



Appreciating the Theoretical Perspectives of the Rwandan Genocide: Implications for Conflict Resolution Practice

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ABSTRACT

The repercussions of conflicts and wars on human life and national progress are inestimably high. Indeed, the incalculably ravaging consequences of conflicts and wars suggest that countries need to institute measures aimed at promoting peace and peaceful coexistence among their citizens. However, to achieve this, one must have a full understanding of the various causal elements and triggers of conflicts and wars. Where there is a lack of clear understanding of the push and pull factors of conflicts and wars and their socio-political, socio-cultural, and psychological undertones, stakeholders find it extremely difficult to institute measures to promote peace and unity. The Rwandan genocide, arguably, provides a rather tragic reminder of the sorry state of affairs countries have to endure as a result of conflicts. The irreparable damage caused by the Rwandan genocide continues to attract huge attention among academics. To this end, various papers and studies have been done to help bring clarity to the issues surrounding the genocide, with findings gleaned from multi-dimensional perspectives. This paper attempts to contribute to enhancing understanding of the Rwandan genocide from a theoretical perspective using a desk review approach. In this review paper, issues that are germane to the genocide are examined from a theoretical perspective in order to appreciate the implications they present for conflict resolution practice. Finally, the paper states, among others, that media institutional renewal is crucial to preventing future violent conflicts given the incendiary role the media played in the genocide.

Keywords: Conflicts, Genocide, Peace, Media, Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and wars have become inevitable components of human existence since creation. Conflicts and wars affect development and progress in several ways. Particularly, conflicts and wars can hugely impede the economic, social, political, cultural, and psychological progress of nations. Throughout history, the world has witnessed various conflicts and wars in different proportions and with varying degrees of repercussions. In recent times, one of the most violent conflicts, especially on the African continent, has been the Rwandan genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Sandole, 2009). The devastating consequences of the genocide are felt even today (Human Rights Watch, cited in Milnes, 2021). The Rwandan genocide, arguably, challenged the realist and Westphalian assumptions about conflict, security, and power. The conventional conceptualization of conflict has always been viewed through the prism of the state as the referent object of security, whereby the main security concerns of the nation-state (Cutler, 2001; Teschke, 1999) focused on external threats mainly projected by an external military. In such an anarchic international system, in the realist and neorealist worldviews, very little attention, if any, was given to the internal sociopolitical dynamics of the state. The genocide in 1994 gives us an ominous glimpse into the devastating character of intrastate conflicts, which, in the post-Cold War world order, have been increasingly ethnic, religious, and nationalistic in nature. The critical question remains, “Why did a country with a fairly small population of people who shared a common culture, language, and religion end up with neighbors killing neighbors?” Lederach (1997) argues that “the difference between contemporary internal conflicts and traditional conceptualizations of international conflict is the immediacy of the

experience” (p. 13). This sense of immediacy is due to the close proximity of groups in conflict, the shared common history of the conflictants, the dynamics of severe stereotyping, and the deep-seated opposing perceptions of the various actors (Lederach, 1997).

No longer, for instance, are civilians, including women and children, considered undesirable casualties of war. Indeed, in intrastate conflicts, they have come to constitute, in many cases, the very locus of the conflict, as they are often used as a strategic weapon of war. Many social science researchers in the field of conflict have written on and argued a similarity of the Rwanda genocide to the Holocaust, largely for its speed and the extensive human toll during that moment of human carnage. In his study of protracted social conflict, Azar (1990) discusses the salience of identity as a central pillar around which many issues in conflict revolve. It is believed that, through the mobilization of group interests and identities by ruling elites and through the reactive counter-identification of excluded minorities, the ‘communal content of the state’ becomes basic to the study of [protracted social conflict].” (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2005, p. 87).

