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# ‘Manufacturing’ Resilience through Cooperatives in the ‘Global South’: The Case of Post-genocide Rwanda

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# ‘Manufacturing’ resilience through cooperatives in the ‘Global South’: the case of post-genocide Rwanda

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**Abstract**

The genocide of the Tutsis resulted in countless psychic and tangible destructions. It has quickly proved necessary for the government to resume a new emancipatory development. The aim of this research is to highlight the fact that agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda are an instrument for the implementation of a major political project and thus, an instrument of resilience. Moreover, it emphasizes the power relations characterizing the Rwandan reconstruction process. Previous studies have focused on reconstruction (Dushimirimana et al., 2014; Musahara, 2012) – especially, the reconstruction of widows (Kappus, 2012) – and reconciliation (Sanchez Bajo, 2019) enabled by cooperatives after the genocide. Furthermore, the resilience of cooperatives in crisis situations has already been examined (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Francesconi et al., 2021). The literature has conceptualized resilience as the ability of an entity to face a shock, a trauma, or a crisis, to adapt to it, and to continue to function. Thus, resilience is considered to be a potential that each individual or entity supposedly has and that may only be achieved under certain conditions. Nevertheless, there is a gap in the literature as to the way Rwandan cooperatives are actively tackling the various crises affecting them which constitute serious challenges to cooperative life. Moreover, no research has analysed the ‘manufacturing’ of the resilience process and the chains of social interactions – characterized by power relations – that lead to its existence. Therefore, this research focuses on the Rwandan resilience process and the power relations within it. The analysis of thirty semi-structured interviews and several official documents – from a neo-institutional, socio-anthropological, and political economy perspective – revealed that the resilience process initiated by the government can only be fully understood when the power relations at work – including the role of international institutions in this process and the ‘resistances’ developed by farmers – are taken into consideration.

## 1. Introduction

Cooperatives are voluntary groupings of people aiming to meet common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a collective and democratically managed enterprise (ICA, 2019). They are therefore seen as an important means of reducing poverty, providing access to employment, and improving decent work for people with limited capital (United

Nations [1], n.d.1; UN, n.d.2). For this reason, they have been strongly promoted in 'developing countries' as an important tool for socio-economic development capable of resolving the economic difficulties of populations, particularly the poorest (Touré, 2021).

In Africa, until the 1980s, cooperatives were mainly used by the colonial and post-colonial State as a tool for organizing production in the service of a commercial strategy (ICA, 2019; Mukantagwera, 2010). Nevertheless, the crisis of the structural adjustment plans brought a new trend to the fore: despite numerous attempts by the State (Niyonkuru, 2014) or economic actors, cooperatives have turned towards local needs, adapting their organisation and operation to their own requirements [Member of a training NGO]. Beyond the issue of poverty, cooperatives have also been recognized in Africa for the role they could play in reconciliation and reconstruction after conflicts or natural disasters and, more generally, for their resilience in the face of crises (Kappus, 2012; Sanchez Bajo, 2019). Cooperatives are therefore important spaces that contribute to the resolution of multiple crises in 'developing countries' (and particularly, in Africa). In these contexts, they are recognized as effective instruments for promoting resilience.

This article aims to understand the relationship between cooperatives and resilience in situations of 'compound crisis' in the 'Global South'. We consider a compound crisis to be a crisis that occurs in a context where people are continually living with chronic violence and vulnerability (Pearce, 2007). In such contexts, any crisis constitutes an additional risk for populations and is likely to worsen their conditions (Baird, 2020). This article uses the case of Rwanda to understand the role of cooperatives as a factor of resilience in these contexts of compound crisis. It aims to understand the meaning, mechanics, uses, and effects of resilience based on the way it is understood in and from cooperatives.

Resilience is generally defined in social science literature as the capacity or potential of an entity (person, family, group, or institution) to cope with a shock, trauma, or crisis, to adapt to it, and to continue to function despite it. A more critical perspective considers resilience to be a tool for justifying and maintaining the neoliberal order (Joseph, 2013; Vignet, 2021).

In this context, Rwanda has proved to be particularly conducive to studies on resilience – given the multiple crises it had to manage. More recently, Rwanda's resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic has been examined (Francesconi et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2022), but the vast majority

[1] UN

has focused on the resilience of women (Militery et al., 2013; Zraly et al., 2013) or children (Dushimirimana et al., 2014) after the Tutsi genocide.

As for the literature on the relationship between resilience and cooperatives, it has raised the question of resilience in cooperatives from the perspective of the effects of crises, particularly economic crises (Allen & Maghimbi, 2009; Carini & Carpita, 2014; Fusco & Migliaccio, 2019). Other literature has examined cooperative resilience in crisis situations (Benbihi & Lahfidi, 2021; Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Francesconi et al., 2021).

