating discourses and by destabilising the institutional control of behavior" (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014: 115).

Genocide, as an exercise of power, links sovereignty and discipline to the creation of the new identities of 'us' versus 'them,' demanding that individuals engage in collective action (Moshman, 2007: 116). During its culmination, genocide unfolds as a collective 'security dilemma' (Sémelin, 2007: 39), which undermines the ability of the people concerned to engage with alternative responses to the violence. As Ervin Staub argues, genocide articulates a reversed morality: 'killing members of the targeted group becomes right and moral' (Staub, 2011: 17).

With the violent exercise of sovereign and disciplinary power, tactics of resistance are difficult to undertake, and the existing literature emphasises the disguised forms of resistance and the use of rescue of potential victims as both the means and the end of the act of resistance (Sémelin, 2011; Nechama 2013; Monroe, 2008; Andrieu, 2008). To widen this frame, in this study, 'resistance' is employed to cover any actions performed in opposition to the dominant discourse of genocide then targeting the Tutsi ethnic group in Rwanda in 1994. These alternative responses to genocide did not necessarily seek to overthrow the then political regime, nor are they limited to instances of rescue or hidden resistance. The departure point is that alternative responses to the genocide could potentially be broader than what the current literature assumes. However, one of the key dynamics to keep in mind is that the existing writings suggest that critical thinking was key to any act of resistance, all the more so because resisting risked the life of those who enacted it (Mutwarasibo, 2016b).

Hannah Arendt's work offers initial guidance. In her reflection on people who, like Adolf Eichmann, complied with Nazi German killings as automatons, she argued as follows for the case of 'non-participants' (emphasis added):

In what way were those few different who in all walks of life *did not collaborate and refused to participate* in public life, though they could not and did not rise in rebellion? (...) Their criterion, I think was a different one: they asked themselves to what extent they would be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves. Hence they also chose to die when they were forced to participate. The precondition for this kind of judging is not a highly developed intelligence or sophistication in

moral matters, but rather the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself, to have intercourse with oneself, that is to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which, since Socrates and Plato, we usually call *thinking* (Arendt, 2003: 44 - 45).

In this account, Arendt seems right to assume that critical thinking was a highly individualised activity. Critical thinking appears in a number of accounts of both the strategies and motivations of resisting genocide in Rwanda discussed in this paper, and the empirical material supports Arendt's formulations of this critical thinking in terms of a person's ability to live with himself. However, as David Moshman asserts, individual people who commit genocide act on behalf of what they perceive to be their own group against what they perceive to be a different one. Arendt's exclusive individualist focus may obscure our ability to see the group dynamics of both the genocide and the resistance to it.

Overall, the established literature on genocide and resistance presumes that in the context of genocide, resistance will be muted, hidden and highly individualised. The typology of resistance drawn from the empirical material in Rwanda outlined in this paper shows that a much wider notion of resistance is needed that accounts for overt violent action and group practices. This wider focus on different types of action allows us to move beyond automatic assumptions that the only two options are to be a perpetrator or to be a victim. The following analytical sections further articulate these findings.

### **How and why people resisted genocide**

This section is about the strategies and motivations people put forward in their accounts of resisting genocide in Rwanda in 1994. First, it highlights both violent and non-violent tactics, developing a typology in which resistance took the form of physical violence, avoidance and argumentation. It then examines the motivations for this wider frame of resistance, teasing out how the critical thinking put forward both confirms and extends Arendt's personalised notion of critical thinking. Community dynamics were key to steering resistance as both an alternative response to violence and as a means of self-defence that those resisting employed to sustain their capacity to critically live with themselves and others as they developed and drew on alternative identities that went beyond the victim/perpetrator binary.

### **Strategies of resisting genocide**

#### *Violent resistance*

In this very overt form of resistance, respondents resorted to direct and physical confrontations opposing genocide perpetrators. The tactics were aimed to affect what Galtung would label the physical (somatic) and structural (physiological and functional) beings of the targeted people (Galtung, 1969: 168-177). In this instance, those targeted were the genocide perpetrators. The particular atmosphere of genocide, which erupted in a context of war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF-Inkotanyi) and the then government, informed this strategy. This violent resistance mirrored the genocidal violence in some respects; however, there were fundamental differences between them.

