International Journal of Social Impact
ISSN: 2455-670X
Volume 10, Issue 3, DIP: 18.02.082/20251003
DOI: 10.25215/2455/1003082
www.ijsi.in |July - September, 2025

Research Paper

Lethal Neighbourhoods: Discourse of the Rwandan Genocide

Gaurangi Sehgal[1]

ABSTRACT

Violence consumes all, beyond space and time. Perpetrators of violence function as agents of chaos and destruction. But who is a perpetrator? Is it a child soldier with a gun? An Air Force officer who drops the bomb? Or a group of civilians who kill their neighbours? A deterministic view of a perpetrator is almost impossible in the field of anthropology. However, the reasons behind one's actions and how they arrive at that point in time are a few elements that have been explored in the subject. My interest in the anthropology of violence arises from my political observations. In times of uncertainty the political frameworks of a society guide everyday lives. Where an individual seeks from their society and their society, in turn, seeks from the individual, the homogenisation of the two agents results in somewhat of a grey area between order and chaos. When the state interferes with the moral conduct of these two spheres of every day, balance is compromised and is gradually led towards structural chaos. Retrospectively, on the 30-year anniversary of the genocide in 2024, this essay aims to critically analyse the relationship between political violence and its agents in 1994 Rwanda. Violence, agency, and identity are three central components of this study. Through these mediums, I attempt to uncover experiences that determine the nature of violence and why might people involve themselves in its perpetuation.

Keywords: *Violence, Rwanda, Agency, Identity, Political, Genocide, Killing, Social, Anthropology, State*

Yesterday's victims can be called survivors, and these survivors can sometimes become today's victimizers. The transformational journey between the two poles involves massive change. Persecution, a violent environment, active conscription, poverty, disturbed social order, and personal vendettas account for influences that may convince affected individuals to join groups that display the ability to deal with these issues in any fashion, which often turns into a brutal retaliation. The land of a thousand hills or Rwanda has been no stranger to this predicament, as times turn, lakes that fill themselves with fresh water can turn into a cesspool of blood. The rain of violence does not happen overnight; the clouds take years of socio-political effort fuelled by an atmosphere of hate and poverty to form gradually. Some get stained by the dirt of hate and others drown in it. Hence, the transition from victimhood to perpetration and vice versa begins.

Like a phoenix who burns to ashes only to be reborn stronger, victims of the past undergo a 'second individuation' (Volkan 1998) which in the context of this essay will be considered as civilians turning into a group involved in mass atrocities. The horrors of victimhood are

[1]MSc Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh

Received: September 04, 2025; Revision Received: September 15, 2025; Accepted: September 20, 2025

conversely reflected in this newfound personhood that flows in theatres of violent hope manufactured by colours of political violence in the region. The grey space between a victim and a perpetrator is defined by ambiguities pertaining to psychological, social, and political structures that influence decision-making for many. According to Schmidt and Schroder (2001), violence rarely occurs as a lone act and frequently follows a variety of social, political, and cultural trajectories. Inherently, processes that have this political form of violence at their core, such as massacres, genocide, persecution, terrorism, and religious/tribal disputes form a coherent range of destruction, which is why they can be used interchangeably within the terminology of war or violence. Landscapes of violence carve themselves in a fashion where they permeate and blend in their surroundings, whether it be as part of kinship ties, remnants of colonialism, or the mere act of existing. This article focuses more on the holistic interaction of propaganda with the individual and therefore explores a multi-angled perspective of incidents undergoing in 1994 Rwanda. Moreover, the essay purposely fails to draw enough focus on the predicament faced by women because the length of this document does not and cannot do justice to the suffering and memory of those who lost their lives to the violence, rapes, and assault; and those who continue to live with the trauma. However, given the centrality of gendered violence, there are sections that cover only a small proportion of actual reality.

Home is a safe space; it is even better when you know someone is waiting for you to come back. However, it turns into a haunted house when the smell of violence lingers, and you realise the person waiting for you holds a dagger in their hands. What adds to this tale of horror is that you are not the only household in this grim situation, hundreds of thousands of others find themselves in the same bog. The lines above may sound like a trailer launch for a sci-fi Hollywood thriller, but they are not. This was the reality of Rwanda during the genocide in 1994 as Mamdani's (2001) records claim and his account is one of the base literatures for this essay.