The genocide was the result of a combination of perceived psychological and ethnic differences. It was also the result of socio-political differences and environmental externalities, which had become an integral part of the social conscience in a narrative characterized by increasingly hard-boiled values and beliefs shared differently by Hutu and Tutsi. Such value and belief demarcations ultimately spiraled into an orgy of mass murder of unprecedented proportions in contemporary African societies. In the decades leading up to the 1994 genocide, Rwanda had known little peace since its independence from the Belgians. Internal power and ethnic hostilities, sometimes intra-ethnic in the case of Hutus, have always characterized Rwandan politics. Uvin (1997), however, has noted in his analysis of prejudice in the Rwandan crisis that, in addition to past conflict issues that were left unresolved, the phase of the conflict that immediately preceded the genocide was the culmination of unresolved issues of Rwandan refugees in neighboring countries and the Habyarimana government’s unwillingness to confront them (Uvin, 1997, p. 91). The refugee problem, a product of past political and ethnic conflicts, constituted the major platform of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) for the October 1990 invasion of northern parts of the country from inside Uganda. As Newbury (1998) points out, the RPF militia was mainly composed of descendants of refugees and other exiles who had fled earlier mass killings during the 1959-1962 revolution, which reversed several decades of Tutsi dominance over Hutu (Newbury, 1998, p. 78). Following the invasion, regional and international pressures compelled the parties into the Arusha peace agreement, which eventually failed.

Hintjens (1999) writes that immediately following the plane crash over the Rwandan capital Kigali, in which President Habyarimana and the Burundian president who was traveling with him were killed, chaos erupted and extremist Hutu in the government and the ruling party, *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND), proceeded to activate a genocidal plan that specifically targeted Hutu political opponents and all Tutsi (Hintjens, 1999, p. 241). At the end of it all, approximately 700,000 Tutsis and some 50,000 moderate Hutus had been killed (Staub, 2006, p. 869). Subsequently, in a period of just a hundred days, the world witnessed—sometimes with a blind eye—the orchestration of man’s inhumanity toward man. In the days that followed, an intimate genocide occurred in which neighbors murdered neighbors, and people in mixed families killed family members and sometimes even their own children (des Forges, 1999; Mamdani, 2002; Mandani, 2001; Staub, 2006; Staub & Pearlman, 2001). According to Hintjens (1999), between five and ten percent of the population was killed within a short time spanning between the second week of April and the third week of May of 1994. Intervening in a protracted social conflict as complex as the Rwandan conflict requires a deeper understanding of all facets of the conflict dynamic. Conflict analysts and practitioners are, subsequently, enjoined to design their conflict interventions by going beyond conventional assumptions. They need to dig deeply into the conflict topography in search of covert contextual issues and understandings of the conflict. To effectively do this, conflict interveners must be reflective in both their analyses and interventions, drawing on a mutually supportive repertoire of theory, research, and practice.

This paper focuses on how the cyclical interconnectivity of theories, informed research, and practice could help conflict scholars and practitioners successfully appreciate the core structural issues, agenda-setting strategies, and multi-dimensional communicative elements surrounding the Rwandan conflict and the implications they present for conflict resolution practice. The paper is organized into five main sections. The first section introduces the paper, while the second section presents the methodological approach the researchers adopted. The third section considers the theoretical issues gleaned from the conflict, whereas the fourth section focuses on the implications of the key observations made for conflict resolution practice. Finally, the paper provides some conclusions based on the core issues that emerged from the review.

II. METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a desk review approach. As an approach, desk review is a type of research that is based on documents and materials published in reports that are available on websites, public libraries, and other media. It is a form of research that focuses on the critical examination and analysis of data obtained from reports, journal articles, surveys, newspapers, books, and other sources (Owa, 2023). The role of researchers in desk reviews goes beyond the mere identification of data. Researchers' role also entails a critical examination and evaluation of materials in order to gain a better appreciation of the subject matter (Travis, 2016).

In conducting this desk review, the researchers followed clearly defined procedures. They first identified a topic of interest and defined the goal of the research. Second, the researchers identified the key sources of literature and developed inclusion and exclusion criteria. In particular, published papers and the general literature on issues related to the Rwandan genocide were included in the data, while materials unrelated to the conflicts were excluded from the data. Thus, though the literature on the subject matter is generally very expansive, the researchers limited their search to papers and reports related to the conflict. Again, published papers and other materials on theories and concepts relevant to the conflicts were included in the data, whereas papers and materials on theories and concepts unrelated to the genocide were excluded.

