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Making gender and building the State in post-genocide rural Rwanda: women leaders and public speeches

*Attending a meeting is a work as many others because if you cultivate the field
you can even cultivate your head, your brain.
(Women's leader, September 2009)*

In this paper I would like to discuss the process of State reconstruction taking place in post-genocide Rwanda, through an analysis of female assemblies of National Women Council. I will present some data of my PHD research which had been carried out between 2009 and 2010 in two rural sectors located in Nyagatare district (northeastern Rwanda).

I will start by outlining the political context of nowadays Rwanda.

After defeating Habyarimana's troops (FAR) and ending the genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front took the power in July 1994, after a civil war started in October 1990. The RPF was a rebel group composed mostly of members of first and second generations of exiled tutsi who fled the country in the Sixties (after independence) and in the Seventies (after Habyarimana *coup d'état*). It was then turned into a political party by its strong man, general Paul Kagame, who was confirmed as President of Rwanda in August 2010 for his second mandate, despite the International Community's doubts about the regularity of the elections.

The RPF-led Rwandan government found itself facing an enormous challenge: repairing Rwanda's social tissue, torn by 50-year racist politics and a 100-day genocide in which at least 800.000 people (tutsi and moderate hutu) had been slaughtered. A new political era of Unity and Reconciliation was inaugurated through the removing of ethnical labels from the identity papers and the public discourse:

every reference to it which does not respect “official forms” can be punished through imprisonment. The political scene was therefore deprived of the actors who had populated it in the past years: groups and subjectivities structured along ethnic lines (hutu, tutsi and twa). Political power has now been called to craft new subjects and, since the Beijing Fifth UN Conference of Women (1995), it has been doing it by following the International trend of promoting women’s political participation in politics through the creation of institution to enhance women’s political rights. A system of pink quotas was inaugurated with the new constitution in 2003, together with the setting up of the National Women Council, a representative organism of female representation that boasts of elected committees at every administrative level, from the cell up to the State¹. This structure has been conceived both as a means to transmit messages from the State down to the grassroots and as a channel to convey upwards the demands and needs expressed by rural women. It is also supposed to serve as a political space for training women in a women’s-only public sphere to prepare them to access the “real politics”: periodical assemblies involving every Rwandan women aged more than 18 take place each month in every cell of the country. Each committee is made up of 10 elected leaders: the coordinator, a vice coordinator, a secretary, one person in charge of finance, one person in charge of health, one in charge of production activities, one in charge of education, one of juridical affairs, one of social affairs, and one of culture and civic education.

But is women’s promotion really an invention of RPF?

Of course it is not. The idea has existed at least since colonial times, when the Belgian government instituted the *foyers sociaux*, centers of domestic education reserved to native women residing in the principal colonial urban centers such as Bujumbura². The aim was to craft proper wives for *évolués*, believing that the development of a woman should correspond to her domestication through the construction of a peculiar colonial intimacy between colonizers and colonized in which processes of colonial mimicry were stimulated.

However, the idea that female promotion passes through the entrance of women into the public sphere became apparent quite late and developed very slowly. A minister for women was created in 1965. At the end of the Eighties the female branch of the MRND³ (URAMA) was founded: its decentralized structure can be seen as the embryonic idea of NWC. Only after the Fourth UN Conference of women in Nairobi and the end of the Cold War, a lively activism for women’s rights was inaugurated: among other associations Réseau des Femmes was founded in 1988 and Twese Hamwe in 1992.

¹ According to the reorganization of 2006, administrative levels in Rwanda are: cell, sector, district, province, State.

² See HUNT N. R., *Domesticity and colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura’s foyer social, 1946-1960*, «Signs», XV, 3, 1990, pp. 447-474.

³ National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development was the ruling party in Rwanda under Habyarimana’s régime, from 1975 to 1994. It was

After the genocide, promotion of women has progressively become an exclusive “State affair”: after a short period of collaboration between the State and the civil society, that led for example to the drawing of a gender friendly inheritance law (1999), most of the well known women activists were absorbed in the RPF or they were offered technical or political posts in the government. Civil society associations, left without their previous leaders, have therefore limited themselves to follow paths already traced or to implement the policies already set up by the government.

