

The Exemplary Citizen on the Exemplary Hill: The Production of Political Subjects in Contemporary Rural Rwanda

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Abstract

Since the end of civil war and genocide in 1994, the Rwandan government has embarked on an ambitious plan to reshape the rural setting. Through a strategy of agrarian modernization, the Rwandan government is reorganizing rural space and production in order to foster economic growth. This article looks at how this spatial and productive reconfiguration contributes to the production of political subjects in post-genocide Rwanda, and how this is constitutive of the political power of government. (1) First, we point to the way in which the state authorities' discursive practices instrumentalize the concept of 'exemplary citizenship' to reinforce policy adherence. (2) Second, we analyse how the reconfiguration of access to productive resources is intertwined with the reinforcement of the state's authority. Hidden behind the discourse of modernization and rationalization, the reorganization of space helps central authorities to gain a greater degree of control over rural settings. (3) Finally, we analyse the way in which the reorganization of rural space contributes to the construction of political subjectivity. Political subjects are defined through adherence to or rejection of the government's rhetoric of economic development and good citizenship as redefining moments of public life.

Keywords: Land, political subjects, state control of space, resistance, Rwanda

1. Introduction

Since the tragic events of the 1994 genocide, Rwandan society has undergone a fast-paced wave of social and economic transformations, particularly after 2000. In a continent that for years has been associated with patrimonial and ineffective states (see other contributions in

this special issue), the Rwandan example stands out for its efficient technocratic governance and for its impressive results in terms of development outcomes (for a discussion, see Ansoms and Rostagno 2012). Twenty years from the genocide, Rwanda is a ‘donor darling’, lauded for its target-driven development model (applauded in various IMF reports), for the successful approach to improving its business environment (World Bank 2015), and for its education and health care policies (see ODI 2012; World Bank 2011).

Such important results are seen as the product of a far-reaching and hierarchical system of governance installed by the leadership of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), in power since the end of the 1994 genocide. On the one hand, the RPF governance is praised as an example of illuminated ‘developmental patrimonialism’ (Booth and Goloba-Mutebi 2012). Referring to Khan’s (Khan and Jomo 2000) concept of developmental states in South-East Asia, advocates of this school claim that the Rwandan case represents an important break with past histories of neo-patrimonialism in Africa. On the other hand, the RPF regime has been accused of ‘cordonning off’ political space, and of enforcing economic and political reforms without allowing public contestation or opposition (Reyntjens 2013; Thomson 2013). This has been coupled with state-organized political violence characterized by the imprisonment and disappearance of political activists, journalists, and members of the government opposition (Reyntjens 2013; Prunier 2009).

What both critics and supporters of the Rwandan government acknowledge is that, since the RPF took power, it has been able to reform the state effectively and to enforce control over its citizens. The country’s reorganization is modelled according to *Vision 2020*, a manifesto elaborated at the dawn of the new millennium with key ambitions for the reconstruction of Rwanda (GoR 2002). This political vision is enforced through a process of social engineering, the restructuring of Rwandan society in line with a top-down developmental vision of modernity (Reyntjens 2013; Ansoms 2009). Social mobilization for the implementation of that vision is achieved through a system of governance that hierarchically links up different levels of the local administration to central government’s objectives.

Indeed, the skilful reforms of local governance implemented by the Kagame administration have provided the country with an army of committed local administrators, tightly connected to the executive through performance contracts, *imihigo* in Kinyarwanda. Local leaders and administrators are part of a ‘technocratic and depoliticized’ body of governances (Chemouni

2014) from the administrative cell unit, to village (*umidugudu*), sector, and district levels, all the way up to the central government (see also Ingelaere 2014). Through this apparatus, policies are implemented and the Rwandan population is mobilized for an extensive range of activities through ‘sensitization’ sessions, and an array of regulations, fines and commitments to local authorities. The Rwandan post-genocide state achieves policy adherence and implementation through its presence at virtually every level of society (Purdekova 2011). This allows state structures to link the distribution of access to resources with the creation of ‘governable’ political subjects.

Existing scholarly literature on post-genocide Rwanda has described the functioning of this dense and far-reaching state apparatus in the domain of reconciliation and reconstruction policies. Thomson (2013), for example, has shown how unity and reconciliation policies have facilitated political control by the RPF-led state machine, while allowing for swift implementation of policy objectives. Purdekova (2012) speaks of the state’s ambition to shape a ‘governable subject’, ‘one that is both docile (non-contrary, accepting, responsive) and easily organized (visible, readable, accessible, traceable, orderly) (Purdekova 2012: 6). This literature thus illustrates how the top-down imposition of policy objectives goes hand in hand with the state’s efforts to generate political subjects who are able to engage successfully with government policies.

In this article, we argue that political subjectivity is also constructed through the government’s rural development policies. As most of the Rwandan population lives and works in rural areas, the policies reorganizing space and production patterns in rural areas contribute profoundly to the production of Rwandans as political subjects, and in turn constitute and consolidate state authority. In the first part of the article, we define the concepts of ‘subject’ and ‘political subjectivity’. We look at the way in which the current literature has engaged with the production of political subjectivity in Rwanda. In a second part, we highlight the role of rural policies in the shaping of political subjectivity through the conceptualization of ‘exemplary citizenry’. In the third part, we present two empirical examples of how concrete state policies produce subjects, and how these subjects politically engage with or react to state policies. In our conclusion, we problematize the creation of

‘exemplary citizenry’, and point to the importance of the often hidden political nature of collective action in rural Rwanda.¹

2. The making of political subjects

Before we proceed with the contextual and empirical discussion, it is crucial to define ‘political subjects’ and the production of ‘political subjectivity’. In this article a ‘subject’ is understood ‘in its double sense, i.e. both an object of domination and an active agent, in relation to forms of government’ (Blundo and Le Meur 2009: 10). Subjects are thus on the one hand the receiving part in a relationship, which presents a power imbalance (domination). But at the same time, they are agents who utilize their own resources and ingenuity to influence the outcomes of these ‘forms of government’. Seen through the lens of public policy implementation, ‘subjects’ are policy recipients as well as ‘active co-producers of this policy’. In this sense, subjectivity is political in so far as subjects actively manage to influence the modes of governmentality that contribute to the production of ‘subjects, goods and services through the definition of representational boundaries and practical fields of actions’ (ibid.: 29).