A question I have been often asked about taking up this subject is that there is so much happening in the world right now, why does the Rwandan genocide still matter? Here is my answer. The reason why the essay till now is prominently metaphorical is because on the tragedy's 30th anniversary, it may seem like a distant, lost-in-time crisis. However, there is still a major portion of the global population living in various post-colonial states, under similar threats to their identity and agency based on beliefs, looks, and faith among others. So, if you really think about it, what we have referred to Rwanda till now, could be any other nation suffering from a similar cacophony of fascist propagandas. Even so, the Rwandan administration is still a long way from finding a nation without hints of atrocities. The illusion of freedom occupies a segment of our lives where we convince ourselves that this is not the persistent scent of violence that subtly marks itself in our surroundings. The truth from the perspective of an individual dwelling in one of these regions is that there is not enough freedom to talk about the current; there is fear, a fear of getting identified by the state or the people who disagree with our kind. The Rwandan genocide is an allegory to today; it is a history that we fail to learn from. It is a history that is repeating itself in very similar, gruesome ways.

Growing up, I was privileged enough to not be exposed to first-hand experience of conflict. However, the politics of my country evaded function and moulded itself into a pedestal of power in the name of democracy, which became vibrant as I came of age. India hides its violence primarily through its people. When I came to Delhi, its life hid the foundations of anarchy that were cast by the majoritarian, ethnically divisive government. During the riots of

2020 in Delhi, I was an active participant in the movement against restrictive state policies. Every week, there was news about violent breakouts that targeted minority groups in the capital. Guns were being fired openly, and no vigilantes were arrested if they belonged to the Hindu-majority. A lot of university students were taken into custody, but they were not the culprits. However, the students and politicians who used arms and made hate speeches (respectively) were roaming free.

What caught me by surprise was that many people I knew supported the rioters and their harmful methods only because of their ethnic affiliation. This made me wonder, how different does life have to be to be a goon during a riot, and even more so to be a supporter? Who allocates the agency that legitimises the thought convincing enough to violate someone's basic human rights- their freedom to practise their religion, to live? Politics of the state that shapes ones understanding of human nature, mere sociality, is often to blame. This one of many observations has directed me to pursue the study of Rwandan genocide where perpetrators were not aliens from far beyond, but people you greet every day and share comfortable spaces with. It is important to know where the line between supporting such ideas end and the actual conflict begins. Therefore, I aim to explore this ambiguous limbo of transitioning individualities and anthropologically investigate how killers are so intrinsically manufactured using socio-political affirmations that affect their agency and identity.

METHODOLOGY

This article has its foundations laying in the empirical research carried out by various social scientists in fields of anthropology, history, sociology and political science. It follows the path of before, during, and, after of Rwandan ethnicities impacted heavily by the massacres in 1994. It gives a historical overview of the circumstances leading to the genocide and the way in which the state interfered with people's collective consciousness while emphasising on individual agency. The essay reviews the perspective of people who were involved in the implementation of widespread violence and the manner in which their actions were affected. The divisions in the structuring are made to explore different aspects of the same incident, acting as a kaleidoscope for combining the central idea of external influence on one's personality in realms of glorified violence. However, it is important to know that the article in no way aims to justify or condone the suffering and grief of individuals/ groups who found themselves in the middle of the conflict in 1994 and still continue to struggle for survival in the region. It also involves a brief analysis of the Wa state of Myanmar comparing the cases on forced and voluntary participation in theatres of brutality. The focus being on the anthropology of violence, this article deems important the socio-political factors motivating individuals and groups alike, thus questioning the notions of ambiguous identities and the possible lack of proliferating agency.

DISCUSSION

Historical Overview

"In Germany, the Jews were taken out of their residences, moved to distant far away locations, and killed there, almost anonymously. In Rwanda, the government did not kill. It prepared the population, enraged it and enticed it. Your neighbours killed you." -Mahmood Mamdani (2001:6)

Reiterating from the introduction, home is a place where everyone is off-guard and vulnerable, you share those spaces with people you trust and admire. The nearest lane to your home is one of the most familiar places one can imagine, however, where does one go when the people who surround your home become hostile, blinded by a bacchanalian frenzy aimed

at brutal death? Where does this venom of hate come from? The Rwandan genocide suggests a larger game of politics that destroyed the lives of thousands with an all-encompassing fire of hatred, fear within its population, and ultimately, barbarity.