Given that, it remains true that women’s massive participation in politics and as orators in the public sphere has been an important change of the last 10 years. Traditionally excluded from speaking in public, women were only allowed to perform the *impundur*: a sort of cry of joy which usually follows the male speech performances on the ritual scene. At the other extreme we can find the male practice of the *ibyimugo*, a sort of auto-panegyric poem which used to be performed by warriors in the monarchic period to praise their own courage and the quality of their actions on the battlefield. Based on stylized improvisation, *ibyimugo* used to be performed with a high tone of voice and very quickly: the same style can be found today in some performances of kinyarwanda traditional dance or during marriage rituals. In all the ceremonies (marriages, baptisms but even birthday or graduation parties) men are those who perform the most important public speeches. Only sporadically, in urban areas (Kigali) women take the floor and speak in public when the end of the ceremony approaches. Therefore, in local tradition no model of female oratory or of female speaker can be found.

In this paper I would like to propose an analysis of the discursive construction of the Rwandan State after the genocide through the observation of a localized practice (female assemblies of NWC). My work is therefore an example of ethnography of the State⁴, completed with a gender perspective on the Nation and the State⁵.

NWC meetings in Nyagatare districts

I attended 12 meetings of the NWC which took place in the sectors of Rukomo and Gatunda, in Nyagatare district and in Kigali. The structure of those meetings have always been the same: after singing some songs in praise of the RPF and President Kagame, the meeting is usually been opened with a prayer. Roll call and scoldings to the latecomers follow. The assemblies are directed by the leaders of NWC: in 4 cases they had been led by the coordinator of the sector (Chantal), who was visiting the cells’ committee of the sector; in one case, it was the monthly assembly at the cell level; I also attended two ordinary sector-level assemblies (Rukomo and Gatunda), one general meeting of the sector before the presidential elections, one meeting of the sector leaders with the coordinator and vice coordinator of the NWC district level, one meeting of the regional leaders with the district leaders and

⁴ See SHARMA A. – GUPTA A. (eds), *The anthropology of the State: a reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

⁵ See YUVAL-DAVIS N., *Gender & Nation*, London, Sage Publications, 1997

one meeting at the national level in Kigali. In most cases the meetings were organized to welcome the visits of higher level leaders, doing their *descents au terrain* to meet grassroots leaders. Very often they took place near the administrative offices (on the grass in front of the cell offices or in the shadows of the trees near the sector offices). When higher level leaders were coming, women gathered indoor, in halls borrowed from the hospitals or from the Church.

All these meetings were held with organizational/practical purposes: planning awareness campaigns against gender based violence, organizing the celebration day of the rural woman, collecting money to build houses for poor women, distributing funds among the leaders and so on. In addition, those meetings were also a place to train and inform women leaders about the national priorities on gender issues.

In those spaces, the medical discourse mingles with the reproductive one, the political discourse with the agricultural one, discourses on development cross that on reconciliation and so on. The most recurrent topics in leaders' speech are the following:

- 1) Political participation and the necessity for a broader involvement of women in politics;
- 2) Gender based violence and the need to encourage people to report cases of domestic violence to the police;
- 3) Hygiene. This is one of the central topic in the NWC assemblies. Periodical visits are made house to house to verify the cleanliness inside and outside the building, to check if women sweep or wash dishes and sheets. Leaders are also taught about personal hygiene with explicit references to the body in all its part, even the most intimate ones.
- 4) Conjugal duties and morality: from doing housework (cooking, cleaning husbands' clothes, taking care of the children) to satisfying all husband's sexual desires. At the same time a woman must avoid drinking in public and going to the bars. Women's infidelity and drunkenness are highly condemned, while the male ones are more tolerated.
- 5) Reproductive health: every woman should preferably have a maximum of three children. All women know (and most of them use) contraceptive methods (especially injections and norplant). Sometimes the assembly is just a place to discuss the effectiveness and problems caused by the different methods.
- 6) Cooperative groups: creating associative small groups following the national directives is strongly recommended as the only possible way to access money and to develop the country. Most of the times leaders spur the women to create small female associations even when the women already have alternative sources of individual income.

For example, in Gahurura cell local NWC leaders put together a small group of women supposed to learn how to weave traditional baskets (ibiseke). They gathered three times in august 2009 and the local leaders even called the radio and the journalists to publicize this project. But the enthusiasm drained

away very quickly and after one month no woman was still attending the weekly training. Most of the families in Gahurura own ricefields and sell the crops to CODERVAM (Mutara Valleys Rice Growing Development Cooperative) and they soon realized that working individually in the ricefield could produce more money than acquiring a traditional skill;

7) Women's membership in RPF, which is a duty of every "developed woman" since RPF and President Kagame are presented as the real responsible for the betterment of their position;

8) Raising awareness on the laws and institutions that protect women, such as civil marriage, registration of children, registration of land, law on GBV, and law on matrimonial regimes, liberalities and successions...