The similarity between the genocide and the violent resistance against it, which to date has not been acknowledged due to the narrow framing of what constitutes 'resistance,' is that when locally organised, it was justified by the community in terms of self-defence. Much as it was widely portrayed as part of the war, then between the government and the RPF (Kuperman, 2006), individual Hutu people who committed genocide resorted to traditional mobs engaged in hunting (*ibitero by'uruhigi*) (Mironko, 2006: 46, 52-54). This local response was seen as being part of the wider defence of the country and its Hutu population against the identified Tutsi enemy. Genocide perpetrators then perceived those resisting the violence as their opponents, hence resorting to hunting them down. In reverse, respondents who resisted saw the genocide perpetrators as the real troublemakers. They then resorted to the same violent means to deter their actions.

Respondents provided interesting stories on how when resisting genocide with violence they first resorted to bows and arrows, machetes, sticks, and, particularly in Bugarura, light weapons. The tactics then included several instances of slapping and punching people that respondents accused of or found committing genocide. In both sites, Bugarura and NUR, respondents saw the genocide violence as endangering their immediate and neighbouring communities, the spread of which they had to deter.

BA, an influential leader in the Bugarura community of people I interviewed, offers an illustrative story. Resisting genocide with violence was not because violence was good, but because resisters deemed it was the language genocide perpetrators then understood better, in an attempt to make them abandon their actions:

As of the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1994, killers suddenly ran from and in different directions, shouting terribly. They killed everybody who was not on their side (...) We counter-attacked with all kinds of weapons from around: knives, bows, arrows, spears, machetes, and, later on, grenades and guns. (...) We started by Kidaturwa, then surrounded Bitama and reached 'Cercle de Nyanza'. In all these places, we engaged in slapping, stoning, insulting, and punching the killers. We cared less their retaliations (...) My brother, then a soldier in President Habyarimana's army was on holiday, and remained here to teach us to use firearms we seized from killers (...) Defeated killers ran away, as we rescued Tutsi people who survived.

The violent resistance gradually changed, along with the magnitude of the mobs of perpetrators. Resisters, aware of the inferiority of their resources in relation to the then state-supported perpetrators of genocide, resorted to violence for defensive purposes only. IB, then an NUR student and on Easter holidays in Samuduha cell (now Muhanga District), provides an illustrative account. The instance of violent confrontation refers to what IB and his family members and neighbours carried out together to oppose the spread of genocide in Samuduha cell:

The grandparents and other senior people encouraged us, the young, not to let killers destroy our cell. We fought killers with stones, arrows, bows, spears and everything we could find (...) For two weeks, we managed to defeat hundreds of killers, who mainly came from other cells. Each time, they had to go back without killing any people. We never attacked them, but were determined not to let them enter and destroy our cell (...) Then they suddenly attacked in several mobs and with firearms, shouting and firing everywhere (...) We then resorted to our last effort to oppose them, before we withdrew to organise for other strategies.

In a similar vein, BC's account below highlights how the violent resistance became increasingly localised. Resisters did not expect to change the general course of the genocide, by then national in its reach, nor did they rely on higher authorities to secure their own safety. Instead, they resorted to their local capacities, such as family ties and gerontocracy, steered by critical thinking both individually and within the group. BC's account interestingly highlights group dynamics as important in maintaining violent resistance:

From April until when we fled the RPF's war in May – June 1994, there was no single day that passed without fighting killers. We could have also killed some of them, but we restrained from that, in order not to attract much attention from leaders and military staff from either Nyanza or Ruhango (...) When BA, BB and/or anyone else whistled, we had to run to defend the attacked person in order to dissuade killers from causing trouble. We could only rest in the night (...) Killers often refrained from attacking in the night, which helped us to reorganise the subsequent defence and hiding place of the targeted Tutsi people we were sheltering.