The double sense of ‘subject’ as presented by Blundo and Le Meur (2009) directs our attention to two important features of subject making. First, the subject-producing process is intertwined with the imposition of forms of governance and governmentality that ‘weave domination and subjectivation in a common framework’ (ibid.: 11). Indeed, ‘political authority is (re-)produced through its successful exercise over an issue in relation to social actors [subjects] that are affected by it’ (see Christian Lund’s introduction to this special issue). As a result, the production of subjects cannot be de-linked from dynamics of state formation, a topic that is recurrent in the literature on post-genocide Rwanda (Thomson 2013, Purdekova 2012). Second, subject making occurs through the production and distribution of ‘good and services’, the immediate objects of policy implementation; but it also depends upon the ‘rhetorical level of discursive practices’ (Blundo and Le Meur, 2009). In n this article we

¹ The empirical materials in this article are the product of different phases of fieldwork by the authors. Since 2004, Ansoms has been engaged in longitudinal qualitative research in six villages in the Southern Province of Rwanda (part in collaboration with Jude Murison). In 2013 and 2014, Cioffo has conducted mixed quantitative and qualitative research in two districts of the Northern Province. Both authors engaged in collaborative research in 2013, in both the Southern and Northern Provinces.

are not only looking at the production of subjects in the process of state formation, but also at the discourses, actions, and practices that make such subjectivities ‘political’.

This question is particularly relevant for Rwanda, as a lively academic debate is ongoing on whether forms of non-participation in, or active boycott of, public policies may represent forms of ‘political resistance’. As mentioned by Lund (see Introduction to this special issue), ‘visibility’ is a basic condition for the recognition of individual and collective rights. What does it then mean to choose to remain invisible? Is ‘staying at the sidelines’ of public space and engagement an act of subtle political resistance, or should it rather be framed as a short-sighted, instrumental tactic to ensure survival? Thomson (2013), on the one hand, interprets local non-participation in public policies as acts of ‘hidden’ or ‘everyday resistance’, a notion that builds on Scott’s (1985) concept of *infrapolitics*. Thomson defines ‘everyday resistance’ as ‘any subtle, indirect, and nonconfrontational act that makes daily life more sustainable in the light of the strong and centralized power of the [state]’ (Thomson 2013: 132). This view, however, is called into question by Palmer (2014: 242), who warns against ‘seeing resistance everywhere and reading it into all types of negotiations and contestations’. Palmer (ibid.) criticizes Thomson’s approach for over-interpreting local-level boycotts or non-participation as acts of political resistance, rather than choices motivated by momentary necessity, needs, or economic conditions. According to Palmer, the question is thus whether engagement in or resistance to public policy is motivated by individual considerations to maximize the chance of survival; or whether it deliberately reinforces or challenges dominant forms of governance. In short, do actions, moved by necessity or worldly interests, carry a political weight? Or are they just ways of coping with structural conditions of life in a poor country?

In order to answer this question, we need to take a momentary step back to define the analytical elements of what frames individual subjectivity as ‘political’. For this purpose, we need to conceptualize both politics and action. Arendt’s work – *The Human Condition* (1958) – is particularly relevant to this discussion. Arendt engages with the question of what defines humans as subjects of a political body and as active participants within that body – either through validated participation or through opposition.

According to Arendt, there are three basic activities of human life that are fundamental to the existence and reproduction of people across cultures, societies, and time: labour, work, and action. *Labour* is defined as the set of activities performed to sustain one’s bodily life.

Cultivation for household consumption, for example, is a form of labour. Labour can be performed individually or in a group, or one may control and profit from other people's labour. *Work* is defined as the set of activities oriented towards the creation of a product that is not necessary for immediate subsistence, such as manufactured goods or works of art. Work responds to men and women's longing for immortality, one's will to assert oneself in the world through the act of making. As a result, work is an essentially human and lonely activity. Both labour and work are, for Arendt, pre-political activities. (3) *Action* is what defines men and women as part of a political body. Action may take the form of speech and thought, and it is only possible collectively. Action is the only human activity that relates people for what they are, without the intermediary of the worldly things that are necessary for both labour and work. The only precondition for action is the presence of a plurality of individuals: '[W]hile all aspects of human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition – not only the condition *sine qua non*, but the condition *per quam* – of all political life' (Arendt 1958: 7).

In order to be political, the activities we present throughout the following case studies must thus belong to the realm of Arendt's notion of *action* and not only to those of *labour* or *work*. According to Arendt, the chief feature of *action* – the mark of the political – is *speech*. Speech accompanies action, and unveils the political nature of it. Arendt warns us that 'most words and deeds are about some worldly objective reality *in addition* to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent' (Arendt 1958: 180 emphasis added). In fact, the political meaning of those 'words and deeds' may be concealed in what Scott (1985) frames as 'hidden transcripts', only appearing in the public sphere in extremely disguised ways. Arendt points, in fact, to the importance of identifying the potential political meanings of words and deeds that are seemingly limited to the non-political world of *labour* and *work*. According to Arendt, 'even the most "objective" intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between, is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origins exclusively to men acting and speaking directly to one another', an in-between that inherently becomes political (Arendt 1958: 183).