However, there has been no research examining how a resilience process can be triggered on a large scale through cooperatives in crisis contexts. In other words, we know that, in these contexts, external (state or international) interventions aimed at building cooperatives assume that the population possesses a capacity that the interventions would *activate* to help improve their living conditions. Nevertheless, this hypothesis has not led to the question of whether these interventions do not have the effect of 'manufacturing' the capacities which they claim simply to activate. Similarly, much attention has been paid in the literature to the critical evaluation of resilience interventions. However, very little attention has been paid to the tensions and power relations characterizing the 'manufacturing' of the resilience process through interventions within cooperatives.

Our fieldwork on cooperatives in Rwanda highlighted the fact that external interventions in cooperatives often impose frames of reference and actions that are not primarily aimed at activating members' ability to deal with the crisis on their own. On the contrary, they tend to create new subjectivities, i.e., to construct new ways of seeing and doing. Moreover, our research has shown that the development and implementation of these interventions are shaped by power relations. It has highlighted the actors' agency regarding these frames of reference and actions. It is through this agency that we can understand the interventions which tend to build resilience within cooperatives as a process of negotiation. These processes of imposition and negotiation of intervention in relation to resilience demonstrate the need to rethink the concept of resilience. This led us to pose the following research question:

*To what extent do the dynamics, tensions, and power relations at work in external interventions within cooperatives in contexts of compound crisis make it possible to understand resilience as a process of negotiation that tends to create new subjectivities?*

Based on the Rwandan context, this article argues that, in situations where cooperatives are trying to play a role in compound crises, resilience is necessarily a process that is shaped by interactions between actors. It is an effect of negotiation and tension between several arenas formed by power relations in which various actors with certain resources and particular interests 'clash'.

To support this argument about the 'manufacturing' of resilience in post-genocide rural Rwanda, we will present the case study we carried out in three agricultural cooperatives [2] located in two provinces (and two districts) close to Kigali – using an inductive, socio-anthropological approach and a neo-institutional, comprehensive, and political economy analytical frameworks. The data were collected using a variety of methods: thirty unstructured and semi-structured interviews with members and workers close to the cooperative movement (officials, local administrators, members of training NGOs, donor representatives, project managers, engineers, etc.), participant observation, and documentary research. This research device was deployed during the summer of 2022.

In the following sections, we develop: (a) the dichotomous perspective of resilience, which offers a third way of thinking about this concept; (b) the cooperative movement in Rwanda, its frame of reference imposed on cooperatives, and the reactions of members; (c) considerations on the 'manufacturing' of resilience in Rwanda based on the case of cooperatives.

## 2. From a dichotomous perspective on resilience to a third way

With the death of more than 500,000 people in just three months, the 'last genocide of the 20th century' which 'was exceptional in terms of its scale, speed and modus operandi' (Reyntjens, 2021, p.5), resulted in countless (psychological and tangible) destructions. It quickly became necessary for the ruling power to transform the country, to 'emerge from a deeply unsatisfactory social and economic situation' (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning [3], 2000, p.4), and to initiate a resilience process by adopting a large-scale strategic programme: *Vision 2020*.

[2] For several reasons, agricultural cooperatives are particularly interesting and strategic to study this subject. Firstly, as they provide a hierarchical structure that is present throughout the country and as the rules governing their functioning depend on national (and international) directives, cooperatives are an important conduit for implementing policies. Several researchers have already highlighted the fact that agricultural cooperatives can be a tool for implementing the Green Revolution (Huggins, 2013; Nyenyezi Bisoka, 2020), and therefore the economic development. Moreover, agriculture is Rwanda's most important sector of activity.

[3] MINECOFIN

The cooperatives were/are an instrument of resilience, of implementation of the *Vision* imagined shortly after the genocide.

The concept of resilience first appeared in material science in 1807 but was soon applied in a wide range of fields. Considering our case study, we have chosen to focus on resilience in social sciences.

Psychology was one of the first social science disciplines to mobilise this concept. According to psychologists, resilience can concern an individual, a family, a community, or even a society (Anaut, 2005; Koffi & Dubois, 2018). Studies in psychology/psychiatry seem to focus primarily on the resilience of individuals or families. Overall, research defines resilience as 'the capacity to resist traumatic situations, to overcome them (...) in order to rebuild oneself to live better (rebound)' (Koffi & Dubois, 2018, p.322). In this context, it has been shown that, depending on its quality, the emotional attachment can be a factor of protection (or, on the contrary, of vulnerability) (Anaut, 2005; Delage, 2004; Nillus, 2018). The security provided by emotional attachment enables individuals to cope with the difficulties and traumas they will face in life, to overcome them, and to assimilate new skills (Michallet, 2009; Nillus, 2018).

On a larger scale, the concept of resilience has been addressed in socio-ecology. Socio-ecological systems (SES) are based on interactions between the cultural and institutional arrangements of a society (or a group) and its environment. Indeed, a society relies on its environment by transforming it into resources that it can use, and the cultural and institutional arrangements determine the way the environment is exploited and mediate interactions. (Aligica & Tarko, 2014) Therefore, many authors consider that it is essential to think about social and ecological systems together (as linked) to truly understand resilience. In this context, the resilience of a SES is generally defined as its ability to persist in its current state of functioning while facing disruption and change, to adapt to future challenges, and to transform itself to improve its functioning (Adger, 2006; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Based on these disciplines and to better understand what resilience is, we established a typology. Individual and family resilience are, as we have seen, broadly approached by psychology. Although some authors argue that resilience can be understood as a capacity, as a process, or as an outcome (Michallet, 2009), we consider that this distinction is not relevant –

resilience is always more or less considered as a capacity, a potential that each individual or entity could have, and which would only be realized under certain conditions.

