Strategies of Survival and Identification of Sources of Trust Within Society in Rwanda[1]

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"Holy shit! This is genocide, not just ethnic cleansing."[2]

These words of Romeo Dallaire, who was the general in command of the United Nations' mission in Rwanda, clearly illustrate how we perceive genocide. Our attention is mostly focused on finding and proving special genocidal intent, which should differentiate genocidal killing from "ordinary" murder. Based on long history of establishing genocide as crime under international law, we assume that genocide happens under extreme circumstances. My aim is not to discuss whether these circumstances reveal the true nature of man or not. I would like to argue that genocide unfortunately happens in our normal world and we should not presume that behavior of perpetrators, victims or bystanders during genocide is in general somehow different, unusual or that it is happening is in exceptional state of mind.

Study of behavior during genocide can reveal significant knowledge/findings about society as such, but we should avoid concluding that there are genocidal societies, state regimes, etc. Every genocide is evitable, although sometimes we would like to think opposite. If we think about genocide as an inevitable result of circumstances which cannot be reversed by human action, it is not only because of our self-justification, but also social science has supported this view. This sort of deterministic thinking is partly caused by methodological perspective. In my paper I briefly present this methodological perspective, which has dominated the genocide studies since the World War II. I would like to stress some of the drawbacks of this paradigm. Nevertheless, I think that there is a way to tackle these obstacles. In the second part of this paper, I focus on the analysis of Rwandan genocide from the point of view of its survivors. Finally, I draw several conclusions for development projects in the future. My project is also influenced by methodological critique of oral history and totalitarian regimes, which is now taking place in the Czech Republic. Therefore I would like to point out these "Czech" connections.

Main goal of genocide studies is often aimed at perpetrators. We would like to catch their personality and analyze the context, which compel them to killings. At this point, one can argue that since the 1970s perspective of the victims has also been studied. Gradually, victims' testimonies have been accepted as being able to reveal the silenced world of victims (Young, 1995). Testimonies about traumatic events became an integral part of collective memory (Young, 1988). Many archives have been filled up with collected testimonies in

[1] This paper was supported by the specific research project (number: 263101-Man in the perspective of historical sciences).
[2] Power, 2002: 358.

order to preserve them for future generations. Hearts of social scientist must rejoice at these new sources, which are relatively easily accessible, but social scientists are not exalted at all as the projects focused on collecting testimonies have many methodological constraints. Firstly, collections are done mostly without a concrete methodological question or hypothesis. Secondly, it is presumed that testimonies per se tell us "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist". Especially, when collecting is done after a longer period of time, it is hard for witnesses to distinguish what really happened and what is false memory. Thirdly, we do not have enough information about witnesses and thus about the representativeness of the testimonies collected.

When I was considering these pros and cons of collected testimonies, I was convinced that there must be a way to make a secondary analysis, which would tackle all the above mentioned hindrances. One possibility is to focus on behavioral analysis of strategies of survival. The main aim is to map the ways of surviving traumatic events. I tried to make this type of analysis of the testimonies collected after the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.[3]

Analyzing strategies of survival is based on these assumptions:

Victims are actors. It means that they can deliberately choose how to act and react. Their actions are not fully determined by actions of perpetrators or other circumstances.

Next assumption is that their conduct is rational. People who find themselves in a dangerous situation tend to react actively and rationally and this may bring them a positive benefit. Analysis of negative consequences of rational behavior under extreme circumstances has been done by Baumann (2000). He considered rationality as universal logic, which is the same for perpetrators as well as victims. However, this methodological stance does not allow analyzing the full variety of motives, and consequently more complex types of behavior. From my point of view, rationality does not mean that we can use our criterions of rationality to assess victims' logic of conduct. Every human action has its inherent logic which reflects human conscious will. Generally, it is possible to say that people behave consistently even under extreme conditions. Thus it is possible to understand human behavior without applying concepts from psychopathology or categories which are more fitting for perpetrators' behavior.[4]

Another assumption that goes together with the analysis of strategies of survival is that these strategies can be found in testimonies. These strategies are composed from answers on questions like: How did they find out that the situation had changed? Who gave them the information? Where did they find the information out? Who hid them? Who did they escape with? etc. These types of questions do not have to be asked by an interviewer. But nearly all the testimonies that can provide reliable information do answer them. These pieces of information are the cornerstone of victims' narratives and because of them, they persist longer in human memory and are less open to misinterpretation and false memories.

