Abstract

The thesis addresses practices of the state in Rwanda, and the experiences and reactions of those subjected to these practices. The Rwandan state has a long history of ordering and exercising intense control over its people. The most atrocious example played out from April to July in 1994 when the erstwhile government initiated a genocide attempting eradicate a whole part of the population. Since the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) overthrew this government the party has remained in power and RPF to a large extent continues the tradition of reaching into and practicing regulation over some of the most intimate aspects of life in Rwanda. The thesis pays special attention to the instability of the surfaces of the state and those subjected to its rule. It analyzes how the state’s many transgressions set in motion a multiplication of violence across social spheres, making it difficult to assess when, whether and how the state is present. The continuous changes in political agendas moreover work to effect routinized uncertainty about what the state actually wants from its subjects. Politics of Patience refers to the precarious political, social and economic situation in Rwanda that produce patient political subjectivities, and in turn to the politics effected by those subjectivities. The study is based on fieldwork as well as what I term failed fieldwork about the rehabilitation center for ‘delinquent’ male youth on Iwawa Island in Lake Kivu, amounting to 13 months. Based on fieldwork where I could do little to influence the process and which ended in deportation, I read my fragmented empirical material on different political practices together by emphasizing the examples in which state violence spills over beyond the state’s utility. Related to this form of violence, I draw on my autoethnographic experiences with sexually harassing state representatives and read them together with other forms of empirical material to highlight the ways in which local representatives of sovereignty influence the state’s agendas, even when they have little to no way to push back against directives from a centralized and omnipresent state. In a context marked by unpredictability, the thesis examines practices of patience, acceptance and compliance among those exposed to the state’s power. This focus is partly motivated by Saba Mahmood’s argument that these are understudied and undertheorized aspects of how people relate to power both in- and outside of Rwanda. The thesis analyzes acceptance in the context of understanding negative emotions as destructive and devastating to survival of extreme hardships. It moreover analyzes descriptions of a patient and compliant attitude as a response to a sense that the authorities were trying to trick my respondents into making themselves arrestable. Drawing on poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity, I characterize fragmented and shifting subjectivities whose agency does not rest in an undominated core, but in the exercise of control over the narrative they tell themselves or others. That is, even though practices of compliance may at times exhibit contradictions or a commitment to subordination, agency is retained in the continued capacity for narration. And with it, the capacity to change the story should circumstances change.