

## GENOCIDE DISCOURSE AND POLITICAL HARMS: THE CASE OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ABOUT RWANDA<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract: This essay explores the connections between genocide discourse that emerged in an aggressive way in the West right after the Cold War's end and political harms that have seen entire countries disappear or become unrecognizably reshaped in many ways. Part of this genocide discourse served the purpose of establishing a quick, stable, and practically immutable accounts of certain violent episodes as consisting of genocides. These accounts turned into "conventional wisdom" that finds its influence even in academic, scholarly writing. By examining conventional wisdom on Rwanda in 1994 that turns out to be false in all its tenets, this essay demonstrates how morally and methodologically perilous is the practice by many scholars of simply presupposing conventional wisdom in their work that passes for scholarship.*

*Keywords: Genocide discourse; political harm; conventional wisdom; Rwanda; proper scholarly methodology.*

“Genocide” is quite a powerful word. While as a concept it has a *strictly* legal definition within positive international law spelled out in the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, its political use dramatically increased in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. Genocide narratives played an important role during 1990s in the developments that lead to the dismantling of Yugoslavia as a state, and changing Rwanda forever. These examples clearly indicate a connection that genocide discourse can have to political harms that ensue in certain contexts, including ending states. More recently, the United States started initiatives for “genocide prevention,” thus expanding the genocide discourse and increasing the chances for political harms in many regions of the world.

The chief features of the genocide narratives on Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 1990s were their rapid introduction and enduring nature of the initially

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<sup>1</sup> This article builds on a section from my (2013a) and offers to explore, using the case of Rwanda as an example, the connection between current Western genocide narratives and political harm.

formulated content; they are apparently impervious to facts or any incentive for their modification. Quickly formed, narratives about those events maintained astonishing stability over time. As if at once all relevant evidence was in place to accurately represent in a single and fairly simple story the events that took place, practically as they were unfolding. This is what we may call “conventional wisdom” about an event; in this case the violent episodes in Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This article will explore the desirability of scholarly projects that would study, on the one hand, the connection between genocide discourse and political harm, and the role of conventional wisdom within this discourse in facilitating the infliction of political harms, on the other. The latter is accomplished here by examining the conventional wisdom on Rwanda. But first, a few general points about researching the connection between genocide discourse and political harms.

### *Political Harms of Genocide Discourse*

A research agenda that explores the ambiguities that threaten the normative foundations and social epistemology behind current national initiatives in genocide prevention would certainly be desirable. In light of the creation by the administration of the U.S. President Barack Obama of the Genocide Prevention Task Force, which is urging the President “to make the prevention of genocide a national priority and to set up a high-level mechanism toward that end,” a careful systematic study of the emergence and function of the “genocide discourse” and possible political harms associated with it may seem like an urgent project. By making use of the concept I developed elsewhere (Jokić, 2004), “genocidalism,” and reflecting on this social phenomenon through an extensive study and analysis of many cases of genocide discourse, we could construct an account of the risks for causing serious political harms as a result of the current practice of genocide discourse.

Let us start with a normative judgment pertinent to genocide prevention. Genocide is a very serious and grave matter. Yet genocide discourse is not always as serious as is warranted. “Serious” normative judgment in this context requires keeping in clear view the interdisciplinary matrix of values. In the moral order, the word “genocide” attaches a particularly powerful stigma of wrongful action to the accused perpetrators; in the political order, its use is a call to action; and in the legal order its meaning is defined in the existing documents of positive international law. Given that the word “genocide” may equally occur within moral, political, and legal discourses, the *minimum* of seriousness in using this powerful word requires on each occasion of its use a precise and explicit “indexing” to the specific normative order. It is particularly worrisome when the legal and political

uses of the word are bifurcated. Genocide discourse is replete with conceptual “mix ups” and bifurcations of this nature which can, and often do, result in serious harms to those who find themselves on the receiving end of inappropriate uses of the word “genocide.” A significant part of contemporary genocide discourse rarely meets even the basic standard for the minimum of seriousness in utilizing the word “genocide,” which suggests that the magnitude of abuse that genocide discourse generates is potentially significant.