The chaos of bloodshed in Rwanda between 7 April and 15 July 1994 was neither accidental nor a recognised terrorist group's doing, it was a systematically designed political machine intricately developed for the purpose of ethnic cleansing. How does a state authority fail to control its citizens for more than 100 days? Unless it is in the administration's interest to achieve a demographic collapse almost 'organically'. Less-violent clashes between the two main ethnicities of Hutus and Tutsis lasted for a while until the Hutu-leaning president Habyarimana's plane was shot down and the government conveniently blamed Tutsi rebels of RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) to provoke Hutus with the assistance of armed militia towards one of the world's worst genocides (Hintjens 1999). While it is important to explore the subject ethnographically, one cannot ignore the vast assimilation of historical events that led to the state's collapse. These politically motivated mechanisms of genocide lay well along a timeline which should be apprehended before we move on to the ontology of violence in the region.

In an effort to counter the RPF, the state formed its own youth militia called the *Interahamwe.* This was the state-sponsored military group that began training in arms and weapons for the very purpose of ethnic cleansing. It is important to know that initially, with an active RPF, there were clashes between the two communities. It was after Habyarimana's death that the scale of communal violence was largely expanded which also turned previous casualties of conflict into perpetrators. Between ten and fifty thousand Hutus and between five hundred thousand and one million Tutsis are believed to have been massacred (Mamdani 2001). However, placing the entire blame on ingrained tribal animosity not only absolves the funders and the major powers, but it also misrepresents a very complicated process of political, social, and economic collapse that affects a state with a population of over 7 million.

Further affecting the economically fragile state, the IMF declared a second devaluation in 1992, which resulted in higher fuel and consumer costs. Coffee production plummeted by 25% in a year, and the peasants returned to food crops. The coffee economy crisis had an influence on traditional food staples, resulting in decreased production of grains; Rwanda was primarily an agrarian state at this time. Trade liberalisation and deregulation of grain markets resulted in substantially subsidised cheap food imports and help from wealthier countries entering Rwanda, destabilising domestic markets. This resulted in the breakdown of the agricultural system, state administrative infrastructure, and widespread instability. The long-standing impact of colonialism, as well as the vulnerability of Rwanda's economy to global market pressures, contributed to the disintegration of state-society ties (Chossudovsky 2022). This economic instability only worsened during the conflict with many donors cancelling aid based on government failure to meet demands including but not limited to coffee price guarantees (Ruranga, Ocaya, and Kaberuka 2014).

Politics of identity and influence of colonialism

Evidently, the state was an accomplice and played a pivotal role in the massacres. It had complete control over the media, news, police, publications, and citizens. It is not that they specifically always targeted individuals, they did not have the technology to do so, instead, they appealed to and attacked the collective identity of the community (Gourevitch 1999). As the Hutus and Tutsis went through an identity transformation parallel to changing authorities,

it became the foundation of forthcoming killings. One might argue as to what this says about the agency of the killer, morality, or other humane aspects. The confluence of geopolitical objectives and geographical parameters frequently established identities (Schomerus 2023), especially during the 1994 Rwanda. The agency of the state becomes one with its people once it is successful in outlining its agenda of fear among the majority population that they are indeed not a majority, and the minority poses a threat to the legitimacy of the power they hold (Müller-Crepon 2022). Hence, earlier identified as distinct 'races', the two communities were under a political regime that believed in forging identities to suit its purpose.

Mamdani (2001) identifies three major phases in the history of Hutu and Tutsi identities in Rwanda. In the fifteenth century, Hutu was a political construct that included oppressed communities, whilst Tutsi was largely an ethnic identity. As a result of some members of oppressed communities being ennobled through marriages with the ruling class, Tutsi underwent a transethnic identity transition in the second phase. Hutu continued to be a subject identity for individuals who were politically inferior throughout this time. When Hutu and Tutsi identities were racialized during the colonial era, the third step took place. Hutu was promoted as an indigenous identity of oppressed subjects, whilst Tutsi was portrayed as a nonindigenous identity linked to subordinate authority. The power dynamics between the two groups were made more volatile by the addition of race, cementing the differences between them (Straus 2013). Critically, colonialism has often given birth to conflicts on distinct grounds of ethnicity, race, and gender. All colonial empires exhibited certain shared characteristics, including their multi-ethnic composition, asymmetrical power structures, and harsh governance. These empires were under the control of authoritative figures who often connected them through shared (racial) ideologies. These factors were also reinforced by streaks of violence which were intrinsic to both formation and dissolution of colonial powers (Dwyer and Nettelbeck 2017). With violence integrated in society, colonialism left a trail of conflict primarily centred on individual and collective identity which were consistently metamorphosed based on political discourses.