After defining the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the researchers gathered all the existing data related to the subject matter using various search engines, including Google Scholar, Researchgate, Scopus, and Semantic Scholar. A large chunk of the materials were sourced through a Google search. There were a few papers that were sourced via other academic search engines, including Researchgate, Scopus, and Semantic Scholar. In all, about 120 materials were identified from the search. However, based on our inclusion and exclusion criteria, the materials gathered were reduced to about 60. Following that, the researchers critically evaluated the materials by comparing and contrasting the ideas, positions, arguments, and propositions of various scholars and organizations on the genocide. Finally, researchers analyzed the information reviewed to ensure that all relevant questions related to the research goal had been clearly answered.

In this review paper, the researchers identified the various structural issues, agenda-setting mechanisms, and multi-dimensional communicative elements and nuances underlying the Rwandan genocide. The approach the researchers adopted was in line with the literature (Fabyio, 2023; Owa, 2023; Travis, 2016). The authors believed that a good desk review should follow certain key steps. The steps include identification of a research topic and its aim, identification of research sources, collection of existing data, combination and comparison of materials, examination and analysis of data, and presentation of findings. As with all desk reviews, this approach offers both the researchers and readers a vital, cost-effective strategy to gain insights into the issues and a broader understanding of the subject matter (Fabyio, 2023; Owa, 2023).

III. THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This section discusses the theoretical issues which have underpinned the Rwandan genocide. The nested theory of conflict, social identity theory, symbolic interactionism, and the lens model constitute the theoretical foundations of the discussion as presented below.

3.1 A Nested Theory of Conflict

Dugan (1996) theorizes that several layers of micro and macro issues can be found in any conflict, and often these layers are seamlessly interconnected. The nestedness of the conflict context is found in how the different categories are interrelated with the narrower categories "nested within the broader types" (Dugan, 1996, p. 16). From this theoretical framing of the problematic of conflict, Lederach (1997) also posits that conflict analysis and resolution involve a broader holistic understanding of the underlying issues in the conflict context, including both the micro and macro dimensions of the conflict (p. 55). Conflict here consists of issues located at four different layers: issue-specific, relational, structural (sub-systemic), and structural (systemic) (Dugan, 1996). The resolution of conflict is, therefore, not seen as an issue to be resolved. Rather, it is conceived as a relationship to be reconciled (Lederach, 1997, p. 56).

The proximate causes of the Rwandan conflict can be situated at two levels of political events. First, the invasion by the RPF in 1990 sparked a conflict between the Habyarimana government and its extremist supporters and the RPF rebels. According to Verwimp (2004), the invasion started a four-year war between the RPF militias and the government armed forces, in which many in the north were displaced and about 2000 Tutsis were killed between

1990 and 1993. The hardliners saw the invasion as a threat to their grip on power and would therefore do anything within their capability to stop what they perceived as a Tutsi attempt at re-subjugating Hutu. Hintjens (1999) asserts that “by mobilizing vertical social cleavages, racial and ethnic political ideologies can be particularly useful to failing regimes facing widespread opposition from within their own ranks” (Hintjens, 1999, p. 242). According to des Forges (1995), the invasion gave the president and his allies the opportunity to consolidate their power base by exploiting the invasion in ethnic terms, “targeting Tutsi within the country as “accomplices” of the invading Rwandan Patriotic Front” (p. 45). Khadiagala (2002) also points out that the genocide was ultimately inevitable because, in the prevailing “polarized socioeconomic environment in which the extremist coalition was fast losing power to the moderate coalition, there did not seem to be any compensation or guarantees by which the mediators could have prevented the genocide” (p. 492);

Hutu extremists found the outcome of the negotiations with the RPF unacceptable as it peeled away a significant amount of their power base, including enormous constraints on the military and the demobilization of thousands of recruits in the Hutu-dominated army (Newbury, 1998). Because of the visual potency of the RPF invasion and subsequent capturing of Kigali and eventually political power, parties to the conflict have often been reduced to the government and the RPF. However, there are other important internal actors whose opposition and pressure on the government for political reforms gave the RPF added credibility and legitimacy. Maundi *et al.* (2006) assert that decades of dictatorship, the north-south/central power struggle, corruption, human rights abuses, economic collapse, nepotism, among others, and the general political atmosphere of change that prevailed in Africa during the 1990s all converged to empower civil society to mobilize for change.