In the proposed research agenda, I use these conceptual confusions partly to articulate “genocidalism” as the dominant phenomenon characterizing genocide discourse. The concept can be defined as follows: (i) The energetic attributions of “genocide” in less than clear cases without considering available and convincing opposing evidence and argumentation, and (ii) the purposeful neglect to attribute responsibility for genocide in cases when overwhelming evidence exists. The phenomenon of genocidalism raises fundamental questions in social epistemology that can be motivated and introduced in a literal manner in our current political context. Were a superpower like United States to adopt the recommendation “to make the prevention of genocide a national priority and to set up a high-level mechanism toward that end,” how would the relevant judgments be made and who would be making them? Reference to “high-level mechanisms” and recent discourse on genocide suggest a central role for genocide scholars or genocide experts, those who primarily engage in genocide discourse. This idea if carefully scrutinized can be characterized in basic user-friendly terms as follows.

When we look up the word “scholar” in an English dictionary we find that it refers to a learned person who has a great deal of knowledge, especially an academic, someone who is a specialist in a given branch of knowledge. So, for example, a “genocide scholar” would, then, be a learned person whose branch of knowledge is genocide. To be more precise, we would not consider genocide a “branch of knowledge,” rather scholars from a number of branches of knowledge might choose to focus on genocide as their subject: international lawyers, sociologists, or philosophers, for example. A scholar from any of those branches of knowledge (or other disciplines) who decides to “specialize” in genocide might then qualify as “genocide scholar.” However, there is another phrase that abounds in the literature on genocide; it is “genocide expert.” An important issue is raised by considering the question of why should we need the phrase “genocide expert” at all given that the phrase “genocide scholar” already exists? Before we venture an answer, let us examine the meaning of the phrase “genocide expert” first.

When we look up the word “expert” in a dictionary we find that it refers to a person with a high degree of knowledge about a certain subject. So, a “genocide expert” would be someone with a high degree of knowledge about the subject of genocide (not necessarily an academic). When we think about the subject

of genocide, the label “genocide expert” reveals an unintended yet suggestive ambiguity. It could mean (i) someone particularly skilled in perpetrating genocide in various ways that this can be done, or (ii) someone particularly skilled in determining which historical (or current) episodes of violence constitute genocide. Let us call the skills described in (i) “genocide-engineering skills” and people who have them “genocide-engineers,” while the skills described in (ii) might be called “genocide-pronouncing skills” and the people who have them “genocide pronouncement-makers.” It goes without saying that in the current discourse on genocide everyone partaking in it, *qua* expert, wants to *count as* expert of the latter sort, and no one wants to be notorious as expert of the former kind. Everyone would rather be a pronouncement-maker than engineer in this respect. It seems to me, however, that a good case can be made for maintaining that many partakers in the current genocide discourse generate nearly as much harm as if they were in fact genocide engineers. A more robust research would be required to successfully argue in favor of this claim as an examination of a number of cases that involve work by genocide pronouncement-makers, leading to particularly worrisome consequences such as the decriminalization of aggression, would be necessary. It will suffice in the current article to simply indicate the likely result by considering a single example.

The dominant desire of genocide discourse partakers to be genocide pronouncement-makers explains well the shift in terminology from “scholar” to “expert” in this area. It is a characteristic of the current discourse (in the West) that many who are not associated with any institution of higher learning or research still want to be in the position to authoritatively pronounce on the occurrence of genocide(s). Often this is done as a call to action. The non-scholarly “experts” who desire to authoritatively pronounce on the occurrence of genocides include journalists, NGO operatives, think-tankers, Hollywood actors, or even government officials serving on various presidential task forces. The danger hidden in this idiosyncratic practice of social epistemology is clear: once pronouncements about genocide are made by “experts,” and aggressively promoted in the media, they become virtually irreversible since credibility in the political sphere usually depends precisely on firm positions and opinions, *viz.*, the refusal to revise the once declared views. Of course, these characteristics are virtually contrary to the epistemological virtues associated with real experts: the scholars. A fuller examination of cases this discourse covers would easily expose the basic blunders concerning norms and facts, which underscore the importance of conceptual clarity in the different normative contexts of genocide.