These morphing identities and hierarchies of power were fundamental to Rwanda's history and had long-lasting effects. Racialization throughout the colonial era paved the way for later tensions and conflicts, which culminated in the horrific Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Historical origins of ethnic divisions and battles that have shaped Rwanda's trajectory require an understanding of the intricate evolution of Hutu and Tutsi identities. The colonial power as a directive of law distinguished between a political majority and its counterpart, the minority. The aim was to 'civilise' the society under western law. In doing so, it vastly created demographics based on not only ethnicities but also race. This modern law identified citizenship based on nativity which it considered to be individuals to were residing in the state at the time of its colonialisation. Hence, with the bifurcation of the native and the settler that continued in post-colonial Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi found themselves classed within these manufactured identities in a respective manner where Hutu was seen as native and Tutsi as an alien (Mamdani 2001).

Nearly half a million Tutsis left Rwanda in the 30 years after its independence, with more than 80,000 of them taking sanctuary in Uganda. Due to the dispersed Tutsi Diaspora, communities emerged, many of them were former soldiers who founded militant organizations in an attempt to re-establish their ethnic identity in Rwanda through invasion. France had backed the Rwandan government after independence, and this relationship was further cemented in 1975 when the Franco-Rwandan military agreement of cooperation was signed in Paris (White 2016).

The Rwandan Patriotic Front's soldiers invaded Rwanda from southern Uganda in October 1990. With the help of its French associates the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government repulsed this onslaught. Both the Pentagon's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) had a significant influence over Ugandan political and military movements and are consequently credited by many African experts as knowing about, approving, and actively supporting the order for the October 1990 RPF invasion (Cameron 2013). The invasion marked a turning point in history as it paved way for an onslaught of anti-Tutsi violence that was inactive for over a decade. It was only after 1994 that this wave of massacres had come to a halt (Caplan 1997).

Anthropology deems important one's subjective experience to analyse prevalent social, political, and economic groundings (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). Sontag (2004) refers to the privilege that this subjective experience highlights. In a globalised world, spectators of violence in rich nations (many of which are responsible for colonialism) have the choice to distance themselves from the realities of war. She claims that the viewership for the events of war, witnessing from a safe distance assumes the luxury of having to discuss whether it is reality or mere fiction. The reason why Sontag is important to the discussion of colonialism is because to cause the radicalisation leading to grave events of violence and then to contest these notions as independent from the coloniser lies at the core foundation of Rwanda as a post-colonial state.

Source and subject of brutality

We have a background about how the process of identity development was intervened by authoritarian forces, however, it still does not answer why almost '80%' of members (Mamdani 2001:266) of an ethnic group would willingly massacre so many people irrespective of their age and gender.

Calls for severing ties with Tutsis were made on national radio especially on RTLM (*Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*) a private radio station that was responsible for spewing sophisticated hate against the Tutsi among large audience, along with public hate speeches which termed them as 'cockroaches', against the entire community. The breakdown of the normally operating inhibitions against killing other humans is essential to the accomplishment of any potential genocide. To overcome moral inhibitions, it is crucial to cast genocide as a self-defence measure against an outside force that poses a serious existential threat to the nation. As a result, a key aspect of the propaganda effort centres on the outgroup's threat and the need for a defence mechanism (Mayersen 2014).

Modes of art that are used as mediums of resistance often contain identity defining elements for young individuals who are then coerced or falsely motivated into becoming sacrificial lambs for a greater political agenda. Speeches, poetry, chants, songs, and flyers are just a few of the many acts during the rally that draw from a vast and intricate library of historical, religious, and regional cultural allusions to relate to actual events and political processes (Gupta and Mundra 2005). The performances integrate grim experiences of individuals within the context of historical events, geographical landscapes, and religious beliefs which ties identity with resistance, for example, emphasising on nativity of the Hutu to the land of Rwanda. These cultural concepts manifest themselves through the physical acts of engaging in violent forms of resistance, sacrifice, and martyrdom, pertaining to a nation that holds greater significance than individual self-interest. Thus, these notions are then presented as objective truths (Abufarha 2009). When such jingoist emotions are evoked, individuals feel

obliged to answer these calls in order to reflect on their duty to this otherwise troubled nation.