The second, and certainly one of the most seminal events that ignited the genocide, was the plane crash in which President Habyarimana was killed along with Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira, also a Hutu. In a matter of hours after the president’s death in the early evening hours of April 2, 1994, complete chaos had descended on the capital, and the well-engineered genocidal norm had been joined. Roadblocks were immediately erected, and a systematic manhunt was activated to track down and kill all Hutu moderate politicians (Newbury, 1998, p. 80). As des Forges (1995) opines, “mobilizing thousands of Rwandans to slaughter tens of thousands of others required effective organization” (des Forges, 1995, p. 44). Similarly, Shawcross (2000) notes that the extremist faction tapped into ethnic cleavages to implore all Hutu to “take your spears, clubs, guns, swords, stones, everything... Sharpen them, hack them, those enemies, those cockroaches... Hunt out the Tutsi. Who will fill up the half-empty graves? There is no way the rebels should find alive any of the people they claim as their own” (Shawcross, 2000, p. 139).

At the relational level of analysis in the nested model of conflict, Hutu and Tutsi had lived for decades in mutual suspicion of each other’s intentions, as both groups had been victims of each other’s brutality. Des Forges (1995) explains that during colonial rule, extremist Tutsi, who were then considered superior to the Hutu by the colonizing Belgians and “influenced by the amalgam of myth and pseudo-anthropology, moved from elitism to racism” (des Forges, 1995, p. 45). Fujii (2002) has similarly observed that Tutsi superiority was articulated and essentialized through a Hamitic myth that compared the Tutsis as more intelligent to the dumber and lazier Hutu Negroid. This specious theory also postulates that Tutsi were the descendants of whites and therefore ascribed biological superiority over Hutus (Fujii, 2002). The ethnic demarcation system became reified with the institutionalization of ethnicity through the codification of an identity card system based on ethnicity. In addition, all administrative jobs in the colonial government and education were virtually reserved for the Tutsi, with Hutu subjugated down the social hierarchy as laborers (Uvin, 1999, p. 255). As recipients of all the socioeconomic and political opportunities that came with this ethnic codification, as des Forges (1995) asserts, it was “not surprising that Tutsi were pleased with this version of history. But even the majority of Hutu swallowed this distorted account of the past. Thus, people of both groups learned to think of the Tutsi as winners and the Hutu as losers in every great contest of the Rwandan past” (des Forges, 1995, p. 45). This was the nature of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic relational dynamics that characterized Tutsi-Hutu interactions in pre-independence Rwanda. Under such oppressive conditions, it was not surprising that the 1959 revolution was defined as a struggle for independence from colonial oppression and for ethnic equality. Uvin (1999) proffers, then, that the revolution was “a fight as much against the (much closer) local Tutsi “despot” as against the (remote) Belgians” (p. 256).

If the 1959 Hutu revolution succeeded in overturning the colonial sociopolitical status quo, it retained the very oppressive structures that the revolution was supposed to eliminate, and the ethnic stereotype and prejudice that had been used mainly as an administrative tool by the colonialists continued and persist to haunt Rwandans to this day (Maundi *et al.*, 2006, p. 31). The only difference is that this time, it was the oppressed who assumed the role of the oppressor. Both Tutsis and Hutus manipulated this deep-seated mutual distrust and hatred for their own sociopolitical expediencies (Maundi *et al.*, 2006, p. 31). Arguably, it was the presence of these cleavages that made

executing the genocidal plan easier. For instance, Mugusera, one of the most passionate extremists within the Hutu power structure, spewed hate that was repeatedly aired on the airwaves, admonishing all Hutu to: “Know that the person whose throat you do not cut now will be the one who will cut yours” . . . With this warning, Mugusera brought the story of Hutu and Tutsi into full circle. “If Tutsi rule depended on Hutu subjugation, then Hutu survival depended on Tutsi extermination” (Fujii, 2002, par. 25). The irony of the Hamitic myth is that, once embraced by Tutsi, it was now the supposed foreignness of the Tutsi that would be used to justify their annihilation (Hintjens, 1999, p. 255).