This notion of *action* is relevant to the discussion of what defines *political subjectivity*. In this article, we shall focus mainly on the shaping of political subjectivity as a result of opposition to public authority. We focus on cases where subjects engage in political action *vis-à-vis* the state apparatus, to reflect upon what makes resistance *political*. For Palmer

(2014), political action has to take the form of ‘active political protest’, carried out in some self-assessing and necessarily outwardly evident form (see Figure 1). We argue, however, that *action* is often a matter of navigating social relations in a controlled social environment, in which space for political contestation may be extremely reduced. Palmer’s approach, in fact, fails to grasp the more subtle ways in which power relations structure rural life in contemporary Rwanda. As we may understand from Arendt, political action does not always come in a self-asserting, publicly identifiable way. Bayart’s (1973: 63) illustration of popular modes of political actions (*modes populaires d’action politique*) appears to be relevant to the present discussion, because such modes of political action often take place in the space of the ‘ambivalent, the allusive, the evasive’. For Bayart, neglecting the political quality of popular action is to accept a-critically the monolithic claims of political power by the state while ignoring the ‘polytheistic’ forms of social organizations that define contemporary African societies. It is in this light that Thomson’s rich illustration of the subtlety of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ is an important contribution that takes better account of the complexity of political life in Rwanda.

For Thomson, political action takes place from the point where deliberate policy violation occurs in order to ensure survival against the odds (Thomson 2013). She points to the ways in which such political action may become collective. But ‘strategic and purposeful’ individual everyday acts of resistance – according to Thomson – are also expressions of political action (see Figure 1). However, we have already concluded that political action requires the existence of a shared, common conscience about action (*speech*) in order for the ‘coping strategy’ to take on its truly political meaning. This shared conscience may take the form of a very explicit discourse expressed within the public sphere; but it may also be extremely subtle – even without or beyond words – and difficult to detect with an outsider’s eye. In fact, in the light of our empirical materials, we suggest viewing political action in Rwanda as placed on a continuum that goes from individual responses to material needs towards overt political action (see Figure 1). It is important to remark that this is a simplification of much more fluid real-life dynamics that cause individuals to move continuously on this continuum. In other words, *action* (read ‘political action’) takes place in the ‘space of appearance’ among a plurality of subjects. The only condition for it to happen and to make subjectivity truly political, is for it to be apparent and real to others, even if that may be in very subtle ways, and even if those others are a very limited group. Before we turn to the empirical material, we provide an appraisal of the complex of policies that will be the object of our case studies.

Figure 1: A continuum of resistance

Coping Strategies Individual acts of policy violation aimed at survival	Political action
Deliberate violation Individual acts of deliberately policy violation (element of pride in violating)	
Collective conscience Individual acts of policy violation with implicit support from others	
Collective hidden acts Collective discourse of policy violation remaining part of the hidden transcript	
Infrapolitics (Scott, 1985) Collective discourse of policy violation reaching out to the public sphere in disguised ways	
Visible Political Action Organized discourse performed in public that pursues particular policy change	
Broad Political Action Organized acts performed in public that pursue broad political change	

3. State-orchestrated reorganization of space and production

The organization of public and productive space in Rwanda is emblematic of the way in which the country is managed. Routinely, new researchers and visitors are taken by surprise by the tidiness of Kigali's roads and gardens. The capital city of Rwanda stands as an example in urbanism and city planning, and has been widely acclaimed as a success story by international organizations. Manirakiza and Ansoms (2014) illustrate how the process of orderly reorganization of city space is continuously spreading from the centre towards poorer neighbourhoods in peri-urban areas. Purdekova (2012: 1) highlights how 'actions and wider symbolic registers attached to cleaning and cleansing, as well as other social themes, come to inform and mould a broader field: a unique form of governance' which acts through social

ordering and control. However, the control and organization of public space is a prominent feature of social life not only in the capital city, but increasingly also in the countryside.

The organization of rural public space and rural life seems paramount to the realization of the RPF governance project. The notion of ‘exemplary citizenry’ is used for those who insert themselves into the authorities’ re-engineering project. A key instrument is the *imidugudu* villagization policy. When it was started in 1996, this policy focused on refugee resettlement. Nonetheless, it evolved towards a broader strategy forcefully relocating the traditionally scattered Rwandan dwellings into centralized and easily accessible villages. Whereas in the initial stage (1997–9) donors actively funded the policy, the coercive relocation of non-refugee households catalysed international attention at the beginning of the 2000s (Human Rights Watch 2001; Des Forges 2005). This led to a retreat of funding and a scaling-down of the policy, replacing coercive relocation of settled households with enforced centralization of newly established households. New households are obliged to build their house within the boundaries of the village site as specified by local authorities (for a discussion, see Ansoms and Murison 2013).

The organization of space in legible settlements that may be ‘governed’ easily by the political centre is not a new phenomenon in African history. The most famous examples include villagization in Ethiopia during the 1980s, and the Tanzanian *ujamaa* experience under Julius Nyerere’s leadership (Scott 1999). Also in the Rwandan context, reorganization of space occurred before 1994, with the creation of *paysannats* under the Habyarimana government (Verwimp 2013; Newbury and Newbury 2000). Scott (1999) analysed in detail how such examples of state-driven resettlement and habitat organization pivot around the need for the state to govern populations, and to discipline rural production in order to foster economic accumulation. Lund (see Introduction) highlights how territorialization does not merely represent a ‘[restructuring] of physical space, [but also of] the social and political perception of it’; and how this represents a structuration of citizenship.