9) Reconciliation, which is often tackled through active and practical actions. For example in 2009 the leader of the sector visited all the cells in Rukomo in order to collect money to buy corrugated iron for the roofing of an old tutsi survivor lady.

Usually the meeting is directed by one (maximum two) leader. The tone is very formal, speaking turns are followed. The speaker usually stands in front of the group or sits on a chair, while the others are sitting on the grass. There is always a fixed agenda.

Every speaker has her own style but all in all they have a soldierly tone and they are far from embodying the calm, sweetness and shyness expected from good Rwandan wives. The leader of Rukomo sector, for example, speaks while walking back and forth, with her hands on her back, and looking above her glasses at the public with a challenging gaze. She fills her speech with rhetorical questions and slogans to which women answer with little enthusiasm:

Leader: *abadamu, abadamu!*

Ladies! Ladies!

Women: *imbaraga z'igihugu!*

The force of the country

Leader: *intore ntiganya*

An intore⁶ has no fear

Women: *ishaka isubizo*

he looks for a solution

⁶ *Intore* means the chosen one. Originally the *intore* were young noble men living at the royal court, where they were trained in the art of war, sports, music and dances. The term now refers both to traditional Kinyarwanda dance groups and (as it's our case) to patriots (identified de facto with RPF supporters).

Chantal: *ababyeyi bu Rwanda*
Parents of Rwanda
Women: *turvamabariye impumbya*
Let's put on the *impumbya*⁷

The tone which is used to address those women is the same as the one used by officials in military exercises:

Leaders: You are pathetic. To create cooperatives is the program of the State. And you? What are you doing with the forces of the State (i.e. the women)? You disperse them, you separate them, while it is said that "those who join together"...

Women: "are never stuck in complex situation"

Leaders often spur the women to be behind each other as soldiers, to help the people they meet as soldiers do in the annual army week.

The public doesn't often react. Most of the times they answer the questions asked by the speakers ("what does it mean family planning?" or "what have you done so far to develop your village?"). Only at the end of the meeting a short time is left for the public to freely ask questions about what they didn't understand or about how to solve their own domestic problems.

Repertoires from which the speakers draw upon are three:

- 1) Kinyarwanda: especially proverbs, among which it's worth recalling those related to women and femininity like "umugore n'umutima w'urugo" "wife is the hearth of the family" or images like the *impumbya* and so on.
- 2) Agriculture: especially leaders of the cell/sector level use images drawn upon agricultural work related to femininity: women are those who dig in the field and plant the seeds. This means that women are the primary food providers and that the development of the country must firstly pass through them.
- 3) Christianity: women are often associated to the Virgin Mary and are presented as icons of piety, faith, devotion and love. For this reason, they are requested to work for the country, to devote themselves to it.
- 4) Development: the repertory related to Western rhetoric typical of participatory development projects is by far the widest. Working in group, opening bank accounts, saving money, digging and planting seeds in line, taking part as women in the *umuganda*⁸ once a week, have become the set of rules

⁷ *Impumbya* was a traditional talisman the wives used to wear when their husbands left for war.

⁸ Collective work,

par excellence that each citizen (and especially leaders) must follow to perform his/her own civic duty. Accountability and participation are the key words of nowadays citizenship.

From the analysis of some expressive forms used by the leaders during NWC assemblies, it is possible to highlight some points of the discursive construction of the State itself:

- The first is related to the use of English language. The speeches are almost integrally held in kinyarwanda except some idiomatic expression or words in French or English. The use of French and especially English increases progressively at the higher administrative levels and this can easily be explained through the idea of symbolic capital and of language legitimacy⁹: in a particular historical and social context, a whole of linguistic practices is associated to authority and is considered as legitimate, while others are automatically subordinated to it. Language therefore brings along traces of the political and social structure in which it is embedded¹⁰.

The case of English, which has been steadily gaining foothold in the country by gradually replacing French as the first official language, is easily understandable through Bordieu's theory of legitimacy. It is the language of the elites, represented by the tutsi returnees from Uganda among whom President Kagame. It is spoken in all governmental offices and ministries and, since 2009, the year of Rwanda's entrance in East African Community, it has become the language of education from Primary School to University. Managing to speak it properly is a sign of status. The fact that even grassroots leaders try to use idiomatic expression and some English words (without actually speaking or understanding the language) is a sign of the actual social structure of Rwandan society with the Anglophone returnees on the top.