I would like to present findings based on the analysis of testimonies which were published after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. These testimonies were collected within a few years after the genocide and grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) was chosen as the best method for analyzing them. From epistemological point of view, grounded theory lays

[3] My research is based on these collections: African Rights (1995), African Rigts (1998), Aegis Trust (2006).
[4] See for example Bettelheim (1980).

between positivistic and constructivist approach. It presumes that information is not hidden in the analyzed date, and that the information revealed in an interview corresponds with reality. The last argument for choosing grounded theory is that it is primarily focused on coping strategies, and this makes the grounded theory ideal for analyzing strategies of survival.

The genocide in Rwanda started on the April 6, 1994 after the plane with president Habyarimana on board had been brought down shortly before landing in Kigali. The genocide is significant for the following reasons: Killing was very intense there. The estimates are ranging between 500 000 and 1 million of dead. Second number seems to be exaggerated.[5] Most of them were Tutsi, but also many Hutu and Twa were killed. The horrendous dead toll was reached within a few weeks after the presidential airplane crashed. Sometimes the Rwandan genocide is called a 100 day genocide. This, however, partly masks grave breaches of human rights that had happened long before and also after that period of time. The fact that is very frustrating especially for the international community is that the UN troops were on ground and were not able to stop the killing. The genocide was terminated by advancing RPF[6] troops and partly also by the French army, which occupied the south-western part of Rwanda in order to create a so-called Safe Humanitarian Zone (Zone Humanitaire Sure).

A diverse image of the genocide killings can be drawn from the analysis of strategies of survival. There is a clear difference between strategies employed by people in Kigali and outside the capital city. In Kigali, organized killings started immediately after the airplane crash. Troops connected to extreme racist politics began to seek and kill their political opponents. They had lists of victims. People on their lists were mostly connected to newly established or renewed democratic political parties. Some of these people did not take part in political life, but were engaged in civic society projects and human rights NGOs. Because of rapid change and aimed killings, many victims had not a lot of time to safe themselves. If they wanted to survive, they had to be quick. Before anything else they had to find out that something was going on and they themselves could be in danger. The airplane fall as such was not the sign of forthcoming killings.

People got information from the radio broadcast. Most of the victims referred to radio RTLM[7] which broadcasted the information as first. It might seem surprising, because RTLM was counted for an extremist one and spread hate against Tutsi and moderate Hutu opponents (Mironko, 2007). Nevertheless, the RTML brought important news as first even though these news were distorted and full of racist rhetoric. Due to a close connection to the extremist Hutu power (Mamdani, 2001: 209), the radio insinuated what would be its next steps. Moderate political opponents listened to the RTLM in order to get a quick notice that something happened. They knew that it is necessary to double-check afterwards. This was also the case when president Habyarimana's death was announced. Most of the survivors from Kigali spoke about the telephone as the next source of information. This shows that these people belonged to the high stratum of Rwandan society as only few people in 1994 had a telephone line at home[8]. In most cases, they called their relatives or high-ranking friends

[5] For more information about the estimates see Des Forges (1999), Straus (2006), Organization of African Unity (2000).
[6] Rwandan Patriotic Front
[7] Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
[8] There were 29 telephone lines on 10 000 inhabitans in 1995 (ITU – UNECA).

from the state administration, who may have confirmed the president's death. During the process of collecting information about what happened, they also excluded the theory that *Interahamwe,* para-militant youth extremist troops, were disoriented without one of their leaders.

After verifying the truth, most of the survivors felt personally in danger. This feeling was caused mainly by two factors. Firstly, they were endangered because of their political activity and recent threats from extremists. Secondly, their fears were based on family history. If someone from their family was threatened, apprehended or even killed for political opinion, they could expect that they would be a target as well.