On a larger human scale, social (or community) resilience is generally defined as a society's capacity to 'absorb' shocks, to cope with crises that disrupt its social cohesion by anticipating (social, economic, or environmental) threats (Koffi & Dubois, 2018). In this context, social resilience is approached from two main perspectives. On the one hand, studies attempt to shed light on the way communities (sometimes countries [Boutin et al., 2018]) try to cope with various crises (Braun-Lewensohn & Mosseri Rubin, 2014; Grard et al., 2021; Rockström, 2004). On the other hand, researchers propose to 'strengthen the resilience' of a human group (Cashman, 2011; Endfield, 2007; Rockström, 2004) to combat a threat (which is often environmental).

Other research discusses local resilience. On the one hand, local resilience has come to the fore in governance studies, in disaster management – particularly in the context of developing measures to deal with emergencies (environmental disasters, terrorist attacks, etc.) (Shaw & Maythorne, 2012). On the other hand, the literature seems to link local resilience to community resilience (Pezzi & Urso, 2017; Shaw, 2012): then, researchers identify the way community resilience can be strengthened in the face of a crisis or look at the way communities (such as cities) cope.

Local and socio-ecological resilience leads us to consider institutional resilience. It is generally approached in two ways. Firstly, the resilience of a particular institution can be examined. In this context, researchers look at the capacity of an institution to self-organise by developing dynamic skills to adapt to a crisis/shock, to mitigate its effects, and to cope with consequences while taking advantage of the 'opportunities' that may emerge. Secondly, institutions are analysed as (active) parts of a resilient (socio-ecological) system (Aligica & Tarko, 2014; Ostrom et al., 2002). This perspective encourages us to study the adaptation processes by which societies transform their institutions in the face of new challenges or crises (rather than focusing on states of equilibrium). Therefore, the institutional dimension becomes central to assessing the long-term resilience of a society (Aligica & Tarko, 2014) and, more generally, of a socio-ecological system.

From a more critical perspective, researchers have emphasized that the concept of resilience is supporting a neoliberal project. In this context, the injunction to demonstrate resilience serves

the market logic by insisting on the need to adapt to a world that is 'beyond our control'. Therefore, resilience is a means of maintaining and justifying the existing neoliberal order. (Joseph, 2013; Vignet, 2021)

As resilience, cooperatives are nowadays the subject of numerous studies. These tend to multiply in times of crisis (Carini & Carpita, 2014) – several researchers having highlighted that cooperatives are more resilient in times of crisis than traditional enterprises (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009; Narvaiza et al., 2017). A part of the literature focuses on the effects of crises, particularly economic crises, on cooperatives (Allen & Maghimbi, 2009; Carini & Carpita, 2014; Fusco & Migliaccio, 2019). Another part of the literature examines the resilience of cooperatives in times of crisis – in particular, economic crisis (Birchall & Ketilson, 2009) or health crisis (COVID-19) (Benbihi & Lahfidi, 2021; Francesconi et al., 2021) – or of daily threats they face (Yacoubi & Tourabi, 2020).

As we have already mentioned it, Rwanda is particularly conducive to studies on resilience. Although more recent researchers have investigated the Rwandan resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic (Francesconi et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2022), the vast majority has focused on the resilience of women (Militery et al., 2013; Zraly et al., 2013) or children (Dushimirimana et al., 2014) following the Tutsi genocide in 1994. Other studies have focused on reconstruction (Dushimirimana et al., 2014; Musahara, 2012) – especially, the reconstruction of widows (Kappus, 2012) – and reconciliation (Sanchez Bajo, 2019) enabled by cooperatives after the genocide.

This literature review has highlighted two main ways of considering resilience: as a potential or as a tool for maintaining the neoliberal order. In either case, the approaches simplify the situations studied, failing to understand – or even making invisible – the complexity of the dynamics at work. By linking this concept to cooperatives, we have seen that the literature has mainly studied the effects of crises on cooperatives or the resilience of cooperatives in crisis situations. Research on resilience in Rwanda has focused on the genocide, although some recent studies have looked at the Rwandan resilience to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thus, there has been no research examining how a resilience process can be triggered on a large scale through cooperatives in crisis contexts. Moreover, the literature has not considered the tensions and power relations characterizing the implementation of this resilience process. Our

aim will therefore be to make current thinking on resilience more complex by proposing a third (and finer) perspective and, moreover, to better understand how cooperatives can contribute to the pursuit of larger objectives related to reconciliation and reconstruction after conflicts or disasters.