- The second aspect considered is related to the use of rhetorical questions, slogans and a soldierly tone together with the discipline and formalism that characterize the oratory of these women's leaders. Rwanda of today is first of all a State re-founded by the victory of the RPF, an ex rebel group turned into a political party. Officials and members of the army are still powerful. Moreover, demobilized soldiers are scattered throughout the country and the army is often involved in civil duties, such as the annual army week, during which soldiers visit all the regions of the country and assist local communities in building houses, putting infrastructures in place or offering free medical services. The intimidating side of the army is therefore counterbalanced with a welfare attitude and an involvement in development and humanitarian assistance. Military education is part of every Rwandan's life: local leaders, teachers, ex soldiers, prisoners, returnees, students before starting university, must undergo

⁹ See BOURDIEU P., *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1991.

¹⁰ See SWIGART L., *The Limits of Legitimacy: Language Ideology and Shift in Contemporary Senegal*, *Current Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, X, 1, pp. 90-130.

ingando, the so-called solidarity camps in which people are taught nationalism, civic education and Rwandan history for weeks or months¹¹. There, they also receive military training.

Militarization of society and the normalization of it have promoted the spreading of attitudes, expressions and self-techniques inspired by the military imagery. After all, the teleological model that the leaders seek to realize in their conduct as State agents is represented by the President Kagame, himself an ex RPF official during the war of liberation. Women's leaders oratory mirrors Kagame's speeches addressed to the local leaders, whose accounts of president's *descents au terrain* reveal a mixture of admiration for his rigorousness and fear to be removed from office.

The influence of a militarized culture on the oratory of local women's leaders adds further elements to the explanation of the high formalism that characterizes the assemblies.

Bloch¹² argued that the formality of speech inevitably reduces the quantity of information that can be transmitted, impoverishing communication. On the other hand, what formalism aims at is actually reinforcing power relations by clearly defining who can speak and what can be said, including and excluding people from the floor. Those power differentials become evident when the code is not respected, as the following paragraph will demonstrate.

- Finally, some considerations on moments of silence and embarrassment allow us to further proceed in the analysis of the discursive construction of the State. Embarrassment here is considered not only as the consequence of the violation of situated interaction rules¹³ but as a sign of the unveiling of the social inequalities and on which the power of the State is built.

I will give an example. During an NWC meeting at the cell level which I attended, a widow took the floor and began questioning NWC coordinator's authority, delegitimizing her actions so far and accusing her of embezzlement of women's funds. After those accusations all women in the public began grumbling. The accused leader didn't even try to defend herself, she kept silent while visibly worried, almost paralyzed. No one answered back and the meeting was interrupted without replying to the woman's accusations. I initially thought that the woman had actually revealed a scandal and that the accused leader lacked arguments to defend herself. The situation became clear only after the explanation of the NWC cell leader in charge of social affair, who unveiled the ethnic dimension of the conflict: the accuser was a tutsi woman, survivor of the genocide, while the leader was a hutu. The coordinator preferred to be silent instead of risking to be accused of genocidal ideology according to the law 18/2008, whose definition of the crime is so wide that many people actually fear reacting

¹¹ See MGBAKO C., *Ingando Solidarity Camps: Reconciliation and Political Indoctrination in Post-Genocide Rwanda*, Harvard Human Rights Journal, 18, 2005.

¹² See BLOCH M., *Political language and oratory in traditional society*, Academic press, London, New York, San Francisco, 1975.

¹³ See GOFFMAN E., *The presentation of the Self in everyday life*, Anchor, Garden city, New York, 1959.

publicly against survivors, even if the matter of the discussion has nothing to do with ethnicity or genocide.

In this case, an accurate analysis of the moments of silence on the public scene and of public embarrassment may reveal the inequalities in the distribution of the power of expression, by unveiling ethnical dynamics still active, while not verbally and explicitly expressed. The ban of the ethnical categories from the public discourse has not completely erased their power of structuring the distribution of power both in terms of posts (the majority of women's leaders at the higher levels are tutsi returnees) and of access to the symbolic capital represented by free expression during public assemblies.

Who are women's leaders?