An important part of the genocidal triggers were the structural inequalities that existed under Belgian rule. These structural inequalities persisted even after independence. In its stark manifestation, the Hutu government instituted a strict quota system for anyone officially classified as Tutsi following independence. This quota extended to secondary and higher education, as well as employment opportunities. As noted by Hintjens (1999), “for Batutsi women, there was now a strong incentive to marry a Bahutu man, so that one’s children might escape such tight controls” (Hintjens, 1999, p. 247). This trend of heavily institutionalized inequalities engineered to achieve sinister agendas would continue to be a major public policy throughout the Habyarimana years. Maundi *et al.* (2006) note that:

Throughout the Habyarimana years there was not a single Tutsi *Bourgmestre* (equivalent to district head) or *prefect* (provincial head), only two Tutsi members of parliament out of seventy, only one Tutsi minister out of a cabinet of between twenty-five and thirty members, and one Tutsi officer in the army, whose members were even prohibited by regulation from marrying Tutsi women (Maundi *et al.*, 2006).

Distal economic dynamics also explain the inherent complexity of the conflict. In this regard, Le Billon (2001) has explained how the economic situation in Rwanda propelled the country into genocide. While the area of resource scarcity has largely been underemphasized in much of the research on the genocide and in the eruption of conflicts in general, Le Billon (2001) argues that, in the case of Rwanda, the “dependence of the state and many farmers on coffee exports was the foremost structural factor in the weakening of the state and the radicalization of exclusionary politics into mass murder” (Le Billon, 2001; see also Uvin, 1996). Many hardliners in the government who resisted democratization were also largely motivated by economic interests. The abrupt drop in the price of coffee in 1986 and 1987 saw the country’s coffee revenues drop from 14 billion to 5 billion Rwandan francs in that year alone (Chossudovsky, 1997; Hintjens, 1999; Prunier, 1995). In the wake of the toxic mix of structural inequality, economic turmoil, and rampant corruption within the ranks of the political elite, the government was also militarizing limited state revenue. For example, the government increased the size of the army from 7,000 troops in 1989 to over 30,000 by 1994, all done in reaction to the RPF challenge. This agenda of nullifying the RPF threat resulted in a diversion of scarce state resources earmarked for other important national issues, such as the importation of essential food and drugs (Hintjens, 1999). Newbury (1998) contends that:

For what had most pushed the government to negotiate, what most threatened meaningful democratization, and what most complicated the war effort, was a series of economic blows that brought to a head the government’s alienation from the population, constrained the costly military campaign, and threatened the privileged status of a small elite faction within the government. It was within this group that there developed a core of extremists who were to plan and implement the genocide-and who were brought to power in the context of the economic crisis. This group of radicals within the government had risen to influence and wealth through the favoritism of the regime in power, especially during the 1980s; they stood to lose the most by any process of democratization which would dilute their power and challenge their claim to privilege. (Newbury, 1998, p.80)

With the economic situation spiraling down to the bottom, the Hutu extremists widened their net of enemies beyond the RPF to include all Tutsi, moderate Hutu and anyone perceived to be supporting the Arusha peace agreement (Chrétien, 1995; Guichaoua, 1995; Hintjens, 1999).

The systemic stranglehold on power by the Habyarimana Hutu-dominated government was also a source of distal grievances for moderate Hutu politicians and Tutsi refugees. To legitimize its control over power and the state, the government exploited ethnicity and institutionalized it in public policy, and whenever “this elite was threatened, it exacerbated ethnic divisions to thwart democratization and power sharing” (Uvin, 1999, p.253). In the views of Hintjens (1999), the ethnic propaganda by politicians only served to obscure a primary goal of regime protection in an environment riddled with socioeconomic crisis and increasing political dissent (p.242). A classic example of the structural institutionalization of ethnicity was the government’s policy that prohibited Rwandan refugees who were mainly Tutsi from returning home. Maundi *et al.* (2006) contend that this policy was a denationalization of Rwandan citizens and amounted to a tragic condemnation of Rwandan citizens to permanent refugee status wherever they may

find themselves (Maundi *et al.*, 2006, p.32). Bequeathed with a colonial legacy characterized by weak and exclusive political institutions and other structural inequities, the post-independent society was destined to go down a path of repression, insensitivity to the interests and ontological needs of minority groups, and subsequently conflict. These incidents find expression in Azar's theory of protracted social conflict. A core pillar to Azar's theory of protracted social conflict is the argument that such conflicts "tend to focus on developing countries that are typically characterized by very restricted 'political capacity' often linked to a colonial legacy full of weak participatory institutions, hierarchical traditions of imposed bureaucratic rule and inherited instruments of political repression (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2005, p.87).