The question about the occurrence of genocide is a question about the existence of facts that can in principle be discovered and identified. This question about the presence of genocide is not decided on the grounds of some institutional processes. Genocide does not become reality as a result of a pronouncement

by persons vested with the authority to proclaim that we are in the presence of an instance of genocide. Occurrence of genocide is not something governed by institutional rules as is the case with, for example, marriage: the right person under the right circumstances—where what counts as “right” is in both cases institutionally defined—can create a new institutional fact by simply uttering that “(by the powers vested in me) I pronounce you legally married.” The determination of genocide is more akin to discovering whether a death of a person was due to a homicide or an accident. It results from the discovery of the relevant evidence left in “nature” and our records of it rather than institutional procedures and political decisions. To put this contrast in stark and summarizing form: genocide is a *brute fact* and only guilt for the crime of genocide is an institutional fact. It is worth keeping in mind that when this distinction is overlooked genocidalism quickly ensues. I would contend that much of the current genocide discourse (propagated in the West) is indeed dominated by genocidalism. Moreover, genocidalism as part of the current genocide discourse has been widely proliferated by pronouncements by various “experts” whose number has tremendously increased in the post-Cold War period! It stands to reason, consequently, that the only way to avoid genocidalism and its politically dreadful consequences is to insist on the strict application of the canons of social epistemology. Let us see what that would be like using the example of conventional wisdom on Rwanda.

### *Conventional Wisdom on Rwanda*

As pointed out at the outset, both in the case of Yugoslavia and Rwanda a certain narrative quickly emerged and remained stable throughout the years, impervious to any change, including minimal amendments. These stories are repeated in the same way not just in the public discourse of journalists and politicians, but also scholars from many disciplines simply presuppose them in their writings on Yugoslavia or Rwanda (presented as, and passing for, scholarship). It doesn’t really matter where we look for an account of what happened in Rwanda of 1994, we are likely to find the same story repeated, and presented in most minimalist ways. I will illustrate this with a couple of examples: the first example will come from a polemic on the character of a “just war theorist” that took place between David Polizzi and myself, while the second one will come from almost randomly picked writer on the topic of genocide, John K. Roth.

An essential part of my criticism of Michael Walzer’s utilization of the “just war” theory had to do with the following dictum: *do not mix scholarship with activism*, especially if the latter involves urging the initiation of wars of choice—aggressions—and violating customs of war. The example I used to illustrate the problem with this approach was that of the Rwanda expert, Alison Des Forges,

testifying in a Canadian court of law, in the case of Léon Mugesera, where she asserted that *as a human rights activist, she could not claim objectivity*. Polizzi responded to my use of this example in the following way:

Regardless its relationship to just war theory, the genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo needed to be stopped for all in the violent cross-fire of that conflict. Does this action also make itself vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy, particularly when a similar type of genocide was taking place in Africa at approximately the same time and the Clinton administration and European countries stood shamelessly by while hundreds of thousands of civilians were butchered? Of course it does! Former President Clinton has admitted as much, calling the lack of US involvement in Rwanda one of the greatest failures of his presidency. Perhaps, even more shameful is the fact that he forbade his UN representatives from even using the word genocide in their official correspondences when describing the events in Rwanda, for fear that such a designation would require that the United States immediately respond to that situation. They did not and hundreds of thousands of Africans lost their lives. Hypocrisy? Of course! (Polizzi, 2012, p. 124)

What this passage from Polizzi does, in a very few words, is load into the discussion all elements of the “conventional wisdom” on Rwanda. However, I want to argue that it is a mistake for a scholar to accept conventional wisdom on Rwanda as factual while discussing just war theory—or for that matter anything else, which rests on factual accuracy. I will demonstrate this error in the remaining part of this article.

While we cannot fault Polizzi for something that almost everyone in the West who discusses Rwanda does, be they scholars or not, it is nevertheless a serious failure of scholarship to simply assume the conventional wisdom. This failure can be illustrated by focusing on another example of genocide narrative, almost randomly selected, that in a very few words, just like Polizzi, presupposes the entire incorrect story of Rwanda, as it has been peddled in the West. The example I shall use is from an article by John K. Roth on genocide and philosophy of religion.