This material shows how resistance did take an overt violence form that used traditional weapons and was locally organised around defending the respondents' immediate community. In spite of these similarities, the genocidal violence differed fundamentally from the violent resistance against it. The key difference was that the violence by resisters did not focus on the murder of members of the targeted group. Violent resistance primarily aimed to deter participation in the genocide, and, subsequently, to save the lives of Tutsi citizens. BA and BB from Bugarura and NUR's IB convey that difference in the instances of violent resistance they carried out. Despite the anxiety, anger, and hatred they say they sometimes felt toward their fellow citizens then committing genocide, BB recounts how he threatened but refrained from killing them:

One of the killers warned me that I would be the first to kill the sheltered people once they found them in my house (...) I was a bit anxious. I then seized a sharp-edged machete, stood in the main entrance and threatened in turn to behead whoever entered and did not find the mentioned Tutsi people (...) Fortunately, none of the killers dared to enter. I would decapitate them (...) I had to avoid antagonising the killers to save my own family, but I would not have allowed them to kill my sheltered people.

In addition, rather than drawing on established state structures of authority to organise the violence, the violent resistance drew on other forms of social authority, such as gerontocracy. As discussed, NUR's IB emphasised the role of his grandmother, L, and other senior people in stirring zeal among girls and boys to stand up against the killers. As he further testifies, the respondent's grandmother encouraged him to violently push out a soldier and two boys, who, after defeating IB's group of resisters in Samuduha cell, passed by to mock them at home:

They kept on insulting my grandmother and me, and forced me to receive the food stuffs they had spoiled (...) I became so hateful of their actions, that is the reason why I punched one boy and threatened to beat the two other boys (...) I could not do more, in order not to give them the trigger to further mistreat or kill us.

These experiences of resistance convey an important finding. They extend Hannah Arendt's personalised focus on the ability of resisters of genocide to live with themselves to include community dynamics that enabled them to live with others. Respondents interestingly exercised critical thinking through violently resisting, yet the genocidal violence put their own lives at risk, and they had ascertained that they would not be able to prevent it in its entirety. Overt resistance still occurred when faced with the most extreme exercise of both sovereign and disciplinary power. A wider study of this type of active resistance could further deepen our understanding of this active participation of Rwandans, then constructed as Hutu, in the genocide, and would usefully be coupled with accounts of the non-violent forms of resistance discussed below, which also drew on respondents' active alternative responses to genocide.

### **Non-violent Resistance – Avoidance and Argumentation**

The interviews undertaken in this study highlight an interesting resort to non-violent means in order to resist genocide in Rwanda in 1994. This non-violent resistance was key to managing the imbalance of power relations between resistance as an exercise of both individual and collective/community agency vis-à-vis the oppressive genocidal violence. Active non-violent resistance included the interchange of tactics of avoidance and argumentation, both of which further demonstrate an exercise of critical thinking. In the next sub-sections, the discussion of non-violent resistance further teases out the relationship between individual and collective capacities to resist.

#### *Avoiding Genocide Perpetrators*

An interesting resort to avoidance emerged as a featured of resisting genocide in Rwanda in 1994. By 'avoidance', I refer to the actions by respondents' aimed at minimising contact with genocide perpetrators while actively undermining their actions of killings. The means of avoidance were instances of active actions, which, throughout April – July 1994, attempted to undermine, through dissimulation, genocide perpetrators' actions.

On the one hand, resisters' actions of avoidance included distracting, disorienting as well as shaming perpetrators in order for them to find it challenging to either kill the targeted Tutsi people or otherwise harm their fellow Hutu who opposed the violence. As they themselves make sense of the particular strategy, respondents also resorted to avoidance in order not to be drawn into committing genocide. On the one hand, respondents who were aware that genocide perpetrators who suspected their opposition to genocide were likely to murder them, and so they strategically sheltered Tutsi people, they also minimised contact with the killers. This double strategy operated through shifting hiding places, separating potential victims in order to decrease their probability of being killed, commissioning the shelter for victims, falsifying their identity to pass as Hutu and strategically destroying houses and surrounding gardens.

IA's account below shows how the seemingly ordinary actions of avoidance might have become part of a plausibly long list of civil actions displayed against an oppressive genocide. He refers to how he unusually stayed at home and often refrained from reacting to killers' actions:

What else could I do in the face of wicked killers who blocked all roads, closed the markets, dared to shut down church activities? I could no longer leave my home (...) I had to deal with up to four blockades in order to reach my office. I would otherwise end up finding myself in their messy killings (...) Most times when they reached me at home to question me why I had not joined them

making blockades, I just watched them and said nothing (...) I played ignorant in order to finally see them gone (...) They often provoked people to trap them into killings that they would not otherwise attend to. Have you not heard of people who just descended into killings like that?