The reorganization of rural space is also very evident in the post-genocide restructuring of the state administration system, introduced in 2004 and adapted in 2006. The reform created six levels: the national level, the province level (four provinces plus the City of Kigali), the district level (30 districts), the sector (*imirenge*) level (416 sectors), the cell (*akagari*) level (2,150 cells), and the village level (*umudugudu*, plural *imidugudu*) (14,975 villages). Local

administration is characterized by a mechanism of upward accountability through performance contracts that tie administrators' careers, and local-level policy objectives, to the government agenda (Ingelaere 2014; Thomson 2013; Ansoms and Rostagno 2013).

Decentralized organs of governance, and in particular the district and sector offices, are crucial implementers of rural policy in two ways. First of all, the executive secretaries of Rwanda's thirty districts, directed by the district mayor, are the 'operative managers' of the national development projects such as agrarian modernization and spatial reorganization. Sector and cell agronomists, acting in coordination with the sector executive secretary and the district agronomist, oversee the reception and implementation of national policies by farmers. Second, these administrative divisions also structure political and social life. The local bodies of government organize a range of social activities and public duties that vary from public community work (*umuganda*), to public gatherings in the frame of the unity and reconciliation policy, to sensitization campaigns explaining public policies.

A word-frequency study carried out by Ingelaere (2014) on over three-hundred life stories from rural Rwandans shows that 'authority' is the third most recurrent word mentioned during interviews, following 'children' and 'land'. Ingelaere (ibid.) points to the presence and reach of Rwanda's central administration at every level of the social space in rural areas. One of the consequences of such a tightly controlled and upward-facing administration system is the 'depoliticization of local politics' (Chemouni 2014: 253). Rather than democratic structures that represent local issues and contribute to the formation of national-level policy, local administration appears in Rwanda as an efficient and responsive apparatus for the achievement of centrally set policy objectives.

This top-down state apparatus also facilitates – in parallel with the reorganization of rural public space – a redesigning of the productive space. The Rwandan government has embarked upon an ambitious mission to reshape farming practices in line with its ambition to initiate a Green Revolution in the Rwandan countryside (see Ansoms 2009; Cioffo 2014; Ansoms et al. 2014). The policy package aims at extending a commercial monoculture model through centrally organized and coordinated crop production schemes. The model is based upon a profound rearrangement of productive space by consolidating land and (re)distributing productive inputs. The legal and political framework that facilitates the policy objectives is already firmly in place. The land law – approved by the Rwandan parliament in 2005 and

amended in 2013 – sets out the formal conditions for a land titling system. Article 25 ties land access rights to ‘productive use’, a notion that is left vague. The subsequently elaborated Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) asserts a strategy of land use consolidation, concentrating on the development of six commercial crops throughout Rwanda. State authorities limit the variety of crops that may be grown on particular parcels through a series of social and legal devices (see Cioffo 2014). In practice, the legal framework ties land rights to participation in the development scheme of agricultural modernization.

As farmers are required to create economic surplus in line with national objectives, they are pushed firmly to change their social and economic terms of reference. Moreover, the recognition of their *citizenship* depends upon their ability to conform to the image of the productive, commercially oriented farmer. This notion of citizenship is quite explicitly defended in several presidential speeches: ‘If we can utilize the resources that God has given us to good effect, we can eradicate poverty. ... We would like to urgently appeal to the Rwandese people to work. As the Bible says, ‘he who does not work should not eat’ (Kagame 2000). The reorganization of rural space and the process of redefining citizenship have become ways to restructure social relations of property and citizenship (see Introduction).

In short, Rwandan farmers are required to change their ways of farming and are obliged to settle within reconfigured patterns of rural habitat. However, as highlighted in the previous section, farmers do not blindly internalize nationally designed reconfigurations, particularly not when policies do not match local agro-ecological specificities or farmers’ livelihood needs. Frustration and anger provide grievances around which individual and collective action takes place. The two cases presented below illustrate how the political subjectivity of farmers is triggered through their resistance to space-reorganizing policies. Farmers’ claims contribute to the formation of ‘unacceptable’ political subjectivities that clash with the model of ‘exemplary citizenship’.

4. Negotiating *Agasozi Ndatwa*

The first case discusses the consequences of imposed crop cultivation schemes on consolidated land. The village of Remera² is situated in a rural sector of the Northern

² Fictional name.

Province of Rwanda. Remera is situated at high altitude and about twenty kilometres from the nearest district town, and the quality of the connecting road is very poor. Before the genocide, the village was spread over two hills. When the *imidugudu* villagization policy was implemented in 1996, most families were obliged to move into grouped settlements on top of the two hills. Before agrarian modernization policies were applied in 2008/9, farmers mainly cultivated sorghum, beans, and potatoes on the hills; and white cabbage, carrots, and tomatoes in the marshlands.

However, with the introduction of the Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) in 2008/09, sorghum production was no longer allowed on selected ‘consolidated’ sites. Sorghum is a traditional crop excluded from the CIP, and it is regarded by agronomists as a low-value crop belonging to subsistence farming. From then on, crop production on these demonstration sites has focused on wheat and beans during the first agricultural season, and on beans and potatoes during the following season. The consolidated sites in which modern agriculture is practised are called *agasozi ndatwa*, literally meaning ‘the hill which is nice to see’ or ‘the hill that we show off with pride’. Farmers cultivating land in the *agasozi ndatwa* must grow the crops chosen for the area. In the case of Remera these were wheat, maize, and beans. Non-compliance is punished through fines, imprisonment, and even the the possible loss of land rights (on the basis of Land Law’s article 25).