Psychological plays, appeal to collective identity, political shifts; in this case created a second conflated version of social being for the community members who decided to participate as killers, the flow of this framework, thus, created a criminal population. Part of which did not refrain from murdering in places of worship, or homes of their friends. In the Holocaust, Jews were at least separated from their space and taken afar, in the Cambodian genocide during the Khmer Rouge, there were mass graves, but in Rwanda, there were dead bodies lining up on the road. No efforts were made to respect the dead, let alone their culture (Mamdani, 2001). Such heinous crimes do not happen in a day; it takes years and a population angry enough to do so.

War as a social institution (MacMillan 2020), confines political autonomies that are manufactured on the foundations of conflict and trauma. Arendt (1970) describes this in the context of conflict characterised by the use of force, where the government has consistently demonstrated unequivocal dominance. However, this dominance is contingent upon the preservation of the government's power structure, which relies on obedience to commands and readiness of the armed forces or law enforcement agencies to employ its weaponry. Once the current condition ceases to exist, the circumstances undergo a sudden transformation which bears strong resemblance to Volkan's (1998) concept of a second individuation. Not only is the suppression of the insurrection unsuccessful, but the possession of the weapons undergoes a transfer of ownership. In situations where commands cease to be followed, the efficacy of employing violent means becomes futile which is when the following acts of struggle for power are termed horrific and terrorising in nature. In Rwanda, this transfer of agency from the state to civilians was fuelled by the fall of economy and an exponential increase in propaganda Commands were being followed, not of the administrative government but of the political state.

Appadurai (1998) writes intrinsically about the role of identity and body in the lives of actors in conflict-ridden areas. While citing Malkki (1995), he suggests that the transformation of individual bodies into representations of their assigned ethnic category occurs through the utilisation of violent means. Necrographic maps of physical distinctions by Tutsi killers to identify Hutu individuals makes it evident that this process is characterised by inherent instability and uncertainty. This is apparent not only in the survivors' perception of the uncertainty faced by their assailants but also in the necessity to employ multiple physical tests for identification purposes. Malkki presents an audacious analysis of the distinct methods employed to perpetrate violence against Hutu men and women throughout the described events. These methods frequently involved the utilisation of pointed bamboo sticks, targeting the regions including the vagina, anus, and head. Additionally, instances were documented where pregnant women had their foetuses extracted whole, afterwards being coerced into consuming the extracted foetus. The author believes that the aforementioned practices, which are depicted on the Hutu ethnic body, appear to have been carried out using specific symbolic patterns of extreme cruelty. The body thus becomes both a target and a source of brutality.

The account mentioned here states the Tutsi as a killer, but other statements and the majority of statistics ('Leave None to Tell the Story', 1999; 'Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations', n.d.) direct us towards the Hutu as a majority perpetrator. The reason why I chose to focus on this instance is to reiterate the overlapping of ethnic identities at play. Thus, furthering the idea of blurring of personhood between victims and

killers. In most locations where mass crimes are committed, genocidaires coexist physically alongside their victims. In this tainted universe, they exist and develop. They talk about bodies, which continue to contaminate the earth and the water, eventually making their way into the food supply. And if killing is ultimately quite simple for these individuals, it is harder to live with the constant presence of human remains (Rechtman 2021). It turns into the daily fare of their banter, their jokes, their annoyances, and their fatigue. Thus, a collection of these extra-ordinaries when combined form new ordinaries every day. 'Everyday' is eventful. With reference to violent landscapes, normalcy does not always mean mundane. Violence gets intertwined in the ordinary (Das 2006). Fear often bases itself off the unknown, the unpredictable. However, in places where most tangible surrounding holds symbolic legacies of violence, factor of the unknown is reduced, and future becomes uncertain yet predictable. This foreseeable future determines the everyday, people sustain their lives in the middle of consecutive violent events. Moreover, the culture that interweaves this co-existence, resulting in mass murders is ultimately born out of, and ends with, the human body as the fundamental source of this violation (Taylor 1999).

