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Abstract

This thesis addresses how government in Rwanda plays out in practice and how it affects lived experiences of state power and citizenship. Two decades after the genocide, Rwanda has come to be associated both with security, development, and stability, on the one hand, and with state repression and coercion, on the other. In 2007, a nationwide programme was launched to teach all Rwandans about the politically dominant vision of the model Rwandan citizen – an ideal that is today pursued through remote trainings camps, local village trainings, and everyday forms of government.

The thesis is based on ten months of anthropological research in Rwanda, oriented around three ethnographic spaces: the life and workings of the Itorero training sites, the voices of two dozen Rwandans living in Kigali, and the daily government of a local neighbourhood in Kigali.

The findings highlight how certain government practices in Rwanda engender in people experiences of being exposed to the state's power and violent potential. As such, they represent an authoritarian mode of rule, reproduced through the way experiences of exposure guide everyday actions and behaviour vis-à-vis the state. The thesis starts from the Foucauldian assumption that all relations of power depend on the acceptance and agency of both those holding power and those who relate to themselves as their subjects. In Rwanda, the terms of acceptance are partly grounded in local social realities. Personal memories of mass violence, for example, justify for many the state's tight social control. Such memories are also actively nurtured by the government itself, by associating the loosening of state

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control with the risk of renewed violence. Furthermore, in light of Rwanda's attraction of foreign aid, authoritarian rule needs to be understood in relation to international terms of acceptance, which are embedded in liberal understandings of good, or at least good enough, governance.