# 3. The cooperative movement in Rwanda: from injunctions to reactions

The genocide of the Tutsis constitutes a milestone in Rwandan history: it resulted in countless psychological and tangible destructions. It quickly became necessary for the ruling power to transform the country, to 'emerge from a deeply unsatisfactory social and economic situation' (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.4), and to initiate a resilience process by adopting a large-scale strategic programme: *Vision 2020*. This *Vision* aims to rebuild the country, to 'construct a united and inclusive Rwandan identity' and to 'transform Rwanda's economy into a middle-income country' (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.6). To achieve these objectives, the authorities want to 'reduce the country's dependence on external aid' (p.6) through various strategies. To implement this programme, six major pillars and three cross-cutting issues ('touching upon most aspects of Rwandan society and comprising socio-political and economic aspects' [MINECOFIN, 2000, p.3]) have been identified.

Particularly, the Rwandan State wants to become more efficient by implementing the principle of good governance. Moreover, the transformation of agriculture is central to Rwanda's economic strategy – the idea being to turn it into a productive, market-oriented industry [4]. To achieve this objective, the Rwandan authorities are stressing the importance of developing infrastructure as well as the private sector (by connecting it regionally and internationally) through a range of measures. Furthermore, the government wants to 'invest' in its 'human resources' to create 'a knowledge-based economy' (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.4). Finally, science and technology, gender equality and the management of the environment and natural resources

[4] By developing Rwanda's most important sector of activity, and therefore the country's economy, the aim is to reduce poverty – a very important objective at international level (which is one of the Millennium Development Goals [MDG] and then, one of the Sustainable Development Goals [SDG]). This is even more obvious for the authorities to focus on the agricultural sector as it has been recognised that poverty particularly affects rural areas in low-income countries (MINAGRI, 2009; UN, n.d.1). The Rwandan government has based its decision on these observations, on several studies which have shown that 'agricultural growth is the most effective means of reducing rural and urban poverty' (MINAGRI, 2009, p.2), and on the job creation opportunities that this transformation of agriculture would provide (MINAGRI, 2009).

are objectives to be pursued which could, according to this document, contribute to the development of the main pillars of *Vision 2020*. (MINECOFIN, 2000)

The data gathered as part of this research highlights the fact that several of the objectives presented by *Vision 2020* are being implemented (at least partially) through agricultural cooperatives. Thus, in Rwanda, agricultural cooperatives provide a hierarchical structure that is present throughout the country to implement a political programme on a national scale and a larger project than it might first appear. From this set of measures, ensue norms and injunctions – related to several areas – that the population is supposed to respect. Local administrators are then responsible for ensuring the respect of these rules.

> 'If you join a cooperative, you agree to abide by the decisions made by the cooperative - which themselves depend on higher levels of authority.' [Official, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI)]

We will see, however, that these injunctions are negotiated between actors. [5]

## *3.1. Norms and injunctions given to agricultural cooperatives*

Nowadays, Rwanda is considered as one of the most successful countries of the Green Revolution. As a member of the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD), it is committed to the *Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme* (CAADP), whose overall objective is to 'boost agricultural growth, food security and rural development in Africa' (African Development Bank Group, n.d., para.1). In this context, the Rwandan authorities have taken various decisions to develop and increase the productivity of their agriculture: intensive monoculture in non-irrigated areas, multiplication and development of cooperatives throughout the country, performance contracts, etc. This approach has the

[5] It should be noted that from a 'human' perspective, as cooperatives are based on the group and on solidarity, they can play a 'pacifying' or 'unifying' role. Indeed, they can create or strengthen a central element in human resilience: the 'bond' (cf. attachment theory) (Anaut, 2005; Nillus, 2018).
This can be reinforced by the cooperative values and principles (ICA, n.d.). The principles contained in the law of 27 April 2021 governing cooperatives in Rwanda (Official Gazette, 2021) are identical to those promoted by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), with one exception: while the ICA (n.d.) tells us that 'cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their community by applying policies approved by their members' (para.12), the Rwandan law states that members must 'take into account the development of the community/population living in the vicinity of the where the cooperative carries out its activities' [Translation] (Official Gazette, 2021, p.25). Thus, the seventh cooperative principle has been revisited to emphasise the importance of cooperatives participating in the development of local communities: this objective concerns a larger part of the population. Therefore, agricultural cooperatives can help to recreate a certain national union (by creating or strengthening bonds).

advantage of enabling economies of scale, the implementation of international projects, the development of the Rwandan economy, the reduction of poverty, etc.

To support this project, several incentive measures have been implemented by public authorities and donors – including access to finance, low-cost fertilisers, training, irrigation systems, greenhouses, etc. Moreover, these mechanisms have the advantage of increasing the productivity of cooperatives. Simultaneously, constraints are implemented to encourage (if not coerce) membership in cooperatives: for example, conditions must be met to benefit from these incentive measures. Furthermore, as the Rwandan State owns the land, it reserves certain parts exclusively for cooperatives. Therefore, to retain their land rights, many farmers must join this type of structure. Thus, one of the fundamental principles of cooperatives – *voluntary and open membership* – has a very specific interpretation in Rwanda.