Furthermore, children's perspective of the new normal in 1994 draws a stark contrast to what the actual abnormal was. The horror of butchering was witnessed where entire family lineages were destroyed by the means of total control over the victim's bodies. Mothers were raped in front of their children and stabbed, fathers were castrated and murdered, and teenage girls were raped as the family watched helplessly (Dumas 2024). The theatrical nature of violence inflicted on human body in this context extends beyond mere mentions of biopower and necropolitics, it is manifested within frenzied killers in a violent atmosphere who know that there are no repercussions and that it is 'allowed' or in fact applauded to kill in fancy, cruel ways. Nonetheless, the necropolitical scenario in 1994 Rwanda was one of the central reasons why 'normal' people were converted to assassins, rapists, and even butchers. In such scenarios. The case of women in Rwanda somewhat aligns with this description as it is often assumed that women were only victims and while this might be true it is also known that Rwandan women participated in the events as deviants too.

Role of women

To expand its personnel, both parties heavily recruited a part of the younger population which was evidently either unemployed or displaced due to the ongoing civil war and while the state recruited youth, women participated in the genocide too. However, their role involved a triangular conjunction of being either a perpetrator or a rescuer or a victim or all at once. As an accomplice to atrocity, they were involved in giving out information locating the target community. They were also seen waiting for other women to cross the river with their children and would throw the children into the river to drown. Many women and children were awaiting trial in 2002 for genocide whereas many were left unpunished. Additionally, these ladies and children assisted in the murder of those who were already injured by breaking into churches, schools, football stadiums, and hospitals- murdering women and children. Some even killed their own kin (Fielding 2014). However, incidents of sexual assault, rape, and brutal killings of women far surpass the capacity in which they participated as perpetrators. Post-genocide Rwandan state failed to recognise this impact where the children born out of rape were not only a reminder of the trauma but also a matter of shame for their extended families to frown upon (Loning 2023).

Dumas (2024) accounts the recollection of children's experience of the genocide where individual narratives often seem to mention the absence of a familiarity within Hutu female neighbours. They were seen denying asylum or even water to children of people they knew

and previously had social interactions with. Noting one of many such incidents Dumas writes about a time when an eleven-year-old girl went to her neighbour to ask for water after witnessing horrific acts of violence against her family, and the woman refused to give her a cup. After drinking out of a banana tree leaf, the child was taken to the place where her mother's dead body lay. This one incident reflects upon the larger gore spectacle of blooded chaos coming out of Rwanda. When it comes to the transition of this secluded hatred into that of a collective nature, what was one of the most important factors behind female participation in the genocide?

Rwanda is and was a patriarchal society (Taylor 1999; Fielding 2014; Zraly, Rubin, and Mukamana 2013) where fear became intrinsically woven into the social fabric of a socio-politically upheaved atmosphere especially for women. Consequently, female indulgence in violence during the Rwandan genocide both contradicted and reinforced these patriarchal standards. Men were considered head of households and often subjugated females in their houses as inferior to them. For many women it was almost impossible to go against the decree of the head (a male kin). The fear was instilled not only from the family; it was gradually built up through an amalgamation of multiple networks such as the involvement of media propaganda that often-suggested Tutsi women will take over Hutu men or that when the *Interahamwe* arrives they should report Tutsi women in hiding to save themselves from the harassment (Reva N. Adler, Loyle, and Globerman 2007). Nonetheless, there was enough passive participation in the incidents of looting, cheering killers or exposing victims that exceeded the presence of fear thus representing terror if seen from a bird's eye perspective (Brown 2014).

Moreover, when it comes to identifying kinship ties between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, it was not as uncommon in the early 1990s but there was a clear classification as to what kind of familial ties were 'better' than the others. For instance, a Hutu man marrying a Tutsi woman to then bear Hutu children was placed at a higher point in the social hierarchy than a Hutu woman marrying a Tutsi man which was scorned upon. Inter-community conjugal relationships in a genocidal atmosphere were everything away from love, people were witnessed killing their own partners based on their cultural identity (Taylor 1999). The role played by women in the genocide cannot be seen from a singular lens, it is a phenomenon that substantially contradicts various scholarly findings of females being naturally prone of motherly sensations or pacifism. Over 3000 women were facing persecution under international criminal law for crimes against humanity in 1999 (Reva N. Adler, Loyle, and Globerman 2007). Ultimately, terror is both a subject and an object of the human body, regardless of how direct it might be.