The speakers have different life histories and different background especially according to the administrative level considered. At the cell level, for example, all the leaders come from families of average peasants (or small traders or teachers). All these women finished primary school and the majority attended at least 3 years of secondary school. All of them have land: while they present themselves as peasants, most of them do not directly work on land but hire workers to dig in their fields. They have all joined one or more cooperatives and attended some training given by the State or NGOs. They all have a bank account. Their difference from the other women is visible also through the clothes they wear (tailored *pagnes* or western t-shirts and long skirts) and their hairstyle (treated smoothed hair, wigs). They are conscious to be part of a small local female elite, together with the low-level civil servants (public servants and the teachers). Their reputation is ambiguous: on one hand they are admired and are highly regarded by the family of peasants and the common rural people, on the other their worth is also lessened by the rural rich population (traders or landholders) who blame their unpaid job/devotion to the State. The owner of the biggest bar in Rukomo once told me: "you see, to devote yourself to the development of the country means having no time to develop yourself and your household". Most of the leaders share the same idea, as one cell leader once told me " I want to quit because I don't get anything and I cannot work for my family". Despite all the rhetoric about the leaders' voluntary and disinterested commitment for the development of the State and women's complains about lack of salary, becoming a leader is actually one of the few ways through which rural people can access the basic skills to start climbing the social ladder, at least locally. Entering the NWC means receiving some training about how to access public funds for women, how to use a computer, how to constitute a cooperative, how to maximize crops: if properly applied, these skills can bring in money and indirectly help to increase the women's families' wealth. Even if they rarely receive money, those women can take advantage of a wider social and symbolical capital.

The access to these leadership positions is regulated through elections occurring every five years. Direct elections are held at the cell level, where every Rwandan woman aged more than 18 is called to vote. The committees at the sector, district, region and State level are indirectly elected. Several leaders (both at the cell and at the State level) declared that they did not actually put themselves forward as candidates but that they had been designated as such by the population under the suggestions of the local authorities. The feeling was that of having been appointed more than elected. Most of them expressed the impossibility of rejecting the offered post because it would have meant rejecting civil duties and patriotism.

Women's leaders as new political subjects

Provided with a new power, having new resources at their disposals, and allowed to enter typically male spaces, NWC leaders nevertheless seem to be very limited in their discourses and actions by the State. This fact pushed several critics of Kagame's regime (but also scholars¹⁴) to question effective power in the hands of women and the democracy of these female institutions.

Instead of further developing this point, I argue that first of all, these assemblies put on the stage the contradiction of what Foucault called "the paradox of subjectification"¹⁵: the conditions that assured the subordination of a subject are those which enable him to become a self aware agent. Drawing also on the foucauldian notion of ethics¹⁶ allows us to better grasp the paradox. Ethics must not be seen only as an Idea universally valid, but as a set of practices, techniques and discourses through which an individual transforms him/herself in order to reach a moral defined state of being, of truth or of happiness. This means that the subject does not build him/herself in a prometeic, voluntaristic or autonomous manner, but "within the limits of a historically specific set of formative practices and moral injunctions that are delimited in advance, what Foucault characterizes as modes of subjectivation"¹⁷.

The political objective of these ethics is one: the development of the country. To reach this target, local leaders must respect actual "holy books" of contemporary Rwanda, among whom there are the annual plans, written to honor the Vision 2020¹⁸, itself written according to the Millennium Development Goals. These documents delineate the target which should be reached by each

¹⁴ See BURNET J. E., *Gender balance and the meanings of women in governance in post-genocide Rwanda*, «African Affairs», CVII, 428, pp. 361-386. See also LONGMAN T., *Rwanda: achieving equality or serving an authoritarian State?*, in BRITTON H. E. – BAUER G. (eds), *Women in African Parliaments*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 133-150.

¹⁵ See FOUCAULT M., *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon, 1980. See also BUTLER J., *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London, Routledge, 1993.

¹⁶ See MAHMOOD S., *Politics of piety: the islamic revival and the feminist subject*, Princeton, princeton university press 2005.

¹⁷ MAHMOOD S., *Politics...*, p.28.

¹⁸ This is Rwandan government development program which fixed the objectives that the country is supposed to reach in 2020.

administrative level: birthrate, mortality rate, literacy rate and so on. Good results reached so far in the country are ascribed to the good governance identified with the RPF and its leader Paul Kagame.

These women have become the central subjects of the new form of biopolitical governmentality of nowadays Rwanda that aims at governing the lives and the bodies of the citizens, by crafting a new model of citizenship, based on gender (women) and on age (the youth)¹⁹ which is supposed to substitute the old one based on ethnicity (and autochthony).