In his article Roth makes very few remarks about Rwanda, yet it is clear even on the basis of this meager content that he presupposes all elements of conventional wisdom on Rwanda of 1994, just like Polizzi did (and countless other authors regularly do). This dominant or received rendition of the 100 days of killing in Rwanda was presented in non-academic narratives by (des Forges, 1999), (Power, 2002), and (Gourevich, 1998); it was then widely transmitted by a copy-paste industry of sorts that continues to this day, despite some opposing and compelling evidence amassed by capable and credible researchers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See earlier works such as (Philpot 2003), (Dickson, 2005), and the on-going



In (Roth, 2010) the author makes exactly four brief remarks about Rwanda from which it is evident that he presupposes the conventional wisdom on Rwanda. When referring to General Roméo Dallaire, Roth touts “his heroic efforts to stop genocide were thwarted by international inaction that included reluctance even to use the G word to identify the genocide that engulfed Rwanda in 1994” (Roth, p. 32). This claim is remarkably similar to the one Polizzi makes (and those we can find in many other articles on the topic). From this simple comment and attitude towards Dallaire we can reconstruct no less than five tenets of conventional wisdom on Rwanda in 1994:

(G) The tremendous violence that erupted in Rwanda in 1994 can primarily be characterized as genocide.

(UN) The UN role was heroic in a way it attempted to stop the genocide rather than being in any way complicit in the fact that violence happened.

(I) Intervention was possible but there was no will in the West to do so, particularly in the US that suffered from the so-called “Somalia Syndrome” or because the West had failed to classify expeditiously the relevant events as genocide.

(PV) The only form of political violence that took place in 1994 Rwanda was genocide.

(A) The genocidal killings occurred all over Rwanda.<sup>3</sup>

Next Roth quotes the entire list of violent episodes classified as genocides from a book where at spot number (15) we have “the Hutu campaign against Tutsi in Rwanda” (Roth, 34). This suggests tenet (G) again, and

(H) The perpetrators were Hutu as the dominant, ruling ethnic group and the victims were the ethnic minority Tutsi.

Talking about the “logic” of circumstances in which genocide can happen Roth offers this example: “‘civil war’ (Rwanda)” (Roth, 37). This suggests the next tenet of the conventional wisdom:

(CW) The violence that engulfed Rwanda in 1994 was a civil war.

Finally, writing about the effects of genocide Roth ponders: “How extensive was the damage to Tutsi existence as Hutu machetes did their worst?” (Roth, 35-36), which gives us the following element of the conventional wisdom:

project by Professors Christian Davenport and Allan C. Stam called “Genodynamics,” current results of which are available at <[www.GenoDynamics.com](http://www.GenoDynamics.com)> (accessed 5 November 2012). Also highly recommended are (Dickson, 2014) and (Collins, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See a very instructive lecture by Christian Davenport with a similar and related categorization of the conventional wisdom on Rwanda, “Rethinking Rwanda 1994” at the Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame (8 April 2010) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vug3OxbpsFA>> (accessed 19 May 2013).

(M) Killings that occurred during the episode of violence in Rwanda in 1994 were for the most part committed using machetes.

In order to complete the list of claims that comprise conventional wisdom on Rwanda we can add just one more:

(R) The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), then rebels but now the ruling party in Rwanda, had stopped the genocide by ending the civil war and taking control of the country (away from the Armed Forces of Rwanda or FAR).

The nine claims enumerated above represent quite accurately the conventional wisdom on Rwanda of 1994 as it emerged from the key writings and repeated often enough that it resulted in a unified narrative both in the public and academic domains. We have seen that Roth (just as Polizzi does) relies uncritically on the conventional wisdom in the case of this violent episode. But are the claims on which conventional wisdom rests true? Can they survive proper scholarly scrutiny?