Subjective experience, kinship, and its implications

Sahlins (2011) notes that kinship refers to individuals who are mutually constitutive of one another and who actively contribute to one another's existence. The dichotomy of biological and social often gets merged while explaining kinship. Kinship is not a closed system for everyone; rather, it is an open-ended collection of prospects and restrictions (Barnard and Spencer 2010). Within these structures, the state is inevitably involved not only in the body, but also the way in which people interact with one another. Kinship and state collectively form social organisation (Tatjana and Erdmute 2017). The latter plays a central role in creating difficult memories. Conflict and persecution largely affect one's memories and thereby, generate multidimensional identities that contribute to state endorsed elements of social life. Similarly, violence and residence ship are linked by the influence of state politics which evidently creates a domino effect in conditioning kinship dynamics. Therefore, it is

important to note that kinship assists in dealing with difficult circumstances beyond these disruptions and at the same time contradicts its purpose and adds to the misery.

It has been important so far to know the history and the structure which was followed by genocidaires in Rwanda in order to reach the pinnacle of inhuman monstrosity in 1994. To unravel the complicated nature of kinship that was established in Rwanda ethnographically, we must look at the narratives of perpetrators primarily sourced from Hatzfeld's (2008) *A Time for Machetes.*

In the book, a young man called Pancrace describes his first time killing someone. He argues that he killed many without sparing a minute to see their faces, he did not identify with his victims as long as he did not look at them in the middle of their screams. However, he recalls a moment in time when one of his victims looked him in the eye, and this instance stayed with him. It was as if his actions were glaring back at him with despair. Similarly, Flugence talks about how killing became almost ritualistic after some time. The guilt vanished, and they became increasingly cruel. Leopord leaps and discloses the fact that he got no pleasure from killing, he did it because he knew there were no consequences and had no remorse. The killing parties were informed of the troops' arrival which was often just for showmanship in an otherwise fallen state. Notedly, my interest here lies in a statement given by Pio in the same book, he says his first victim was his neighbour, someone who he met on a daily basis but failed to distinguish when he became his killer. With little physical difference, and uncertain body maps, how did the Hutu mobs recognise the Tutsis? They did not have to look because they knew them. They were neighbours, people who shared public spaces and often crossed each other's paths.

Rwanda was prominently rural, and village societies were enclosed for routine relationships. Everyone knows everyone. In fact, one can say that the propaganda was successful to the extent that it was owing to a hierarchy of communication channels lubricated by the state and ultimately utilised by smaller communities. While many perpetrators did not harm their close acquaintances (R. N. Adler et al. 2008), many forgot their own identities which were once forged in a subjective interaction with their counterparts. I agree with Hatzfeld's (2008) theory of the genocide being both neighbourhood and simultaneously agricultural in nature. Rural Rwanda was so occupied with poverty that farmers were wary of each other's harvest. Lootings and occupying victims' properties were a few motivational factors contributing towards the killers' cause. It is not that Tutsis did not retaliate; death, trauma, and loss were in the atmosphere, yet the sheer abundance of Tutsi death makes it difficult to attain a holistic perspective of the subject. A teacher, a priest, a farmer, and a doctor were seen killing with machetes in Rwanda fields (Sharlach 1999), these professions are well blended into any society as integral parts of coexistence. However, blinded by hate and consumed by propaganda, the ones who would once assist your survival in the world antagonized their roles to become symbols of death.

Rwanda and Myanmar: Brief ontology of participation

The manner in which safe spaces transform into a haven for violence in regions of conflict is of importance in understanding how it shapes the perpetrators' perspective. One can say that the state in context of Rwanda dissolved itself into the bodies of its people. It conscripted individuals not just physically but also mentally, thus enhancing the so called majoritarian democratic power. So, in technical terms, the majority was indeed selected to rule, but this rule of conscription and murder went above and beyond its scope and managerial ability. Levi (1996) suggests that for conscription to be successful it is important to question the

democratic process. It needs a centralized government with the power and means to organize a sizable portion of its eligible populace. Mass conscription does not necessitate democracy, but it does assist create a modern state. While Levi maybe right in suggesting this, I believe his conclusion of state modernity scale relies on the absence of a core factor: Violence. To expect an entire demographic to accept violence in the name of a state or a people is far from a democracy.