The following morning, the official statement affirmed president's death. Unusually and against the constitutional practice, the Minister of Defense, without the Prime Minister, announced a curfew. In October 1990 after the fake attack of the RPF, a curfew was placed on Kigali. Due to the curfew, the government could easily arrest many of its political opponents, who were released only after continuous international pressure. The announcement of another curfew in April 1994 was a clear signal that nobody should stay at home.

The possibility to escape was very limited in Kigali. Barricades were built in every street and those who did not arrange a secure and armed transport, were chained to their house or backyard One strategy of survival was to snake through yards towards places, where the UN troops were stationed. Only some survivors waited until the RPF troops seized the area and pushed out the genocidaries. If they wanted to move out of their houses, they needed more information about the situation. Their telephone connection was lost, if it had not been cut off even before. The important role of informant was taken over by security guard, who patrolled in front of wealthier houses and larger institutions. A security guard was a link or a bumper between a house and a street. His social status was close to youth from *Interahamwe*. Sometimes he knew them from everyday life. For *Interahamwe* he was not their target. He was not even suspicious for them. The security guard could divert *Interahamwe*'s attention to a different house. For the escapees, he was a valuable source of information about the situation outside: they were informed whether the RPF had secured their area or whether they should move towards another hideout. If the relationship between the secure guard and the escapees was close and trustworthy, it meant a great advantage. Otherwise a security guard could have blackmailed escapees. Blackmailing had a variety of forms and could actually end with betraying escapees to *Interahamwe*.

The peril of disclosure increased with the growing number of people hidden in one place. Every additional move was more dangerous because the place was often surrounded by militia. In Kigali, examples of self-organizing groups of escapees which tried to defend themselves somehow, were very rare. If people attempted to organize themselves in a group, it was based on previous institutional hierarchy. This was the case of the hotel Mille Collines or boarding school St. André.

The situation outside Kigali was completely different. The course of event was changing slowly in comparison with Kigali, apart from some areas on the border with the RPF troops in the north. It might appear that people outside Kigali had more time to escape. Nevertheless, slow gradation of violence implied that it was difficult to recognize in-coming severe danger, which went far beyond the worst expectations.

President's death did not mean anything significant for most of the respondents. They got the information from their neighbors or radio. In their view, politician's death should be of concern to politicians and not ordinary people. Some of the survivors expected looting but nothing more. Sixteen-year-old Marcel Ruhurambuga put it bluntly: *„When the genocide started, things happened in the usual way. The neighbors took all our livestock."* (Aegis Trust, 2006: 175).

People got most information through variety of social contacts. These relations went across any ethnic or political division. By ignoring these divisions people could be informed in advance, could hide properly, etc. It was not unusual for peole to hide their friends. During day time they attended meetings, where the attacks were being coordinated. When they returned home, they warned their friends and told them, where to go or whether they could stay over for another night. These contacts formed a social web which helped people to survive. If they were able to use them, they solved two problems at once. People had to escape from their village, where genocidaries could easily kill them. However, this would have deprived them of the necessary social contacts. Without these they could be quickly called a RPF accomplice. If no one from the local people guaranteed the opposite, they would be killed. Hence when escapees used their social contacts, they had a chance that someone would stand on their side.

There are three types of social webs that can be found in collected testimonies: close family relatives, family friends, and relations, which were established within collective organizations. The distinction among these three types might not be obvious. When we consider the differences among strategies employed by children, men and women, the logic of division between first and second type of social webs becomes evident. The ties within close family relatives (the first type) are set up within primary socialization. Family relatives were the only chance for small children to seek help. On the contrary married women could hardly expect a warm welcome, when they tried to return to their primary family. After having killed a Tutsi husband, *Interahamwe* would encourage his Hutu window to go back to her family. When these windows appeared on the doorsteps of their primary family house, their families hesitated to accept them. They were afraid that they would be asked to return the dowry which they got at their daughter's marriage from the groom's family. (Even though this aspect would deserve closer analysis, it has to be omitted due to limited space.) These women could have more luck if they sought help with their husband's family or their husbands' close friends. For women these relations sometimes represented the only possibility to find help. Most women were bound to theirs houses, so there were deprived of the opportunity to make closer friends.