NUR's IB also provides salient testimony on what collective actions of avoiding killers' actions looked like. After a week of direct confrontation, in which he joined his family members and neighbours against genocide perpetrators in Samuduha cell, now Muhanga District, they withdrew and shifted to avoidance. Among such new tactics, they employed Twa, members of another ethnic group in Rwanda, to spy on the killers' activities and bring food to Tutsi people who were then sheltered in the Kabgayi Catholic Church's compound:

We gave food, beer and money to Twa. They helped us in getting information from the killers' camp and transporting food to Tutsi that managed to reach Kabgayi (...) Killers got into the strategy of using the Twa as intermediaries, as the latter often got drunk and revealed their secrets (...) We then faked that we were fleeing the RPF towards Butare in order to reach the victims and provide them with food at Kabgayi. In returning, we invented several kinds of stories to tell the killers who cared less about our move, since by then the war was rampant and the killers were also in a hurry to check everything.

On the other hand, once caught by authorities and questioned about their refusal to conform to the then state-supported genocide, respondents would resort to active avoidance. This included verbally formulated lies on the identity of potential victims and projecting a false compliance with the genocide. Respondents from Bugarura cell recount, for instance, how they twice resorted to pretending to hunt, with traditional weapons in their hands, their neighbouring Tutsi and others who had sought refuge in the locality. They did that to disorient leaders and military personnel from Nyanza and Kigoma who had come to check on the information suggesting that the group members had created obstacles to killing Tutsi. To further distract the visitors, the citizens partly destroyed a Tutsi house that the Kigoma commune leader, U, then pointed at. In a similar fashion, NUR's ID, in Butare, also lied to the killers who had attacked the orphanage she was *de facto* running, in order to disorient and exhaust them, preventing them from discovering and killing two Tutsi girls from the Gikongoro prefecture who were sheltering there.

This active avoidance as a means of resisting contributes to the existing writings in both genocide and resistance studies. Here, I once again refer to the finding that respondents resisted, even though they had ascertained that they were not able to change the general course of the genocide. They relied on local loyalties and alternative authority structures to balance the effect of the then dominant power relations that were in favour of the oppressive genocide. More interestingly, genocide was constraining and risked resisters' own lives. For all the people interviewed in this study, it was a very clear, deliberate and brave choice that confirms how resistance can usefully be understood as an intentional rejection of demands to subordinate (Hollander & Einhowner, 2004; Vinthagen, 2015). These oppositional dimensions of resistance were clearly articulated.

Respondents regretted that they did not thoroughly deter perpetrators' actions. In many instances, the killers ended up discovering their tactics and killed the sheltered Tutsi people. However, this killing machine needed to first overcome both overt violent and active non-violent resistance, and it is important to acknowledge this. This research extends the ideas of James Scott (1990) around the use of 'hidden transcripts' as a means of resistance. Certainly, interviewed people resorted to non-violent means of resistance often in a clandestine fashion, as seen in much of this discussion of avoidance. However this was often coupled with more explicit violent and non-violent means of resistance. In addition, as much as those resisting genocide in Rwanda in 1994 engaged in rescuing potential victims (African Rights, 2002; Rosoux, 2007; Kayishema & Masabo, 2010; Sémelin, 2011: 145-157, 345-36, Palmer, 2014), resisting the pressure itself to comply with the order of committing violence was also of central importance and should not be neglected. The next sub-section, on argumentation, highlights the role of critical thinking in these active forms of resistance.

### *Argumentation as Resistance to Genocide*

The agency of non-violently resisting genocide in Rwanda in 1994 is highlighted through the instances of resisters using argumentation. Arguments that respondents formulated against genocide perpetrators while defending their resistance included, but were not limited to, de-legitimising violence as opposed to neighbourly friendships as a means to govern ordinary interactions among people. They are also indicative of the exercise of critical thinking as key to these alternative responses to a state-supported violence.



IA's account, for instance, is salient on pre-emptively persuading one's relatives not to participate in the then ongoing violence, through directing them towards critical engagement:

I quickly gathered my children and grandchildren and let them know that they needed to pay much attention to the then ongoing political events (...) The question I asked them was tricky enough to help them critically respond to the situation. I challenged them with this: 'Are you sure people will be able to exterminate all targeted Tutsi, to the extent that there will be no survivors?' I quickly proceeded with warnings that people then involved in those deeds of killings would be once held accountable (...) God willing, my children followed my instructions.