There was a problem: Remera’s soils were not suited for wheat production and many farmers knew this in advance. However, they were confronted by a local authority structure that was firmly determined to implement the policy guidelines. The issue was raised several times in various focus groups. A female teacher explained: ‘Normally the ideas should come from the farmers; it should not come from the top to the bottom. . . . They should not come with papers on which there is written that on these hectares you should do these crops. We do not have those hectares, and even if we had them, you cannot decide what we are going to cultivate, really.’³ On top of the fact that wheat was not adapted to the local agro-ecological conditions, the region was confronted with an unpredictable rainy season and a particularly hot dry season. At the end of the year, wheat harvests were predictably meagre. As one focus group participant – with land inserted in the land consolidation scheme – put it: ‘The problem

³ Focus group with *inyangamugayo*, Northern Province, July 2014.

is that the soil is not the same. They can tell us to do wheat . . . but in my plots wheat does not grow, so I do not earn even a franc. This is the problem.’⁴

By the next season, in 2010, the village authorities were summoned by the district to transform the whole of Remera into an *umudugudu ndatwa*, an ‘exemplary village’ where the land consolidation programme is implemented over the whole surface of the village. Normally, only part of the village’s land is chosen for the *agasozi ndatwa*, which is also often the most fertile land.⁵ However, when classified as an *umudugudu ndatwa*, the whole village is bound by strictly controlled agricultural production schemes. Given the poor harvest of wheat and maize during the previous season, Remera’s villagers were very worried about this. Some focus group participants tried to frame their reluctance to wheat cultivation as a matter of lack of means: ‘Not all people have the same money, or can choose the same crop. You may not have the money to buy that seed.’ Others, however, pointed clearly to the fact that the authorities had made the wrong choice: ‘People who do the planning [crop assignment] should not say: “On this surface you are going to do wheat.” If they do this, they are forcing us to do wheat where wheat is not productive, even if we use fertilizer. You will see that wheat is not productive on those soils, so my suggestion would be that they do the planning according to the soil we have in the village.’⁶ In Buhoro, a neighbouring village of Remera confronted with the same problem, farmers had restarted sorghum production against the sector authorities’ directives, but with the agreement of the local village chief. Farmers in Remera soon started following their neighbours’ example.

When confronted with the widespread violation of centrally imposed policy guidelines, local authorities at various levels in the administrative chain reacted differently. District and sector authorities, on the one hand, imposed rigorous policy adherence. Village and – to a lesser extent – cell authorities, however, were often confronted with the same problems as their fellow villagers. Some of them tried to pass on information about the problematic aspects of the policy to the higher levels in the administration. As the village chief of Buhoro put it: ‘In the meeting [with sector authorities] I really tried to say [what] did not work in the consolidated region. . . . As they did not have any help that they could give us, they just stood

⁴ Focus group with poor farmers, Northern Province, July 2014.

⁵ Information provided by farmers both in focus groups and individual interviews, as well as by local authorities, during fieldwork carried out in 2013 and 2014. See also Cioffo 2014.

⁶ Focus group with *inyangamugayo*, Northern Province, July 2014

silent.’⁷ Nevertheless, this input was ignored and decisions were implemented from the top down: ‘The policy was decided at a high level . . . they said, for example, in this sector you will do maize and wheat. They do not consider that even if you are in the same cell we can all have different soils, even in the same *umudugudu*.’⁸ Up until the end of the first agricultural season in 2013, fines and imprisonments were quite widespread in the sector in response to policy violation.

Cultivation of sorghum and other non-allowed crops continued nonetheless. Whereas initially non-compliance was an individual coping response to the meagre harvests on consolidated land, it transformed into a collective strategy challenging the policy guidelines (Cioffo 2014). The common experience of the violation of policy guidelines resulted in the emergence of a shared discourse about the inappropriateness of the imposed crop cultivation schemes. By May 2013, more and more farmers were violating the official policy. Moreover, the village chiefs of both Remera and Buhoro increasingly tolerated the transgressions, and transgressed themselves.⁹ Farmers started ‘crying out’ in favour being able to plant sorghum. The case even caught the attention of a national newspaper¹⁰. Figure 2 details the various stages of resistance to *Agasozi Ndatwa*, scaling up to political action.

Figure 2: The continuum of resistance in negotiating *Agasozi Ndatwa*

Continuum of resistance	Negotiating <i>Agasozi Ndatwa</i>
Coping strategies Individual acts of policy violation aimed at survival	Individuals cultivate sorghum for household consumption in a hidden way to survive.
Deliberate violation Individual acts of deliberately policy violation (element of pride in violating)	Individuals cultivate sorghum for household consumption in a hidden way out of a principled position, considering sorghum as an important part of their livelihood.
Collective conscience Individual acts of policy violation with implicit support from others	Individuals cultivate sorghum as an individual resistance strategy. The act is reinforced by validation through implicit

⁷ Village chief, Northern Region, Rwanda. Focus group with village authorities, 21 July 2014.

⁸ Focus group with village authorities, Northern Province, Rwanda, 24 July 2014.

⁹ Individual interviews with farmers in Remera and Buhoro 2013; focus groups in Remera and Buhoro in 2014.

¹⁰ The New Times Rwanda, ‘Shortage of cassava leaves Kinazi plant operating at 40% of capacity’ 03/06/2013

	support from others (neighbours in most cases). No explicit coordination.
Collective hidden acts Collective discourse of policy violation remaining part of the hidden transcript	Many people in the village cultivate sorghum, resulting in the emergence of a common discourse that justifies policy transgression at a collective level.
Infrapolitics Collective discourse of policy violation reaching out to the public sphere in disguised ways	Sorghum cultivation becomes known to local authorities; collective protest reaches out to the public sphere but in disguised ways.
Visible political action Organized discourse performed in public that pursues policy change	Collective protest reaches out to the public sphere in more open ways (media, for example), co-opting local authorities in the negotiation with the higher-level officials.
Broad political action Organized acts performed in public that pursue abstract political aims	Resistance at broader level against land consolidation, monocropping and forced commercialization of production.