The third type of social webs were not based on kinship or on dyadic relations, but they were shaped within larger artificial groups like church, work groups, microcredit organizations, self-help groups, etc. In comparison with the second type of relations, these were established within a larger community. After 1990 many NGO's projects supported these types of communities (Uvin, 1995). Ongoing democratization also helped to propel activity within civic society and that led to additional increase of local community organizations. This type of flourishing civic society was developing concurrently with

political parties, but local organizations tried to remain absent from daily political quarrels.[9] This might also partly explain why people outside Kigali did not feel endangered immediately after president's death unlike people in Kigali. Relationships established within these non-political organizations helped people during the genocide regardless of the fact whether they tried to escape by themselves or they attempted to defend themselves in a group.

In conclusion I am going to stress some of the theoretical aspects which are important from my point of view. I would like to point out several connections with the situation in the Czech Republic. Finally I would like to draw attention to what these findings might imply for future development of Rwandan society.

Social webs, as found in collected testimonies, contrast with strict division of society. Division between us and them, in the case of Rwanda between Hutu and Tutsi, is considered to be a prerequisite of genocide killing (Fein, 1993), but when we focus on strategies of survival we cannot find such a thing. When people were deciding whether or not to help their friends, the ethnicity was not the key factor. Division based on being Hutu or Tutsi was not as strict as we would expect. I think that it is caused by using the concept of genocide without careful explanation of its meaning. Genocide is a term from international law. I absolutely agree with elaborating the definition of the term and we can thank the International Criminal Court for Rwanda for clarifying the concept of genocide. However, the main problem is that genocide is generally defined as an act against a fixed and stable group. This presumption can be challenged by micro-level analysis but it does not mean that genocide did not happened. I hope that the International Criminal Court for Rwanda will reinterpret this strict definition of genocide. I would like to argue that in the future, genocide should be considered as an act against any group, stable or variable, large or small, political, ethnic or religious. My analysis points out that insisting on stability and strict division between groups would diminish power of genocide as concept of international law.

If we think about genocide, we also have a tendency to use a black-and-white pattern. We look for bad guys and good guys. To our disappointment, we often fail to find them. Genocide might become a powerful concept which helps to give meaning to our past, present and future. From my point of view, there is a connection between the situation in Rwanda and the situation in the Czech Republic. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989 there was a tendency to see things as black or white: on one side, there was communism or broadly speaking totalitarianism and oppressed people - bad guys and good guys (Pullmann, 2011). Only now, we are slowly discovering that there is a huge variety of grey between black and white. This process is full of disappointments and quarrels. Nevertheless, there are plenty of opportunities, where we can apply our experience of national memory crisis. Czech social scientists might be sensitive to these simplifying patterns and I hope I will able to analyze these patterns critically. It is difficult to cope with someone else's efforts to reinterpret one's own history. This may help us understand the transformation process in Rwanda. For me, the study of post-genocide transformation in Rwanda also means reconsidering the scientist approach, which is being employed in the Czech Republic.

[9] This supports Longman's (1999: 342-3) hypothesis that newly emerging civic society was not interconnected with political parties.

Finally, I would like to stress the connection between strategies of survival and sources of trust within society. I spoke about three types of social webs that people used actively in their effort to survive. They sought help among people they trusted. They carefully considered who could hid them and who could not do that. Sometimes they risked everything by asking a member of *Interahamwe* or local authority for help. We might say that those who survived were the ones who were best informed about local society.

From the perspective of the future development projects the third type of social webs is the most interesting one. Based on testimonies it is possible to conclude that only some of the social organizations were helpful. First of all, there were permanent organizations, because establishing mutual trust takes long time. It also seems that organizations were not larger then small social groups. It means that people knew all their members or could recognize who belonged to them or not. Hierarchy of these organizations was flat and the members were empowered to control it. However, any external control from the state or strict supervision from an international organization might have damaged the trust. Although these organizations were local in many cases, they could help people to get to safety. This raises the question whether current reconciliation projects can meet these requirements or not. I think that from analysis of strategies of survival it can also be concluded that mutual trust is surprisingly gained where it was not intended to develop and vice versa. Where we strive to restore trust, we are not successful.

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