Argumentation as a strategy of resistance often intersected with one or both of the previously described strategies of resistance. Arguments of resisters against genocide accompanied both violence and avoidance. IA's testimony, below, is illustrative, for instance, as to how argumentation went hand in hand with avoidance and both were displayed in an active form:

I could not respond to all the killers' questions. Nonetheless, I sometimes broke the silence to challenge them on what they were doing (...) I liked asking them what sustainable outcomes they could expect from a violence destroying their neighbourhood and for which they had to be aware of severe accountability, be it in Rwanda or elsewhere. I did not delay to realise that what the killers were executing qualified for genocide, even with little knowledge of the international prosecution that would follow (...) I once asked one of them this: 'Frankly speaking, what can an aging man, whom I am, gain of such deeds of yours?' It was shocking to see them lacking a single answer to such basic issues, yet they had a particular zeal in what they did: killing and destruction of everything they pleased.

BE, from Bugarura, drew on her status as a woman to refuse the order to kill Tutsi children discovered in her house:

One of the killers handed me a machete and said: 'Start killing one of them.' I fearfully handed back the machete to him. Another dragged me and ordered me to kneel down, which I executed faithfully. He then passed me his machete and ordered me to kill one of the ladies as punishment because they had been hiding in our house (...) 'Frankly speaking', I said, to refuse their order, 'did you ever see a woman kill somebody? As a mother, I cannot attend to that order' (...) They burst out laughing, kept on insulting me. They, however, left us and the children remained in hiding and survived.

BB, also from Bugarura, provides a relevant account on how argumentation was combined with violence. He argued against genocide based on its opposition to humanity and friendships among people:

'Come on, small boys!' I asked them, 'Where did you meet with Tutsi people to enslave you, as you are now saying? Are not these your neighbours, that you share lots of your being human with?' I just kicked and dragged them down and took the two children to shelter them. Their parents, who I knew, were already killed (...) The other time I resorted to that is when I punched my neighbour E, whom I found mocking a young boy he had wounded and left in a neighbouring marsh. I asked him what he would feel in the place of the parents of the boy, and his own children in lieu of the wounded child (...) Those are questions they strikingly failed to respond to.

Much like avoidance, these types of argumentation show how critical thinking was core to the non-violent resistance to the genocide. More importantly, overall, this typology of violence, avoidance and argumentation shows the complexity of resistance to the 1994 genocide. Strategies were interchanged in accordance with the calculations of resisters to exhaust all possible means to challenge the actions of the genocide perpetrators. Respondents moved from violence to avoidance or vice versa, and these strategies were often accompanied or preceded by the use of argumentation to denounce and discourage involvement in the genocide. These accounts highlight a plausibly wider set of available agencies for ordinary people to act during the extraordinary times that characterise genocide, and ask us to further explore the motivations of their resistance.

### **Motivations for Resisting Genocide**

While critical thinking featured explicitly in respondents' explanations of why they resisted genocide in

Rwanda in 1994, the motivations discussed in this section show how a complex set of identities was tied up in each individual's choice to resist. These accounts show how people's sense making of their critical response to the genocide help to develop alternative identification(s) to which respondents now resort, while further highlighting the critical thinking that was required to resist genocide.

### *Faith-based Motivations*

Among the study respondents, religious beliefs provided a ground for resisting genocide in Rwanda in 1994. In their accounts of why they resisted, and, particularly why they rescued potential victims, respondents commonly argued that they had been acting on the basis of Christianity. This was evident across Catholic and Protestant Church members, however, subtle difference in their accounts also show some of the current and historic divisions among these church communities. Bugarura's BB's assertion provides a useful encapsulation of this motivation, in which religious belief differentiates those who resisted from those who didn't:

What do you think God will condemn and reward people for? The Bible shows it clearly, that it is part of our nature as human beings and born-again Christians to overcome evil by doing good (...) For Christians, at least, there is no circumstance during which killing is allowed.