It is not easy to question conventional wisdom, and doing so can be quite uncomfortable as those who ventured using appropriate methodology to research what actually happened in Rwanda during the hundred days of violence that later justified continued war and misery in the Democratic Republic of Congo causing the deaths of several more millions of people could testify. However, we can start by making a point with which all could agree. The proximate cause that triggered the large-scale massacres that followed was the shooting down of the Presidential plane. On the evening of April 6, 1994 at 20:25 the plane carrying Presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi was shot down by two surface-to-air missiles as it approached the international airport in Kigali. The plane operated by a French crew was returning the two Presidents and the Chief of Staff of the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), General Deogratias Nsabimana, from a summit held in Dar es Salaam. One could hardly expect that this would become the most under-investigated presidential assassination and terrorist act in history. Still more deplorably, this event would soon become known simply as a “plane crash”. Thus, even the 1999 “Report of the Independent Inquiry Into UN Actions During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda” commissioned by Kofi Annan contains a section titled “The Crash of the Presidential Plane: Genocide Begins” though it is stated there that “at approximately 20:30 the plane was shot down as it was coming in to land in Kigali” (UN, 1999, p. 15). Similarly, Samantha Power starts her chapter on Rwanda describing how the news of the Presidential plane having “been shot down” (Power, 2002, p. 329) was received by General Dallaire, only to become a “plane crash” on the very next page and in all later references to this event. So have done countless others (journalists and scholars) in their writings about Rwanda of 1994.



A major clarification regarding the shooting down of the Presidential plane specifically and a decisive setback for the conventional wisdom on Rwanda in general occurred in November 2006, when the French anti-terrorist judge Jean-Louis Bruguière issued a report and an international arrest warrant against the current Rwandan President and leader of RPF Paul Kagame, for the deliberate assassination of President Habyarimana. Bruguière was of the view that Kagame knew full well that large-scale massacres would ensue after the downing of the plane enabling him and the RPF to take complete power in Rwanda by force. Judge Bruguière's rigorous six-year investigation, along with more or less concurrent revelations about the elements from another investigation carried out by Michael Hourigan, an Australian lawyer and one of the lead investigators at the International Criminal Court for Rwanda (ICTR) office of the Prosecutor, whose inquiry into the shooting down of the plane was personally shut down by the ICTR's Prosecutor Louise Arbour, and above all the testimony of Abdul Ruzibiza, a former RPF officer, before the ICTR provide decisive evidence that a 'network commando' of the RPF had shot down President Habyarimana's plane. Ruzibiza testified publicly at the ICTR that:

The missiles came from Uganda in the month of January and they were transported to Mulindi; and, from Mulindi, the missiles were taken to Kigali in the month of February—if my memory is good... Sometimes I don't remember dates very well. And from within the Parliament building (CND) the missiles were brought to Masaka. And the missiles were transported in a UNAMIR military convoy. (*Prosecutor v Bagosora et al*, (Transcript) ICTR-98-41-T (March 10 2006) 44, lines 14-18)<sup>4</sup>

Masaka is in the outskirts of Kigali near the airport, the area from which the missiles were fired. The evidence indicates that the Presidential plane was shot using missiles that were the property of the Ugandan Army purchased from the Soviet Union in 1987.

The combination of judge Bruguière's report, Hourigan's investigation, and Ruzibiza's testimony is damning for the tenet of conventional wisdom labeled (UN) and in particular the former UN mission commander, General Roméo Dallaire: he was in charge of the so-called Kigali weapons secure area from where the missiles were shot, and if the missiles arrived to their tactical destination in a UNAMIR military convoy, then general Dallaire—far from being a hero who tried to stop the genocide as Roth and others claim—appears at best an incompetent military cadre and at worst an accomplice in the operation of putting the missiles in place for carrying out the presidential assassinations and unleashing massacres that the RPF would use to grab power in Rwanda. This evidence is also damning for the tenet (R), since if the RPF shot down President Habyarimana's plane, Kagame

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<sup>4</sup> My translation from French.

can no longer be deemed a heroic military genius who stopped a genocide. As we shall soon see there is another reason why (R) is false.