Source: Own research.

Three elements emerge from this case. First, it points to how Rwandan authorities have instrumentalized the notion of ‘exemplary citizenship’ as dependent upon farmers’ alignment to official rural policy guidelines. Policy makers even scaled up the notion of ‘exemplary citizenship’ from the individual level to the village level, where land rights and the ‘exemplary citizen’ status depended on adherence to government policy. This illustrates the way in which struggles over property and citizenship are closely interrelated in the shaping of political authority. Second, the case illustrates how farmers are both objects of domination (through locally implemented policy guidelines and systems of punishment) as well as active agents who shape the process of policy implementation. Finally, individual action to respond to immediate practical challenges gradually surpassed the domain of the private. The experience of conscious transgression was shared by a multitude of subjects, which in turn resulted in the articulation of a common discourse. The production of such discourse challenged policy guidelines, initially in more disguised ways, but eventually quite openly. In fact, action and speech moved from a response to immediate circumstances, to the defence of

a discourse on more abstract matters: who takes decisions on policy implementations? How were these decisions taken? Why were we [the farmers] not involved in this process?

5. Smuggling Cassava

The second case analyses farmers' reactions to enforced marketization of agricultural production. Kinazi cassava factory is a processing plant in Ruhango district (Southern Province). During our research stay in 2011, when the cassava factory was still under construction, participants in a focus group held in an area near the factory spoke of it as a source of hope for economic development. The factory was supposed to have a processing capacity of 250 tonnes of raw cassava per day to produce 60 tonnes of cassava flour (*The NewTimes*, 28 March 2011). People were genuinely convinced that the nearness of the factory would improve their chances in negotiating good prices for their cassava harvest. The Kinazi factory was officially inaugurated in April 2012 (*The NewTimes*, 17 April 2012). On that occasion, President Kagame 'called on the area residents to make the most of the processing plant to empower themselves economically. He said that while in the past, cassava was just eaten raw, roasted or boiled, the new factory comes with value addition, which should make their products competitive on the international market' (*ibid.*). Less than a month earlier, the CEO of the Rwanda Development Bank – Jack Kayonga – claimed that 'the factory will increase the residents' income and provide a market for the local cassava farmers' (*The NewTimes*, 28 March 2012).

However, hope soon withered after the opening. A focus group participant reported: 'When we noticed the construction of the factory, we were happy that development was to come to our region. But the first thing they did, was to prohibit us to cultivate sorghum. And we just told you that the little sorghum they let us cultivate gave such a high production the last season. Then, at the moment we started to deliver the cassava to the factory, we noticed that the price was very low. We thought that the factory would mean "development" but it has made us go down instead of making us grow. We are not happy with that factory stuff.' According to another farmer, 'Normally, cassava was our crop. We earned a lot of money. But the factory pushed us to do even more but gives a very low price.'¹¹ At the time of our research in 2013 the price paid by the factory to farmers for their cassava varied between 40

¹¹ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

and 60 Rwf/Kg for fresh cassava. Farmers lamented the price paid by the factory to be less than the price on the local market, which varied between 100 Rwf/Kg at harvest season, and 200 Rwf/Kg. These prices refer to cassava which has been treated (soaked, dried and peeled) by the farmers themselves, while the factory only purchases fresh cassava.

Disappointed by the limited price offered, farmers turned to alternative strategies – to the production of other crops, for example. This was problematic for the Rwandan authorities. ‘For sure, the factory gives a low price,’ a focus group participant explained. ‘But as we knew this, we got out of cassava production, and rather cultivated another crop that brought us more money, because we did not earn well at the factory. But a big constraint was that the government did not allow us to do anything other than cassava, because the factory needs its capacity, and that is why we had to produce.’ Another confirmed that ‘Cultivating cassava is an obligation. At the moment the factory was built, they told us that it has to receive at least 600 kg per day. If not, the factory makes losses. Since then, it is obligatory [in this region] to cultivate cassava [and sell it to the factory].’¹²

An alternative strategy was to not sell one’s cassava to the factory, but to search for alternative options. At the time of our research (September 2013), the factory was not producing at its full capacity. By June 2013, *The NewTimes* reported a processing capacity of 120 tonnes of raw cassava per day on the basis of a 20-hour daily operation (3 June/2013), of which, at that time, only 40 per cent was being utilized. Corroborating this, farmers mentioned that the factory was always searching for cassava. But as one participant in our focus group explained: ‘It is not that we produce little [cassava], but the price is low so we try to keep as much as possible in our own hands. If they would increase the price, the factory could even have a surplus that it could not treat.’¹³ In fact, farmers who did not sell their product to the factory were fully aware of the implication of their actions for factory production levels. They were also aware of the fact that refusal to sell to the factory had become so widespread that the authorities realized what was going on.

This led to a forceful reaction from the side of the authorities. To counter the sale of cassava to buyers other than the factory, all of the household equipment necessary to dry cassava was destroyed. One interviewee explained: ‘When the factory came, they gave an order that no

¹² Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

¹³ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

one could treat cassava. Those who had basins to soak it had to destroy them. Today this [activity] is no longer permitted.’¹⁴ In another focus group, a participant confirmed that ‘All the soaking equipment has been destroyed, as the factory gave the order to destroy it.’ But he acknowledged that ‘People who do it [treat cassava themselves] do it in small quantities in barrels. But you really cannot do it openly.’¹⁵ Later in the interview, our participants revealed how they dry their cassava on their roofs, or on quickly removable sheets that they hide behind the house. This was done for smaller quantities that, when transformed into cassava flour, were mainly destined for household consumption.