3.2 Social Identity Theory

Another theoretical foundation of the Rwandan genocide is the social identity theory. A theoretical construct credited to Tajfel (1978) and Tajfel & Turner (1979), social identity theory focuses on the individual in the context of personal identity and an acquired identity through membership in one or several groups in the broader social relationships. According to Yuki (2003), social identity theory is primarily "intergroup-focused, rather than focusing on intra-group relations. It identifies intergroup comparison as a key source of in-group identification" (Yuki, 2003, p.168). The theory engages the conflict resolution practitioner in a deeper understanding of the conflict prior to an intervention design and implementation.

It is important to reemphasize that ethnic identity in Rwanda must be seen not as a "given" truth but as more of a product of social reengineering beginning from the colonial era and carried over into the social narrative of the post-independence society. Maundi *et al.* (2006) have argued that the animosity between Tutsi and Hutu was a social construction based on a mythical narrative of Tutsi genetic superiority over Hutu primarily for its functional utility to colonial indirect rule which thrived on divide-and-rule and served the colonial purposes of division of labor (Maundi *et al.*, 2006, p.31). Over time, this purely administrative tool became internalized in both Hutu and Tutsi psyche. Black (2008) posits that "by thinking and then acting as though ethnic groups were the result of natural processes instead of being the products of human activity, the boundaries between them are constituted as permanent features of the natural world instead of the social order, and thus become reified" (Black, 2008, p.152). Prior to the arrival of the Belgians, and the Germans before them, social mobility in terms of who was considered a Tutsi or a Hutu was a fluid one, a socio-cultural experience that stands in sharp controversial contradiction to the rigid stratification of society later introduced for colonial expediency. Hintjens (1999) notes that:

The practice of tracing official Bahutu, Batutsi and Batwa identities through the male line was initially an administrative device introduced for convenience by the Belgians in 1933. This method of deriving a single ethnic label for each individual contradicted the complex ways in which social identities were constructed over time . . . Historically, for example, the term Bahutu and Batutsi were used in relation to each other, and more flexibly than later came to be the case (Hintjens, 1999, p.249-250).

Uvin (1999) observes that in pre-colonial Rwanda, upward mobility in social stature was loosely connected to economic affluence. For instance, any Rwandan, irrespective of ethnic classification, who acquired a significant herd of cattle could move up the social ladder to be considered a Tutsi with all the respect of that recognition bestowed on the individual. On the other hand, all farmers were Hutu and hunters and artisans Twa (Uvin, 1999, p.254).

In essence, the ethnic dichotomy and axiological articulation of ingroup and outgroup differences constituted a legacy and a subtle agenda of social manipulation which was begun by the Belgians and maintained by both Hutu and Tutsi politicians to protect their sociopolitical interests. In the period leading to the genocide, Hutu politicians whipped up the rhetoric of hatred against all Tutsi, mainly to consolidate their power by mobilizing the Hutu community behind their cause against the Tutsi foreign "Other" (des Forges, 1995, p.45). In the attempt to resist internal and international pressure for political reforms, President Habyarimana "responded by rallying the majority 'faithful' against a purported common racial enemy, in the hope that this would prevent regional and class divisions from assuming more open political manifestations (Hintjens, 1999, 242 quoting Article 19 1995). Redefining ethnicity and national identity this way was therefore an important precursor to the genocide that eventually consumed the country (Hintjens, 1999). Another logical step was to demonize all Tutsi as the evil that will not stop at anything than to bring Hutu back into subjugation and subordination. The genocidal narrative depicted all Tutsi as morally reprehensible while exiating all Hutu of from any wrongdoing. The conflict terrain demarcated this way, saw all Hutu as the faithful, at once civil, moral, and virtuous while the Tutsi remained criminals (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006, p.33).

