BOOK REVIEW

Omar Shahabudin McDoom. *The Path to Genocide in Rwanda. Security, Opportunity, and Authority in an Ethnocratic State.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xvii + 384 pp. List of Figures. List of Tables. List of Abbreviations. References. Index. $99.99. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1108491464.

Beginning in 2003, Omar Shahabudin McDoom interviewed over three hundred Rwandans, including prisoners, to learn why some (he estimates one in five Hutu men), but not others, participated in the killing that took place during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Drawing on established research while contributing insightful new analyses, the resulting book, *The Path to Genocide in Rwanda*, demonstrates broad knowledge of quantitative research in political science, as well as various philosophical, sociological, and psychological theoretical frameworks for making sense of human behavior, both in group contexts and with regard to individual agency.

The average low-level perpetrator (as opposed to architects and planners) was a middle-aged, married farmer who identified as Christian. Those who took part in the killing were not radically different from those who did not kill, except that the perpetrators were overwhelmingly male and somewhat younger. What mattered the most was where they lived and who they knew. The more socially connected they were, the more likely Hutus were to kill. In this largely rural, traditional social formation, connections between neighbors and family members were powerful motivators; indeed, this was a genocide by proximity.

One of McDoom's many strengths is the ability to grapple simultaneously with multiple competing theories, narratives, and results. The author explores existing scholarly assumptions, noting the tendency of some analysts to think in simple binaries: either state or individual, national or local, rationality or emotion, or beliefs held before or during acts of violence. He demonstrates the limits of such generalizations, illustrating why comparative genocide studies are weakened by the cross-cultural application of generalizations. Explaining how Rwanda was unique on the African continent, he follows with a complex outline of perpetrator heterogeneity, at the same time avoiding an overemphasis on the power of the state, the intellect of the elite, or the supposed "obedience" of local civilian perpetrators.

In establishing historical context, McDoom examines the conditions that made genocide possible: the beginning of party politics following the Hutu revolution, the perception of danger from the 1990–93 civil war, and peace negotiations. Nonetheless, he contends, genocide was not an inescapable result of these unique circumstances. The book methodically explains Rwanda's unusual geography, demography, and political context, focusing on its small size, hilly landscape, population density, ruling party machinery, reach of the national government, and the pivotal catalyst of Habyarimana's assassination.

Drawing on evidence from interviews and gacaca proceedings, the author traces competing explanations of how and why the genocide occurred, and how and why individuals were motivated to kill. His research highlights the importance of what he terms "violence entrepreneurs" or "ethnic entrepreneurs" who galvanized their local communities in this densely populated country of remarkably integrated and tightly woven social networks. Local drivers of the killing began with extremists, followed by opportunists, who were ultimately joined by conformists. Perpetrators cite multiple rationales, including the perception of security threat, acquiescence to authority, and material opportunity. McDoom argues that local perpetrators who may have begun to participate out of fear of retaliation or ostracism, initially killing with reluctance, were transformed by the process of killing. Many became habituated to the violence and then changed: "Some killed first and hated later" (382).

Though the text is impressively wide-ranging in scope, readers from outside the social sciences may desire an even more diverse, interdisciplinary range of source material to inform some of the assertions. While the author cites Rwandan scholars such as Jean-Paul Kimonyo, much of the research stems from European and U.S. scholars. As McDoom thoughtfully acknowledges, any book about the 1994 genocide will cause controversy and debate. Refreshingly, he welcomes this critique. For example, his conclusions about the responsibility for Habyarimana's assassination will likely provoke debate, as will his use of the term "ethnic," when "social group" may be more nuanced, and his estimate of the number of Tutsi victims and Hutu perpetrators. Fortunately, he does not espouse a "double genocide" theory. McDoom's carefully neutral forthrightness about the limitations of his research findings and possible alternative explanations provide a welcome perspective.

The Path to Genocide in Rwanda holds enormous value for scholars in the intersecting fields of social science and genocide studies. The book offers carefully researched conclusions highly specific to 1994 Rwanda and crucial in distinguishing that particular genocide from others. The author—and the reviewer—hope such research will clarify "the extraordinary, terrifying, and tragic circumstances" of Rwanda in 1994.

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