But farmers also developed inventive strategies to sell their cassava to alternative trade chains on a larger scale. Such illegal cassava trade had to be carried on in secret. A rather subtle way was to sell raw cassava to local traders who would take it to a region where the factory did not dominate the trade chain: ‘There are traders who do this and take the harvest, dry it, and sell it to the market which is further away from the factory.’ A participant in another group confirmed this: ‘The traders of the region who have money buy up [our harvest], dry it, and sell it in Kigali. [...] They do not pay per kilo, but they buy up an entire plot. They buy the cassava that is ready [to be harvested].’¹⁶

Over time, this kind of trade became more and more organized and – as a result – also more obvious in the public sphere. This trend was confirmed when traders from abroad came to buy up cassava on a massive scale. Several focus groups mentioned that traders were coming from Cyangugu (near the Congolese border, and far from our research setting). A participant noted that this trade ‘occurs *en cachette*, the buses are charged during the night and they leave in the morning’. For another, ‘Everyone knows this secret, because we live here.’ The secret became more and more open. ‘There are cheaters everywhere,’ a participant confessed, ‘and given that I know that, I had my go with it. These traders come at noon and then we sell our harvest. We put them on the truck with sheetings on top. And then they leave very quickly to bring that to DRC.’ While farmers went through the motions of concealment, the massive quantities disappearing from the local market were certainly noticed by the authorities. A focus group participant explained that ‘Even the cellule and sector chiefs are aware of this. The secretary

¹⁴ In the region of the study, farmers used to treat cassava tubers in the household in order to produce cassava flour. This is normally done by peeling the tubers, soaking them in water in a basin or a hole in the ground, and then drying it in the sun on a rack or on the ground.

¹⁵ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

¹⁶ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

of the sector knows the truth because he knows that the price at the factory is low.’¹⁷ An admission to the press by the plant manager, Robert Runazi, shows that he was indeed aware that farmers were selling their produce to neighbouring countries such as the DRC and Burundi (*The NewTimes*, 3 June 2013).

When we asked how the agronomists at the level of the cellule and the sector reacted when confronted with the low production quantities offered to the factory, the answer was plain: ‘These agronomists are from the region. They know the situation. And they too have to eat cassava flour. So they cannot punish the people directly.’¹⁸ Resistance to official policy prescriptions had become more and more open, up to a point where the case was publicly discussed in the Rwandan press. It became a news item in the government-controlled *The NewTimes*, and on national television. Farmers expressed their dissent in an increasingly open way.

Figure 3: The continuum of political action in *Smuggling Cassava*

Continuum of resistance as political action	Negotiating <i>Agasozi Ndatwa</i>
Coping strategies Individual acts of policy violation aimed at survival	Individuals keep their cassava production for household consumption, and cultivate other crops, in order to cope with low prices.
Deliberate violation Individual acts of deliberate policy violation (element of pride in violating)	Individuals keep their cassava production for household consumption and/or local sales on hidden markets, to cope with low prices and out of a principled position that the factory should bring development and benefit local producers.
Collective conscience Individual acts of policy violation with implicit support from others	Individuals keep their cassava for local sales but with implicit support from neighbours who know and do not reveal this to the authorities.
Collective hidden acts	Many people participate in alternative cassava trade. Active engagement from

¹⁷ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

¹⁸ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

Collective discourse of policy violation remaining part of the hidden transcript	several members of the community ensures that the activity stays hidden.
Infrapolitics Collective discourse of policy violation reaching out to the public sphere in disguised ways	The authorities start noticing that local farmers are selling their cassava to alternative trade chains. On the producers' side, a façade discourse of 'harvests being poor' is created and reproduced in order to perform compliance with policy guidelines.
Visible political action Organized discourse performed in public that pursues policy change	Collective protest reaches out to the public sphere in more open ways, co-opting local authorities and the media in the negotiation with the higher-level authorities for higher prices.
Broad political action Organized acts performed in public that pursue abstract political aims	Resistance at broader level against power disequilibria of farmers in centrally-imposed trade chains.

Source: Own research

As with the previous case, several conclusions can be drawn. First, this case provides an illustration of how the discourse of 'exemplary citizenship' was instrumentalized to reshape property relations – in this case not property as land but property as the harvest generated by that land. The discourses of high-level authorities presented the factory at its launch as a chance for empowerment, a gate to increased revenue and to international competitiveness. The local population was called on to perform as 'exemplary' smallholders, using this opportunity for their own development. Second, the case highlights how the making of political subjectivity depends upon the development of a common *speech* that frames the *action* of farmers (in Arendt's terms). Such *action* – when taken up collectively – may rapidly result in a coherent 'hidden transcript' (Scott 1985) capable of breaking out into the public sphere. Nevertheless, the case also illustrates how farmers remain prudent in the formulation of their dissent. Whereas *visible political action* to confront the low factory prices was in this case quite apparent, expressions of *broad political action* calling into question the broader agrarian commercialization policies of the Rwandan government remained limited. Farmers were very aware that the seeming openness from the authorities' side to discuss the price issue in public could turn against them in a near future. 'We know that the days of a thief are

40,’ a farmer said, quoting a Swahili proverb invoking a dangerous situation that cannot continue forever. ‘We know that one day this will be over, and that we will get 30 years in prison if they catch us.’¹⁹

6. Subject making and everyday politics

Narratives of statehood and development in Rwanda tend to unfold along opposite lines. Critiques of the post-genocide Rwandan state highlight the lack of public space for political expression. Advocates of the post-genocide regime bring to the fore its results in terms of technocratic governance, economic development, and the provision of public goods. To move beyond the opposition between the two streams of literature, we call for a more nuanced reading of the necessary reconfiguration of property and citizenship that state building mobilizes. We highlight three elements that, taken together, may provide a better understanding of the structural tensions between the articulation of political claims and subjectivity, on the one hand, and the consolidation of the post-genocide Rwandan state on the other.