While the decisions relating to agriculture are primarily aimed at Rwanda's agricultural and economic development, they are moreover intended to reduce poverty in the country (cf. MDG & SDG 1) and eventually transform it into a middle-income country. Concomitantly, projects (linked to these objectives) are implemented by the government and various donors. These also aim to tackle climate change and its effects, guarantee food security for beneficiaries, and strengthen Rwandan value chains.

As we have already mentioned it, *Vision 2020* sets the objective of developing its '*human resources*'. The Rwandan government is clearly indicating its desire to achieve one of the eight MDGs – Universal Primary Education – but also to go further by educating and training 'people at all levels: primary, secondary, and tertiary, with special attention paid to the quality of education' (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.12). By training children and adults, its goal is to have a skilled workforce that will enable Rwanda to develop its various sectors of activity.
Thus, training courses punctuate the development of the cooperative movement in Rwanda and are a good way of giving it a uniform course of action throughout the country. Among the training courses provided to cooperatives, the various members of training NGOs we met explained that the two most important were on good governance and gender equality – both are necessary for 'the cooperative movement to function properly' [Member of a training NGO].
The aim of these training courses is to ensure that the cooperative works properly, to disseminate uniformly the logics and principles that are central to the successful implementation of the resilience process.

As already mentioned, gender equality is one of the cross-cutting areas of *Vision 2020*. More specifically, based on the principle that women represent the majority of the Rwandan population and play a major role in the (re)construction of society (particularly through agriculture and their role within the family), the authorities stress the need to offer them more opportunities and facilitate their access to positions of power – as advocated by UN Women. (MINECOFIN, 2000) To this end, *Vision 2020* plans for gender to be 'integrated as a cross-cutting issue in all development policies and strategies' (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.19). Moreover, the ruling power tries to establish a position of choice within the (Western and neo-liberal) world order by 'playing its game' and accelerating its 'development'. It is therefore in its interest to focus on women and their empowerment. In this context, training courses are a way of getting people to adopt a certain vision of gender relations (in line with international – Western – gender norms). Their aim is to show households what they can gain from it, so that they agree with these norms and public policies can be implemented in the way they have been designed [6]. Simultaneously, the Law of 27 April 2021 governing cooperatives in Rwanda (Official Gazette, 2021) imposes a 30% quota for women on the executive committees of cooperatives and aims to facilitate the establishment of women's cooperatives.

Overall, giving women – who represent a large proportion of the population – a bigger role can 'boost' the country's economy by building up a larger workforce and thus, reducing the country's dependence on external aid (as well as international pressure).

On a different subject, one of the UN's seventeen SDGs aims to 'ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' (UN, n.d.2, para. 1). To meet this goal, the United Nations specifies that everyone should benefit from universal health coverage. Rwanda is the country in sub-Saharan Africa with the highest rate of people covered by health insurance. It has particularly succeeded in covering the poorest people through community health insurance schemes (Chemouni, 2021). To reach this level, Rwanda has once again relied on its cooperative movement.

In 2007, Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) became compulsory for all citizens to increase the take-up rate. As Chemouni (2021) has pointed out, local administrators play a central role in the implementation of this health mutual scheme, as they are required to fulfil performance contracts.

[6] The same logic applies to projects implemented by donors (UN, International Monetary Fund, European Union, etc.).

> ‘Even though the CBHI is now compulsory, some people are still not members.’ [District Cooperative Officer]

Therefore, in addition to the fines and other types of practices employed by the local administrators, our case study has highlighted the fact that agricultural cooperatives have a role to play in getting members to join the system (‘more gently’). Although it is not necessarily stated in the cooperatives’ articles of association (because membership in CBHI is compulsory), being in a cooperative means that a part of a person's income is withheld to pay its CBHI contribution. Therefore, agricultural cooperatives are a tool for implementing mutual health insurance schemes and, more generally, for achieving international health objectives.

On another issue, in 2017, the Rwandan government established a long-term savings scheme: Ejo Heza. The aim of this scheme is to provide retirement and long-term savings for the entire Rwandan population (and, particularly, for people working in the informal sector, who are often excluded from this type of scheme) (Ministry of Local Government [7], 2021; MINECOFIN, 2020). The funds saved by the population can then be reinvested and used to promote the national economy by supporting domestic investment over the long term (MINECOFIN, 2020). Although this scheme is not compulsory, the authorities' aim is to extend it as far as possible: the MINALOC is asking local authorities to increase the number of Ejo Heza memberships (as quickly as possible) [8].

> ‘Ejo Heza is also part of the performance contracts that authorities have to fulfil. And they have to report on implementation.’ [Official, MINAGRI]

Moreover, although the long-term savings scheme is not compulsory, membership in an agricultural cooperative means that you must save for it.

> ‘For Ejo Heza, membership is normally free and voluntary. But in a cooperative, people are obliged (even if it's not written down) to join.’ [Official, MINAGRI]

As is the case for the payment of the social share or the CBHI contribution, a certain amount is deducted from the members’ income and constitutes their savings for Ejo Heza.

[7] MINALOC
[8] These are calculated on the basis of the individual’s harvests.