Consequently, I wish to bring in an example from the Wa state of Myanmar where communities have witnessed mass persecution in the past. Steinmüller (2019) brings up the concept of lethal neighbourhoods where the establishment of governmental institutions necessitates both the growth and dilation of acquaintance networks. In rural areas of Wa, communities are close and therefore display a stronger knowledge of kinship relations in their vicinity. This mere knowledge is weaponised by the state which uses it to forcefully conscript young individuals into the military. An ethnographic example of one such case taken from Steinmüller's study is of Sam Sin (17 years old) who fled into the hills close to his village when he learned that the army would register at least one son of every household to join them on the borders. The commander, who had just arrived, was informed about him by a different villager who worked as a driver. If he didn't go back to the village, the soldiers said they would arrest his parents. In order to inform him and persuade him to come back, his father went to the slope where he was hiding. Sam Sin registered his name and age upon returning to the village, and twenty days later the truck returned to collect him and the other fifty people. Here, when an individual who has been conscripted without consent and asked to kill people at their posting still accounts for the statistics of active perpetrators. Networks of knowledge, through kinship, can help in strengthening as well as breaking a community. It also contributes towards provocation of violence in the area. In Wa, relatives of deserters were captured to replace them in the military, irrespective of their age.

The reason I include this example as a comparative study for the scenario in Rwanda is because the element of threat at home is the same in both these instances. Danger to life here is posed by the people you grew up with. In Wa, neighbours inform authorities, and they take the victims to get involved in combat, similarly, neighbours in Rwanda take matters into their own hands, as puppets of the state, force members of their own community to kill others. This breadth of distrust can further be seen in societies engulfed with cartel violence, where local connections are used to prosecute and recruit. While it is true that every individual has a choice, in matters of life and death, moreover safety of loved ones; rationale and morals do bend. The government in Rwanda did not need to forcefully conscript its people to implement the ideology, it equipped them with the handiest tool and convinced them that it was the need of the hour to get rid of their ethnic counterparts; this is the difference between the two situations. Tsunami effect that caught the killers in a surge of mass genocidal mayhem was mainly based on the notions of greed, fear of ruling authority, pressure of conformity, radicalised hatred, or even self-defence (McDoom 2005). Thus, bringing us back to the idea of conscientious conscription in this case.

CONCLUSION

In the process of studying the Rwandan genocide, I came across multiple contrasting narratives which explain the extensive nature of violence that shook Rwanda in the early 1990s. There was a plethora of elements at play, all at once pervading and overlapping each other making it difficult to point towards a singular perspective. Fluid identities and ambiguities in the movement led to a conclusion that at its core, the incident was profoundly developed and intrinsically created amid volatile circumstances to capture entire populations

of victims and victimizers. This occurrence strengthened my belief that the journey from a sufferer to a culprit is indeterminate if based on limited assumptions. Social capital required for such mass movement must involve stages that Rechtman's (2021) theory analyses in the introduction. Hence, while we look for a definitive conclusion to the questions asked in the beginning, the answer remains devoid of vividity. The socio-political molecules forming a volatile landscape permeate through time and space, blending the lines between individual agency and perpetual perpetration.

Looking back 30 years in time, the Rwandan genocide was considered a horrific secluded series of events. This essay directs us to the idea that it was not just about the people of Rwanda. Many studies do combine state-politics with the nature of its people; however, it is seldom that one gets a clear vision of how the two might be connected. Looking around and catching a glimpse of current headlines as of 2025, I would say there are multiple regimes across the globe that are suggesting similar indicators of oppression as the state of Rwanda once institutionalised. Conclusively, political violence is almost never placed in time, at least anthropologically, without the inclusion of bare necessities of people who kill, get killed, and factors that make them kill. Thus, this study remains important and relevant in the face of tragedy and in the name of learning from those tragedies, respectively.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sehgal, G. (2025). Lethal Neighbourhoods: Discourse of the Rwandan Genocide. *International Journal of Social Impact*, *10*(3), 751-764. DIP: 18.02.082/20251003, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1003082