First, we challenge the idea of the Rwandan post-genocide state as a coherent, monolithic structure through which decisions flow unhinged from the top to the bottom. In both our case studies, the post-genocide state apparatus is not unresponsive to pressures exerted by claims from the bottom. In fact, in both cases, public authority represents the coercive arm of the state, but also an opportunity for articulating claims around access to resources. In fact, lower levels of public administration are subjected to a double pressure. They are tightly connected to the central government through performance contracts. As such they are implementers of public policy and bearers of public authority. On the other hand, they do respond to local grievances, at times cautiously pushing for recognition of local claims at higher levels of the administration. At the same time, this receptivity of lower-tier public administration to citizens’ claims is not free from risk. Accepting the legitimacy of locally articulated grievances implies that local-level authorities at least partially admit the failure of the national modernization project. In the case of the Kinazi cassava factory, the strategy to deliberately turn a blind eye to illegitimate cassava trade brought to public view the image of

¹⁹ Focus group with local cassava producers, Kinazi sector, September 2013.

impoverished cassava producers, countering the government's media narrative of successful modern farming.

Second, the contestation of public policy paves the way for the production of *speech* and *action*, and the emergence of collective claims around the control over resources. The image of the 'modern exemplary farmer' is contested through the organized, intended violation of policy guidelines. While these actions may be seen as a purely strategic response to material conditions of poverty, they 'are also the expression, the alibi of something else that defines a *position* of the people within global society and *vis-à-vis* state institutions' (Dozon 1977, quoted in Bayart 1981: 59). Farmers who cannot and do not want to fit within the commercial model are incapable of performing within the lines of 'exemplary citizenship'. Interestingly, this discourse is also – partly – adopted by farmers themselves. In both our case studies we gathered accounts of farmers declaring themselves as 'unfit' for government policies. The poorest farmers referred to themselves as 'the poor' or 'the peasants' (*abahinzi*) as opposed to the authorities (*ibozu*, a Kinyarwanda derivation of the English 'boss'). While *abahinzi* belong to the realm of reproduction and survival, *ibozu* belong to that of decision making and modern production. It is often perceived by farmers that 'this government does not like the poor',²⁰ and that policies and economic strategies are formulated without taking into consideration the rationalities of subsistence farmers (see Ansoms 2009; Thomson 2013; Cioffo 2014). However, the fact that the poorest Rwandan farmers may define themselves as 'powerless' does not impede *action* altogether. Although powerlessness is the structural condition imposed on Rwandan farmers, the very nature of power means that it cannot be accumulated or stored, but inevitably circulates (Arendt 1958). In fact, *action* to contravene policy guidelines does not only aim at redefining struggles over property, but also culminates in the emergence of a commonly shared *speech*.

Finally, the tension between subject making and state building seems to be a constitutive element of the post-genocide political community. As we have seen, the government's capacity to reach out and exert control over the local representatives of public authority (through the *imihigo* performance contracts, for example) makes it difficult for farmers to bring their shared *speech* to the public space. In fact, the discourse produced by farmers rarely enters the public domain in a confrontational way. It rather becomes 'the secret that everyone

²⁰ Conversation with women farmers, 2013.

knows',²¹ eventually entering the public sphere in disguised ways. In turn, the confinement of contestations to non-public (but not private either) forms of *infrapolitics* (cf. Scott 1985) further exacerbates the government's need for social control. In this way, public authority and political subjectivity (even when antagonistic) are decisively and necessarily mutually constituted, in so far as the emergence of action and its accompanying speech are the response to the hardship of rural life *and* to the government's effort to trigger social transformation. It is through this dialectical movement that 'power, accumulation and common sense' (Bayart 1973: 72) are negotiated. Importantly, increased control may hinder the emergence of political claims to the public, but can hardly respond to them. It is in a non-public – but not private either – 'space of freedom' (Arendt 1985) that *speech* becomes an outspoken illustration of farmers' political subjectivity.

The emergence of such a space remains specific to social circumstances. Although its borders may vary, they rarely openly cross the frontier of public state power (Bayart 1981). The creation of specific political subjectivities and the emergence and consolidation of the Rwandan post-genocide state are twin historical specificities, formed through mutual interactions and struggles over the distribution and access to productive resources. For farmers to develop a publicly articulated discourse would mean a further step into public confrontation. However, farmers' boycott and resistance do not have the mere character of the 'worldly': they do pivot on worldly objectives and coping strategies, but they also evolve to encompass a common point of view of the interaction between the perception they have of themselves, the rearrangement of space and production, and the dominant modes of governance in post-genocide Rwanda. To neglect this point is to fail to grasp the dialectical interaction between state consolidation and the emergence of grassroots, often-disorganized forms of political contestation. For the government, accepting public contestation on such matters would mean to question the very ideal-type of the 'exemplary citizen', in which a consistent part of the national project of the post-genocide state is rooted. The control over property and citizenship is not merely a *condition sine qua non* of state power in Rwanda; it turns out to be a *condition per quam* (cf. Arendt 1958).

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²¹ An expression often used in focus groups both in Remera and Kinazi.

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