These faith-based motivations were often explicitly linked to other motivations. NUR's ID and IC associated Christian values and their resistance to universal notions of 'justice' and 'solidarity' towards people in danger and/or sorrow. NUR's IA further linked Christian faith to his critical personality. These linkages among several motivations to resist are evident in his account:

In 1963, I disobeyed the then head of state and fellow ministers who wanted to engage me in things of killings, in Bugesera, Gikongoro. I was worried that secret forces would pursue and kill me (...) I did the same in 1994, otherwise I could not have supported being me; I would have been acting as somebody else. The Virgin always supports my personal choice and my capacity to reject things that require me not to use my critical thinking.

These wide claims to faith-based resistance are striking, given that the same Christian dominance contributed to instrumentalising religion in order to stir up genocide. The famous 'Ten Commandments of Hutu,' which Kangura issued in December 1990, and were crucial in enabling large participation in the genocide (Chrétien, 1995), drew parallels with God's Ten Commandments in the Bible.

Such a clear tension shows some of the complexities in the formation of Christianity as an alternative identity that enabled resistance. Some respondents argued, for instance, that they resisted the pressure of committing violence while seeking to conform to God's election of them as Christians. BD's testimony is salient because of how she asserts, for instance, that her active efforts to rescue targeted people complied with the biblical commandment of 'Love your neighbour as yourself and do to them as you would have them do to you.' She further asserts as follows, when asked if she was ever concerned about being forced to kill: "I would rather die than kill my neighbour (...) Genocide was, for us Christians, a temptation (...) There is no born-again that would afford doing such horror of killing."

These narratives are, to some extent, underpinned by the real opposition between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches in Rwanda. Members of one denomination draw on this socio-political crisis to establish themselves as being on the side of the victim, while downgrading the other side. This was more strongly foregrounded by respondents of Protestant churches, who argued in terms of the complex identity of being 'born-again.' BB and BD's accounts portray them and their actions as if they sought to form a separate Protestant community in line with Reto Gmünder's perspective on God's election of them entailing scarifying one's interests to deserve eschatological appreciation (Gmünder, 2006: 123-124). In offering this perspective, respondents interestingly construct new subject positions. They argue that they resisted as part of both their desire and God's expectation for them to meet a distinctive criterion of being real 'children of God' and not 'fake ones.' BE, also from Bugarura, argues as follows, that she resisted simply because killing neighbours could not be part of her identity as a Christian: "I wonder what would have been my life and that of family members (...) Don't you know that the Bible even prohibits harming anybody in retaliation?"

Through bringing in these new identity-based hierarchies of people in accordance with how they responded critically to the genocide, and reading them in the light of their involvement in active violence and

non-violent resistance, these understandings of resistance lead us to an exploration of a much more power-loaded perspective of resistance. The language of these actions shows the use of key terms such as ‘kutemera’ (to not accept), ‘kudashaka’ (to not want), ‘kwanga’ (to refuse), ‘gutsimbarara’ (to stand for one’s position or to not change one’s argument or to defend one’s understanding). These terms are embedded in respondents’ faith-based recounts and the religious identity perspective they illuminate. Resistance emerges as an active means of exerting alternative forms of hierarchy and power, rather than simply reacting to the exercise of overt sovereign or disciplinary power. Religious identity was an alternative formation that allowed an exercise of power but also moved individuals beyond victim/perpetrator binaries.

The next and last analytical sub-section focuses on how socio-professional backgrounds contributed to enabling a different type of identity formation that underpinned the choice to resist, and further complicates our understanding of resisting genocide as it emerges from critical thinking and ideas around communities and self-defence.

### *Social and Professional Values*

Social and professional backgrounds are the final motivation that the resisters in this study put forward as to why they resisted genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The participants in the two study sites of Bugarura and NUR had very different backgrounds, referred to herein, as factors shaping their life conditions, and this led to differences in how these conditions shaped and motivated their resistance.

On the one hand, the Bugarura people put forward, as a reason for resistance, a long life of poverty and hard work alongside Tutsi neighbours, whose friendships they envisioned keeping. BD’s recount below emphasises friendships as key to enabling resistance to the genocide in 1994: “Helping others has been and is always in our habits (...) We provided little assistance to Tutsi people, compared to what was present in our secular friendships.” Likewise, BC from Bugarura argued as follows:

Talking about those hard moments of our war against the killers reminds me of the true love we showed to our fellow Tutsi, with whom we had been living in harmony (...) Due to harsh life conditions, as an orphan and poor single man, I employed my then acquired self-reflection and self-reliance, to decide what I could do. I could not join killers who made people that I had grown up with experience pain and suffering.