In the Rwandan context, the salience of a Hutu social identity was consolidated, inter alia, through what Volkan (1997) has called *chosen trauma*. Chosen trauma occurs where a group recounts the humiliation and a sense of loss suffered at the hands of the other (Volkan, 1997, p.82). In this case, Hutu saw this humiliation at the hands of Tutsi during the colonial period through “the servitude, the whip, the lash, the forced work that exhausted the people” at the hands of Tutsi leadership in the past (HRW, 1999, p.92). What made the mass participatory killings possible was the fact that out of this chosen trauma emerged a conversion of private hatreds to public devaluations through mass stigmatization of Tutsi (Rothbarth & Korostelina, 2006, p.36). Radio broadcasts depicted Tutsi as the evil one “seeking to kill Hutu on a massive scale, hoping to conquer lands of the genuine Rwandans (Hutus). These messages demanded Hutu vigilance against the Tutsi manipulations, exposing their lies, condemning their declarations, and unveiling their evil plans”. In the mythical redefinition of their trauma, there was a time collapse that effectively linked past Tutsi wrongdoings to the Tutsi of 1994. In effect, the perceived Tutsi guilt was traced back to a shared ancestry of the Tutsi history of Hutu subjugation (Rothbarth & Korostelina, 2006, p. 35, 38).

3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism also offers a sound theoretical explanation to the Rwandan genocide. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism focuses on three essential premises. First, Blumer (1969) argues that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything that human beings may note in their world – physical objects, such as trees or chairs, other human beings, such as a mother or a store clerk; categories of human beings, such as friends or enemies; institutions, such as a school or a government; guiding ideals such as individual independence or honesty; activities of others, such as their commands or requests; and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life. Second, the author states that the meaning of such things is derived from the social interaction that individuals have with their fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p.2). In the context of the Rwandan genocide, symbolism and the interpretive meanings ascribed to current and historical acts heavily impacted the way Tutsis and Hutus perceived and behaved toward each other. Particular in the genocide was the centrality of how Hutus and Tutsis have come to perceive each other in the social world.

Even though Hutus and Tutsis had intermarried, shared a common culture, language, and religion, and lived side-side peaceably for centuries, over time, the social relationship had been reduced to how the actions of each other were interpreted – an interpretation based on a mediated symbolic meaning – and not on the immediacy of actions. Symbolic interactionism is an important theoretical foundation for gaining further insights into how the perception of the self and “other” in the context of actions and inactions by both sides to the conflict contributed to the irreversible downward spiral into chaos and eventual genocide.

To reinforce the theoretical explanation of interactionism in the unfolding of the genocidal norm in Rwanda in 1994 was the role of Belgium (Fujii, 2002). The Belgian colonizers propagated a heart-rending agenda of Tutsi superiority, both socially and genetically, over Hutus. Through this agenda, Fujii (2002) remarks that “the Belgians established a social-political system that placed all Tutsi . . . in a position of privilege and all Hutu including once powerful and autonomous chiefs, in a position of subjugation” (Fugii, 2002, p.4). The policy not only changed the structure of the Rwandan society, but it also changed the social, political, and economic dynamics that had hitherto been conceived as a fluid social mobility. Uvin (1997) bemoaned that under such a divide and rule system “the exclusive beneficiaries of these new sources of power were people of Tutsi descent.

During most of the colonial period, the Belgians, and the Germans before them, were convinced, based the specious Hamitic theory, that the Tutsi were “more intelligent, reliable, hardworking – in short, more like themselves – than the Hutu” (Kamola, 2008; Uvin, 1996, p.6). In fact, for many experts on Rwanda, and for many Rwandans, the argument is made that the beginnings of these racial ideology and practice are deeply rooted in this Western-centric genetic ontology of Rwandan society (Uvin, 1997). As beneficiaries of the privileges and social status on whom this Hamitic myth (and accompanying social re-engineering) was bestowed, Tutsis did not only advocate for this ethnically rearranged social order by the Belgians, they also failed to condemn its perpetuation. This worldview would ultimately come to define the relationship between the two groups even long after independence. The assumption of Tutsi superiority would be resuscitated by extremist Hutu and used to great symbolism and effect both before and during the hundred days of carnage. In the post-independence era before the genocide, Hutus, now in power, also developed their own reverse image of a “Hutu power” which, in turn, intensified Hutu fear and devaluation of Tutsi. In the moments leading up to the genocide, the propaganda was, “The Tutsis were going to kill everyone, they would

take away people's property, they would rule over Hutus as before. A "Hutu Ten Commandments" propagated violent action against all Tutsis" (Staub, 2006, p.870).