That all tenets constituting conventional wisdom on Rwanda in 1994 are incorrect is shown in the research undertaken over the last fifteen years by Christian Davenport and Allan Stam,<sup>5</sup> supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The team led by these two prolific and well-regarded political scientists has accumulated a huge body of data from many sources including the following: a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations that had compiled information about the killings; interviews with Rwandan government elites and a household survey of the Butare province during their study visit to the country; detailed maps that contained information on the location of the FAR military bases at the beginning of hostilities obtained with considerable difficulties from the ICTR; a preliminary database that ICTR prosecutors had compiled from thousands of eyewitness statements associated with the 1994 violence, based on some 12,000 different people that this UN body had deposed that the research team compared with information found in CIA documents, other witness statements, academic studies of the violence; and the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency information that documents approximate positions of the RPF units over the course of the war, which the research team updated using CIA national intelligence estimates obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and then updated again based on interviews with former RPF members, whose recollections the team corroborated with information from the FAR.

Using the data compiled from all these sources the research team of Davenport and Stam was able to code events during the 100 days of violence by times, places, perpetrators, victims, weapon type and actions enabling us to better understand *what really happened* in Rwanda in 1994. Having documented where killings took place and using the maps that showed the relative positions of the FAR and the RPF over time, Davenport and Stam were able to relate these deaths to the changes of the battlefronts and conflict zones presenting all this as an animation using sophisticated computer software. Particularly useful is the animation of violent deaths and troop overlays showing troop movements and zones of control with median estimates of daily killings during the 100 days of massacres. The data accumulated and their visual presentations by this team of researchers suggest a number of conclusions about what went on in Rwanda conflict with respect to all tenets of the conventional wisdom.

Anyone who was to consult the material described above would quickly realize that claims (A) and (CW) are incorrect. The data clearly show that not all

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<sup>5</sup> The essential aspects of their work on Rwanda is presented and explained in detail in Christian Davenport and Allen C. Stam, "Genodynamics", National Science funded data collection effort and analysis of 1994 Rwandan genocide [Http://www.genodynamics.com](http://www.genodynamics.com). See also Davenport and Stam, 2009).

of Rwanda was engulfed in violence at the same time. Rather, the violence spread from one locale to another, and the movements of the RPF dictated the direction and pace of killings. This is what Davenport and Stam judge as their *most shocking finding*: The killings in the zone controlled by the FAR would escalate as the RPF moved into the country and acquired more territory. When the RPF advanced, large-scale killings escalated in the areas directly across the moving frontline. When the RPF stopped, large-scale killings also mostly stopped. This is another reason why the tenet (R) of conventional wisdom is false as the data show that much of the killing would *not* have taken place if the RPF had simply called a halt to its invasion.

The much-neglected aspect of Rwanda in 1994 is the international character of the conflict, which meant that this was not simply a civil war. The moment the President was assassinated the RPF moved into action not just from its bases in the north of the country and the center of Kigali that the RPF controlled as a result of the Arusha Accords, but the RPF started a full blown military invasion, which constituted an aggression against Rwanda from Uganda by the RPF. It should be noted that many leading members of the RPF were officers in the Ugandan army, including Paul Kagame, and that the aggression was mounted using Ugandan military materiel. This was the second such aggression after the FAR repelled a similar attack on the country by the RPF in 1990, followed by a series of political agreements reached by the two parties, which should have seen the RPF and the FAR both partially demobilized and reintegrated into a national army. Contrary to what could have been reasonably expected after the signature of the Arusha Accords, the RPF failed to transform into a political party that would participate in the upcoming elections and even share the power.<sup>6</sup> Instead, as a result of the simultaneous attack on the presidential plane and invasion from Uganda violence that erupted must be given a character of both international (aggression) and civil war. The plausibility of the tenet (CW) is further diminished by the finding of Davenport and Stam according to which, contrary to the claims by the Tutsis outside the country to have invaded Rwanda from Uganda on behalf of the Tutsis inside, the invading force actually had a primary goal of conquest and little regard for the lives of Tutsis residing in Rwanda. In fact, the Tutsi diaspora who were largely English and Swahili speaking had very little awareness about the living conditions of, or contacts with, Tutsi Rwandans who spoke Kinyarwanda and French, and who were well integrated in the Rwandan society. It is hardly a stretch to think that invading Tutsi military must have appeared as proper foreigners even to Rwandan Tutsis, making the classification of this conflict as international aggression even more appropriate.