On the other hand, respondents from NUR emphasised a school-based critical thinking. This appears through statements such as IA’s argument of the Socratic Oath, which the respondent, a medical professional and lecturer in 1994, had decided obligated him to avoid damaging human life. I asked IA why other NUR medical students and teachers did engage in killing their patients. He interestingly argued as follows: “Did you ever check if, first, they loved NUR? (...) I also wonder how come somebody identifying with a noble institution like that one, NUR, I mean, would betray all of that investment into such messy things of killings.”

IB, an NUR student in 1994, also gives a relevant account about how intellectual critical thinking was key to catalyse his capacity to resist. He does that through reporting the political analysis he made of the context of genocide and war between the then government and the RPF:

Until killings started, we were waiting to see those people who would dare to attack and kill their long-time neighbours (...) I personally never believed that violence could resolve any problems, as politicians vehemently preached (...) For citizens of Gitarama prefecture, at least, we had been suffering from discrimination. Reputed to be pro-MDR and against the MRND-CDR of President Habyarimana, we had less to gain from joining the extermination of Tutsi, violence which was planned by and for the political elites of the northern Rwanda, ‘Bakiga’ in order to maintain their political power.

Respondents’ accounts once again highlight resistance to genocide as requiring a high degree of critical thinking, but this operated in conjunction with a range of other complicated personal and collective dynamics. Both resisting the pressure of committing genocide and rescuing potential victims was enacted with thanks to individual capacities of alternative thinking and community dynamics. For active resistance in the particular context of genocide to take place, resisters self-created a community of actors and actions, which they then

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actively defended while resisting genocide.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study set out to explore how and why resistance was carried out in the context of highly oppressive genocidal violence. Drawing from the case of Rwanda in 1994, semi-structured interviews highlight resistance as one of the multiple responses to the call to commit violence, a response often neglected in writings on genocide. The paper explores resistance through the use of physical violence, argumentation and avoidance, as both individual and communal actions. Key to understanding this typology is the recognition that actors moved from violent resistance to avoidance or vice versa, and these strategies were often accompanied or preceded by the use of argumentation to denounce and discourage involvement in the violence. These three emergent strategies of resistance overlapped and were used interchangeably. This interchange demonstrates how resistance was enabled through the capacity of exercising individual critical thinking, as Hannah Arendt suggests, but was also supported by key community dynamics.

Both the violent and non-violent resistance recognised the imbalance of power relations between resistance, as both individual and the collective/community's agency, vis-à-vis the then highly oppressive genocidal violence in 1994. Faced with the power of the genocidal state, respondents, who occasionally resorted to violent means to express their critical thinking, drew on other forms of social authority, such as gerontocracy and family ties, in order to sustain their resistance as an alternative self-defence response to genocide.

What is strikingly important is that those resisting had ascertained that they would change few of the larger outcomes of genocide but fostered alternative identity formations, to which respondents now ascribe their experiences of resistance in 1994, to further make sense of their self image vis-à-vis the killers and those they endeavoured to rescue. The faith-based and socio-professional motivations discussed in this paper constitute a departure point to expanding knowledge on the 1994 violence beyond the binary of either being a 'victim' or 'perpetrator.' In doing so, the active and complex choices from which they drew resistance enhance our knowledge of the 1994 Rwanda's genocide itself.

In addition, the present study adds to existing writings that explored resistance to post-genocide policies, be they agricultural and settlement reforms (Hahirwa, 2014), or justice and reconciliation (Thomson, 2011; Eramian, 2009; Straus & Waldorf, ed., 2011; Clark, 2014; Palmer, 2014), in order to contribute an understanding of the response of ordinary people to state-supported practices they judge as unwise and/or constraining. It suggests that these actions are often deliberate, multifaceted and enabled through alternative identify formations. Further study is warranted to examine the stories of people who resisted and were killed, and to examine how the identity formation displayed in respondents' stories has structured how people now think of their actions in terms of the ongoing politics of memory and reconstruction.

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