Ejo Heza pursues several objectives: the introduction of a savings culture among citizens, financial inclusion for everyone and 'universal access to pensions and social security' (RSSB, n.d., para. 2). More generally, the scheme is designed to ensure the country's 'economic growth' and 'poverty reduction' to 'achieve a higher standard of living' (RSSB, n.d., para. 2). Once again, we can see that the goals pursued through the long-term savings system are deeply linked to those defined in *Vision 2020* but also to international recommendations and objectives. For example, the first SDG aims to 'reduce (...) poverty' (UN, n.d.1, para.8) by 2030. For its part, the eighth SDG promoting 'sustained, shared and sustainable economic growth' (UN, n.d.3, para.1) (emphasising that this would improve the standard of living for everyone) highlights the need to 'achieve universal access to banking and financial services' (UN, n.d.3, para.23).

### *3.2. Reactions to the injunctions given to agricultural cooperatives*

These injunctions generate numerous reactions from cooperative members and managers.

Firstly, faced with compulsory monoculture, some farmers are adopting strategies to bend the rules by growing prohibited crops and 'leaking their harvests'.

> 'People sometimes use plots of land behind their homes to grow fruit and vegetables to which they don't have access through cooperatives. Some people also grow vegetables or onions, for example, by hiding them between plots of authorised crops.' [Official, MINAGRI]

As monoculture involves risks, a part of the cooperatives' land is used to grow crops other than those normally permitted. There are various reasons why farmers may resort to 'forbidden crops'. Firstly, monoculture creates dependence on fertilisers by making the soil infertile. While fertilisers are an important entry point for cooperatives, they moreover represent a major daily burden for farmers, who find it difficult to meet their needs. This difficulty can be compounded by poor harvests or late payments from customers. In both case, farmers suffer a drop in income that makes their situation even more precarious. Monoculture can therefore be dangerous, as it is not possible to feed oneself exclusively with one type of vegetable, nor to buy the necessary food at the market. Furthermore, numerous farmers deplore the lack of freedom which prevents them from realising less risky 'experiments' and reducing the risk of lacks, bartering, selling products more easily on the market, etc. Moreover, multicropping can ensure a certain degree of food security and the possibility to remove some crops to sell them at the market.

> ‘Vegetables are easy to sell at the market (you don’t sell them to major companies) and to eat at home (if you don’t sell, for example’ [Member, cooperative 3]

Secondly, cooperative members can refuse to participate in the life of the cooperative. Members’ shares and contributions to the CBHI and Ejo Heza are deducted from their income, which is calculated on the basis of their harvests. Nevertheless, some people do not want to be part of the cooperative and refuse to participate by continuing to cultivate the land they were on before the cooperative was created or by not returning their crops (from which their membership shares and contributions to the CBHI and Ejo Heza are deducted). They may then make arrangements with a member who has already paid their membership fees to entrust their harvests to the cooperative on their behalf and then, return the money to them. It should be noted that some people opt for the latter strategy when they lose confidence in the cooperative, after embezzlement or failure to communicate on the part of the cooperative leaders.

As far as gender equality standards are concerned, there has been resistance from both women and men to the gender standards promoted. Faced with these obstacles, the training courses (based on government directives) have had to evolve. As men were afraid of losing control of the situation and women ‘felt they were 'abandoning' their children with their husbands at home’ [Member of a training NGO], changes have had to be made to the way training courses are delivered.

> ‘We have now changed our methodology. To give this training more impact, we now invite both the man and the woman. We do the training together.’ [Member of a training NGO]

Overall, however changes have been observed: the women we meet, said that the men were looking after their children and doing more housework than before. According to them, this ‘advancement’ is motivated by the fact that they ‘bring something back’ [Group leader, cooperative 2] by working.

In this section, we highlighted the various reactions that the injunctions given to agricultural cooperatives provoke within them. Moreover, our data have emphasised the links between these norms and more global objectives (included in *Vision 2020*) – the latter also being globally connected to standards promoted at higher levels of power.

By examining the reactions to these injunctions (and the rationale behind them), we demonstrated that, to understand how cooperatives really work, it is essential to consider the way people use these normative frameworks.

## 4. 'Manufacturing' resilience

The literature review has highlighted the fact that resilience is generally defined as the capacity or potential of an entity to cope with a shock, trauma, or crisis, to adapt to it and to continue to function despite it. A more critical perspective considers the concept or resilience to be an instrument for justifying and maintaining the neoliberal order (Joseph, 2013; Vignet, 2021). In either case, the approaches simplify the situations studied, failing to understand – or even making invisible – the complexity of the dynamics at work.

The analysis of our study case thus aims to make current thinking on resilience more complex by proposing a third (and finer) perspective and, moreover, to highlight how cooperatives can contribute to the pursuit of larger objectives related to reconciliation and reconstruction after conflicts or disasters. By mobilising several approaches, we will therefore emphasise the dynamics at work in the resilience process initiated after the Tutsi genocide. This reflection will be based on Elinor Ostrom's theoretical model, which we will make more complex through various approaches.