Much of the research by Davenport and Stam is concerned with the nature of killings that took place with a direct bearing on the claims (G), (H) and

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed account of the institutional framework in place at the time see the chapter entitled “Antécédents” in (Reynjens, 1995, p. 15-19).

(PV) that are parts of conventional wisdom. The best available data allow us to reconstruct where the violence took place, the types of killing that occurred, as well as the identity of victims and perpetrators. While the violence did seem to begin in the FAR controlled area it must be underscored that it also took place in the RPF-captured territory, and along the (clockwise moving) front between the two warring parties. In order to understand the nature of the hundred day killings one must keep track of the events in these three shifting spatial segments (areas controlled by the FAR, areas controlled by the RPF, and the frontline). The data show that multiple processes of violence took place simultaneously: many of the killings were spontaneous or opportunistic killings to settle political, economic and personal scores with Hutus and Tutsis playing the roles of both attackers and victims; in the territory controlled by the government's FAR Hutu victims significantly outnumber the killed Tutsis, which suggests that a government's attempts to exterminate an ethnic group—that is, genocide—was hardly the only motive for the killing in the FAR controlled territory; and in the RPF controlled areas large-scale killings happened in refugee camps, and in individual households where the RPF targeted among others the Hutu elites. Hence, the killings were perpetrated by government forces, by the RPF rebels, and by citizens engaged in opportunistic killings.

The complex picture of the violence that emerges from this study suggests that genocide was just one of many forms of violence that took place simultaneously. Furthermore, when Davenport and Stam compared reported deaths from all different sources that were consulted they quickly concluded that there were not enough Tutsis in Rwanda to account for all the killed. Consulting the census of 1991 we obtain the number of approximately 600,000 Tutsis in Rwanda at that time and if we subtract from this number the 300,000 who, according to Ibuka, the Tutsi survivors organization,<sup>7</sup> lived through the violence, we get the actual number of killed Tutsi. Depending on the estimate of the total number of victims we take into consideration we can conclude that the number of Hutus killed is either comparable to or vastly greater than the number of killed Tutsis. If we take the usually cited numbers suggesting that 800,000 to 1 million had been killed, then the killed Hutus outnumber the killed Tutsis by a 3 to 1 ratio, or more. All of this goes to show that claims (G), (H) and (PV) are false. Also contrary to the conventional wisdom, and tenet (M), the research shows that most deaths were caused by military weaponry.

The complex picture of Rwandan violence portrayed by this research found instant critics, and provoked not only anger by the regime in Rwanda but

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<sup>7</sup> It must be noted, however, that this is an extremely partisan organization and that this estimate of theirs must be taken as very conservative, and thus indicative of the very real possibility that in fact many more Tutsis survived, which only means that if the number of total victims is kept steady that many more Hutus were among the victims.

also accusations of genocide denial. This has been the most curious outcome since Davenport and Stam had never denied that a genocide took place—in fact, their estimate is that there were some 100,000 genocidal killings—but have concluded in their research that genocide was only one—and not the principal—form of violence that occurred in 1994. The complaints against these researchers appear to be based on a specific and widespread attitude regarding Rwandan killings. While I have explored elsewhere, in the context of violence in Bosnia of 1990s (Jokic, 2013b), the “genocide or nothing” attitude and the corrosive effect it has on scholarship (when it exhibits what I called “activism *in* scholarship”), but here we see a similar attitude we may call “nothing but genocide” that prevents one from actually grasping (or even wanting to) what really happened in Rwanda. However, claims (G) and (H) cannot be sustained by sheer insistence and stubbornness, particularly if they clash with our best data.