The reasons for stressing gender as the new basis for citizenship are the followings:

- 1) Being a woman is seen as a natural condition: it is believed that *women are born, not made* both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. This is radically opposed to the nowadays official conception of ethnic categories, whose historicity and artificiality have been acknowledged by the political discourse which endorsed a simplified version of the academic hypothesis of the ethnic groups as “historically invented entities”²⁰;
- 2) Women moreover embody also the trans-ethnic potential expressed by marriage, a union between two lineages ritually sanctioned through long-term exchanges (money, cows, beer);
- 3) Global legitimacy of the “gendered citizenship projects” since Beijing 1995;
- 4) As we have seen, the power of Rwandan State explicitly strives to reach also the most intimate spheres of everyone’s life: it aims at controlling daily diet, daily body hygiene, the cleanness of the house, thoughts and feelings. To do this, it aims at crafting those subjects more associated to the domestic sphere: finally, we can say that women’s NWC leaders don’t actually leave the domestic sphere to enter the public one. Rather, they are called to openly bring the domestic in the public. Power, in doing so, shapes domestic sphere through the subjects who populate it, reducing the border with the public one to the extent that it becomes impossible to separate them.
- 5) In general, the whole system of local politics is almost managed by leaders who look more like development agents (or technical implementers of national programs) than politicians *tout court*. NWC leaders, as women, a group traditionally excluded from politics, further contribute to a process of depoliticization²¹ from inside the political sphere. A State which discursively constructs itself through a rhetoric based on the self-evident necessity of development and reconciliation, finds in women’s leaders the depoliticizing subject *par excellence*, supposed to deal with “small domestic things” which can be included in the technical developmental sphere or in the moral humanitarian one²².

¹⁹ Even the youth have their own Council, called National Youth Council (NYC).

²⁰ See AMSELLE J. – M’BOKOLO E., *Au Coeur de l’ethnie. Ethnies, tribalisme et état en Afrique*, Paris, La Découverte, 1985.

²¹ See FERGUSON J., *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

²² See FASSIN D., *La raison humanitaire : une histoire morale du temps présent*, Gallimard, Paris, 2010.

Those women may appear to be as puppets at the mercy of State power, which uses them to construct itself and to remove any political content of this process at the same time, following Foucault's statement "power is tolerable only when a good deal of its workings are concealed"²³. However, even in this case of authoritarian and pervasive power, attention paid to the ethnographical details allows us to detect some practices of resistance in the form of "hidden transcript", i.e. "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders"²⁴.

For example, during one assembly in Rukomo I could assist to the indirect expression of discontent of the majority of hutu women when the leader of the sector was trying to convince them to contribute to the purchasing of corrugated iron for the roofing of survivors' houses. Several women did not bring the money when expected. When a tutsi survivor took the floor and started scolding those who were not contributing, some women started grumbling and expressing their discontent with non verbal language (by doing "tsk tsk") and mumbling phrases in a whisper such as "so what? The State has not just killed the tutsi and they haven't given us anything". Their discontent was evident, but it has never been expressed following the formal expected code, by taking the floor and answering back to the lady. Several times I noticed groups of women criticizing decisions taken by the assembly while never exposing themselves during the meeting. Or women coming deliberately late, in order to filibuster the meeting; hiding in the banana plantation, to avoid being called back. However, instead of romanticizing these sporadic manifestations of resistance, I think it is more useful to consider them not as an expression of an assumed agency of those subjects, but as a sign of the authoritarian nature of Rwandan State power. The only possible forms of resistance are either hidden transcript located in the interstices between consciousness and unconsciousness or diaspora movements operating outside the country (in Europe or in the neighboring African countries).

Conclusions:

Women's leaders complain about the lack of appreciation for their daily unpaid work, for the lack of budget for activities or for the disregard shown by other leaders. A feeling of discouragement about the efficiency of the institution as well as the impression of being neglected by the authorities that really matter, is present in all the interviews collected, especially at the local level (cell and sector). However, when analyzing the Rwandan discursive construction of the Rwandan State, women are far from being second rate leaders, but become the hearth of the big project of biopolitical engineering inaugurated by post-genocide government.

²³ See FOUCAULT M., *La volonté de savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976.

²⁴ See SCOTT J.C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, London, Yale University Press, 1990, p. 4.

Photos:



1) meeting at the cell level (cell executive secretary is speaking)



2) meeting at the sector level. NWC coordinator is speaking.



3) dances to open NWC cell meeting.



5) Executive secretary of the cell is speaking.



6) Dances before starting



7) Executive secretary of the sector came to meet women.



8) NWC coordinator at the sector level waiting for women coming (they are all late)



9) Cell level NWC leader writing down the agenda.