According to Ostrom (2010), the set of rules of our social structures fit into other sets of rules, determining 'the way in which the first set can be modified' (p.69). She thus identifies three levels of rules that will impact the decisions and actions taken within a resource system. *Constitutional choice rules* are the broad guidelines that influence collective and operational choice rules. These determine the mode of governance of the considered entity, as they introduce frames of reference. *Collective choice rules* are those used by individuals to design policies: they are a translation of the constitutional reference frameworks and directly influence the operational choices made by the actors. *Operational rules* directly guide the choices made by individuals: these are the rules 'that are actually used and' whose 'application is monitored' (Ostrom, 2010, p.68).

At each level of analysis, the rules are defined within one or more arenas – an arena being 'the setting in which a particular type of action takes place' (Ostrom, 2010, p.72). We add the idea that these arenas may include various spaces in which several actors – with different positions

and interests – 'clash': they are therefore governed by power relations (Nyenyezi Bisoka et al., 2020). We also consider that power relations exist between the arenas involved in the creation of rules of a given level.

Applying this analytical framework to our case study will enable us to highlight the power relations at work in the Rwandan resilience process.

At the *operational level of analysis*, the rules established directly guide individual decisions. According to Ostrom (2010), these depend on the arenas of collective choice and the monitoring and implementation activities. In our case, formal monitoring activities are ensured by local administrators, project managers, donors and by group leaders and cooperative leaders. Informal monitoring activities are ensured by actors who are not formally obliged to keep an eye on each other. As we have seen it, there are major discrepancies between operational and collective choice rules. The rules are, therefore, the subject of negotiation between various actors: in fact, it seems that non-compliance with the rules is tolerated by officials, cooperative leaders, project managers, etc. Thus, actors have a certain degree of agency: through their various strategies, they manage to 'tinker' with these constraints by acting under different rationales from those promoted (inter)nationally.

As far as measures to promote gender equality are concerned, we have seen that the actors have a certain degree of agency. While *traditional* gender norms (inherited from colonisation) are no longer applied very strictly, the norms currently being promoted (of Western inspiration) are not implemented unaltered – as a certain appropriation takes place. Indeed, while women have more opportunities, we have seen that there is still resistance – producing particular gender norms. This resistance has, moreover, led to changes in the content (depending on higher levels of rule creation) and delivery of training courses on gender equality.

Therefore, farmers – affected by the measures we have presented – have a certain degree of agency: they have the capacity to act on the world. This agency, these 'tinkerings', are based on the navigation of actors between different spheres/arenas. For example, when they do not respect the injunctions given to them (through the cooperatives), individuals may be animated by several rationales. Some people refuse, for example, to leave the land they occupied before the cooperative was formed, or to pay their share of the cooperative (after being '*obliged*' to join) under the customary laws that previously prevailed. Others do not respect the injunctions given so that they can continue to provide for the (food and financial) needs of their families

(by ‘leaking harvests’ or growing ‘forbidden crops’, for example). Some members refuse to contribute to the CBHI or Ejo Heza because they prefer to choose the destination of their money.

Moreover, local administrators have a certain degree of agency regarding the rules they are supposed to enforce and their commitments. Our data have shown that resistance to the norms and injunctions imposed on members of the cooperative movement can be tolerated by officials. Indeed, they are often aware of these ‘blocks’, which some of them try to limit (or give the impression of limiting) by trying to ‘mobilise and raise people's awareness’ [District Cooperative Officer] – the idea being to show that the objectives set can be achieved. While some officials may tolerate this resistance for practical reasons (a cordial agreement being easier to manage than a conflict), at least some of them accept it because they understand the rationales that animate farmers and the problems inherent in the system/in the implementation of the cooperative movement.
It should be noted that these attitudes are probably themselves influenced by the administrator’s personality, experience, interests, resources, etc.

The choices made by the various actors thus depend on the resources available to them, their interests, and their values, and are ultimately the result of their interactions with other people (with their own resources, interests, and values). It is these interactions, this coexistence of rationales and arenas (and the asymmetries associated with them) taking place in different spheres, that result in particular ‘tinkerings’. For example, monitoring – linked to injunctions resulting from higher levels of rules – does not necessarily lead to denunciation or sanction: resistance is tolerated. While it would be easy to think that individuals are completely passive recipients, we see that they manage to impose certain rationales by changing rules at higher levels.

The *collective choice rules* directly influence the actors’ operational choices. Nevertheless, we will not develop this point further – it is not the focus of our research.

The *constitutional choice rules* are the broad outlines that determine the formulation of the other types of rules. In our case study, we saw that many policies, action plans, and projects are linked to a major programme: *Vision 2020*.

In the preface to this document, Paul Kagame said:

> ‘We must always ensure that everything we do – individually, in our communities, our business enterprises or our public institutions – contributes to the realisation of this Vision.’ (MINECOFIN, 2000, p.2)

As highlighted by Ostrom (2010), decisions relating to a given level of analysis are taken within one or more arenas. Thus, various arenas – composed of actors with different interests and positions – influence the definition of rules at this level.