It remains to consider the tenet (I) of the conventional wisdom. Davenport and Stam did not see intervention of any sort as a possibility in Rwanda. Their main reason is the fact that almost the entire population of Rwanda was on the move. Everyone tried to either leave the country or at least avoid finding themselves right in front of the point of contact between the FAR and the RPF, where most of the killings took place. In my judgment, the most significant finding of Davenport and Stam is that in Rwanda *people got killed not because of who they were but because of who they were not*. With almost everybody on the move and the fact that the Hutus and the Tutsis are physically indistinct from one another, people got killed because they were perceived as *non-locals* who as such were seen as presenting a threat (as fifth column infiltrators or criminally minded opportunists). Rwandans tragically found themselves in a situation when one could not meaningfully assert who he or she was, but it could be fairly clear who one was not, in the sense of being a non-local person, not from here, not one of us; therefore presenting danger that must be removed. This is of huge conceptual importance as the nature of killings appears as an exact mirror image of genocide. Perhaps we should give it a separate label. I would propose *aliundecide*, from Latin words “aliunde” meaning “those from another place” and “cide” for “killing”. Even if somehow justified or desired, a foreign military intervention with any chance of success in such a context seems unlikely to say the least.

### *Conclusion*

Using the example of Rwanda I have engaged in this article the question about the proper place for conventional wisdom within scholarship or academic debates. While the practice of identifying the main tenets of conventional wisdom regarding violent historical episodes, such as the hundred-day killing

in Rwanda, and seeking evidence that supports or counters those claims can be entirely legitimate and methodologically justified, the opposite practice of simply presupposing conventional wisdom, however, is objectionable both on the moral and methodological grounds. Namely, simply taking for granted the conventional wisdom within a work of scholarly research or an academic polemic must be seen as a particularly grave mistake: something we may call the Appeal to Conventional Wisdom Fallacy. The error is that much more serious if it can be demonstrated, as I have attempted to show here with respect to Rwanda, that *all tenets* of conventional wisdom about the case are false. In a situation like that, it becomes egregiously obvious that it is methodologically and morally objectionable to espouse conventional wisdom in light of the fact that contrary and compelling evidence is readily available.

Furthermore, we should realize that genocide discourse that propels a certain set of immutable elements of a story about a violent episode, such as Rwanda, constituting a “conventional wisdom” about what had transpired, effectively serves to mask the political reality that emerged *post bellum*. This reality may take many forms, but often those include negative political effects, even to the point of ending or essentially reshaping a given state beyond recognition, a phenomenon that I have here referred to as “political harms”. Consequently, scholars who in their work simply presuppose conventional wisdom about a violent episode such as Rwanda, position themselves in the space where these political harms are to them invisible, thus any discussion of those harms is for them methodologically inaccessible. This clearly shows the objectionable character, both methodologically and morally speaking, of espousing conventional wisdom in one’s scholarship, which is a practice that is unfortunately too common in the academic component of contemporary genocide discourse.

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## DISKURS GENOCIDA I POLITIČKA ŠTETA: PRIMER KONVENCIONALNE MUDROSTI U SLUČJU RUANDE

Ovaj esej razmatra povezanost između diskursa genocida koji se najednom i u agresivnom obliku pojavio na Zapadu odmah posle kraja Hladnog rata i političke štete koja je u nekim slučajevima dovela do nestanka čitavih država (npr. Jugoslavija) ili njihove rekonstrukcije u nešto što je u mnogome neprepoznatljivo u poređenju sa onim što su te države bile u ranijem periodu (npr. Ruanda). Delimično, ovaj diskurs genocida služio je svrsi brzog formulisanja stabilnih i nepromenljivih priča o raznim istorijskim epizodama koje su uključivale nasilje kao slučajeve genocida. Ove priče se neprimetno pretvaraju u „konvencionalnu mudrost” koja svoj uticaj pronalazi čak i u okvirima akademskog, naučnog rada. Baveći se konvencionalnom mudošću o Ruandi iz 1994. koja je, ispostavlja se lažna u svakom svom aspektu, ovaj esej pokazuje do koje mere je moralno i metodološki nedopustiv pristup velikog broja naučnika koji u svojim radovima, koji na neki način prolaze kao naučni radovi, prosto podrazumevaju konvencionalnu mudrost.