To clarify this point, we will be considering the example of the creation of *Vision 2020*. According to MINECOFIN (2000), it is ‘the result of a long process of national consultations which were initiated between 1997 and 2000. These discussions and debates involved all categories, including economic operators, the State, academia, and civil society’ (p.2). In this context, the constitutional choice rules have been shaped by several arenas – within which power relations are at work between the different actors (with different interests and positions). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that the authorities received the entire population, and it is very likely that only the most influential actors in their arena participate in the discussions. Furthermore, all the stakeholders were involved in several other arenas which probably influenced their positions at some point.

More generally, there are power relations between arenas. On several occasions during this research, we have noted that the objectives pursued, and the modes of action implemented by the Rwandan State were often similar to (or close to) those promoted by international institutions [9]. While we do not have the means to determine with certainty the dynamics at work behind the choices made at this level of power, we cannot deny the fact that these supranational structures – which govern, after all, at least in part, the functioning of our world – have exerted/are probably exerting an influence on the decisions taken by the Rwandan central authorities.

In 2002, the Malian politician and author Aminata Traoré declared:

> ‘African leaders, if they want to be granted the capital they need, must follow the logic of the market, swear by exports, privatisation and openness to foreign investors.’ (p.46)

[9] It should also be noted that, at every level of analysis, the rules defined at the level of international institutions are themselves the result of negotiations between (inter)national arenas and between (inter)national actors.

Moreover, non-compliance with international standards means risking sanctions and isolation. From this point of view, we can consider that the international arena has probably had a greater impact on the definition of the constitutional choice rules than an arena intervening solely locally. While not respecting diktats can have serious consequences for a country's situation, conforming to them can have advantages.

This does not, however, preclude a certain agency on the part of the actors regarding these standards. While the standards promoted by the Rwandan authorities may be close to those supported internationally, they are not applied in the same way. On the one hand, they are locally reinterpreted. On the other hand, our data have highlighted dissensions between donors and the Rwandan authorities over how these standards should be implemented. Indeed, the Rwandan government is often criticised for unilaterally imposing its measures on the population. Nevertheless, it seems to be tolerated.
The Rwandan attitude could therefore be interpreted more as a form of subversion of international standards than as an attempt to reproduce international standards 'identically' – to achieve more global objectives (particularly independence). The ruling power thus manages to navigate between the rationales that animate it and those that try to impose themselves on it: it manages to play the game of international institutions to better pursue its own objectives.

With this analysis, we have been able to show how the Rwandan cooperative movement truly functions by highlighting power relations at work in the resilience process initiated after the genocide. Therefore, our case study underlines the fact that:

*Resilience is a process 'manufactured' by negotiations and tensions between several arenas – whose interactions are governed by power relations – in which various actors with particular resources and interests 'clash'.*

This reality must therefore be considered for studies on SSE and its role in reconciliation and reconstruction after conflicts and disasters – as resilience is a concept often used in these contexts. Methodologically, it is even more imperative to overcome the two perspectives on resilience 'proposed' in the literature as the production of scientific knowledge is under threat. By postulating that resilience necessarily exists or, on the contrary, that it is a neoliberal Trojan Horse, we run the risk of obscuring complex social dynamics and therefore, of failing to fully

understand what the SSE's role in reconciliation and reconstruction after conflicts and disasters can be: it is thus essential to consider power relations and tensions.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to understand the relationship between cooperatives and resilience in situations of ‘compound crisis’ in the ‘Global South’. It used the case of post-genocide Rwanda to understand the role of cooperatives as a factor of resilience in these contexts of compound crisis. It aimed to understand the meaning, mechanics, uses, and effects of resilience based on the way it is understood in and from cooperatives.

By examining how a resilience process can be triggered on a large scale through cooperatives, we have highlighted the fact that, in situations where cooperatives are trying to play a role in compound crises, resilience is necessarily a process that is shaped by interactions between actors. It is an effect of negotiation and tension between several arenas formed by power relations in which various actors with certain resources and particular interests 'clash'.

Moreover, it has been shown that, by introducing specific frames of reference, external interventions create specific subjectivities which mobilise both local frames of reference and those introduced from outside. Indeed, the actors’ agency produces new subjectivities at the crossroads of imposed Western conceptions and local ones. By considering this agency, it is therefore possible to really understand interventions aimed at ‘manufacturing’ resilience within cooperatives as a process of negotiation.

Furthermore, we can add that it is these interactions, these power relations between actors and between arenas, which shape the process of resilience and, more generally, the meaning of this concept. We therefore propose to go beyond the dichotomy characterizing the concept of resilience by highlighting a ‘third way’ that is much more complex. With the perspective we offer, resilience ceases to be an *essence* possessed by certain entities, or a tool for maintaining the neoliberal order: it is an object of negotiation, a strategic 'game' between actors. In this context, the ontology of resilience lies not only in the discourse on it, but above all in the practices, power relations, and conflicts that shape it.

Finally, this perspective of resilience – emphasizing tensions and power relations between actors – becomes essential to truly understand the SSE's role in reconciliation and reconstruction after a crisis.

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