The hardline Hutus in collusion with hate media in Rwanda did not encounter any challenges accentuating the salience of ethnic cleavages institutionalized and perpetuated since colonial rule. Assuming the genocidal inflammatory role was not difficult for the media because the nuances embedded in the Hamitic mythology of Tutsi superiority and foreignness had been successfully inscribed into Hutu and Tutsi consciousness and had come to be embraced by both groups in line with the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism. In other words, the agenda setting capacity of the media in contributing to the genocide became very effective because the grounds had been made fertile for the explosion. Fujii (2002) asserts that:

The institutionalization of these precepts is what made the genocidal narrative intelligible to the masses, for the story was not only based on familiar themes, but was also grounded in long-accepted historical 'truths' that . . . Tutsi were foreign invaders from Ethiopia who had stolen Rwanda from its rightful inhabitants . . . The invasion of the RPF not only signaled the Tutsi's long-held plan to reinstate a feudal way of life and to re-enslave all Hutu, but worse, it revealed their ultimate plan to annihilate Hutu completely and regain absolute power (Fujii, 2002. p.6).

The subjective meanings ascribed to past occurrences rationalized the urgency for genocide in the present. In other words, the Hutu's very existential survival would come to be defined as inescapably linked to, and contingent, on Tutsi extinction and the best possible means to achieve that existential necessity was extermination by genocide. Bernard Lonergan, the Canadian philosopher and priest, makes much sense of this symbolic and interpretative social world, noting that, "Because of our feelings, our desires and fears, our hope and despair, our joys and sorrows, our enthusiasms and indignation, our esteem and contempt, our trust and distrust, our love and hatred, our tenderness and wrath, our admiration, veneration, reverence, our dread, horror, terror," as individuals in the social world, "we are orientated massively and dynamically in a world mediated by meaning" (Crocker & Doran, 2004, p.14).

3.4 The Lens Model

The lens model postulates that the way parties entangled in conflict communicate, behave and perceive each other play a critical role in the resolution or escalation of conflict. Hocker and Wilmot (2002) have identified certain communication behaviors and the perception of those behaviors by parties engaged in conflict as important elements critical to conflict intervention and resolution. They argue that the lens through which parties see themselves and "Other" dictate the positions and narratives in the conflict dynamic. As they argue, oftentimes, conflicting parties see themselves differently through the "meanings (attributions) the . . . ascribe to their relationship" through their own worldview (Hocker & Wilmot, 2002, p.27). The perception of the past, the present, and the future all converge at once to play a critical role in the conflict.

In conflicts such as the Rwandan genocide, legitimating ingroup actions and ideology is directly related to a devaluation of the other as inhuman and therefore deserving of destruction. Once extremist Hutu political leaders succeeded in stirring ethnic and nationalist sentiments that pointed to an incompatible co-habitation with the evil Tutsi, the next logical step was to introduce into the conflict narrative, the dehumanization and the "satanization" of not only the RPF militia directly locked in an impasse with the Habyarimana government, but of all Tutsis simply by guilt of ethnic association (Frodhart & Temin, 2003; Milnes, 2021). Fordhard and Temin (2003) contend that "while it might be difficult to attack a neighbor with whom one has shared good relations for some time, once that neighbor is 'depersonalized' and the positive individual history . . . displaced by the negative group history, the attack is no longer against an individual but against what he or she represents" (Frodhart & Temin, 2003, p.6). In an article published by *Kangura*, as Human Rights Watch (1999) has reported, the extremist pro-government newspaper, in one of its editions in March 1993, highlighted the time collapse between the past Tutsis and their contemporary offspring noting that "A cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly," an obvious metaphor used here to implicate Tutsis in the past "sins" of their ancestors. The paper reports:

The history of Rwanda shows us clearly that a Tutsi stays always exactly same, that has never changed. The malice, the evil are just as we knew them in the history of our country . . . Who could tell the difference between the Inyenzi who attacked in 1990 and those of the 1960s. They are all linked . . . their evilness is the same. The unspeakable crimes of the Inyenzi of today . . . recall those of their elders: killing, pillaging, raping girls and women, etc (Human Rights Watch, 1999, p.87)

By categorizing the outgroup as the evil one who would stop at nothing to oppress and re-subjugate all Hutus as it happened in the past, the conflict narrative veers toward a trajectory where peaceful coexistence becomes an anathema to ingroup axiology, and the extermination of Tutsi becomes a necessary existential imperative. Through such

construction of the Hutu-Tutsi social narrative, the genocide became a nationalist duty for all Hutus who yearned to be liberated from the impending Tutsi oppression (Human Rights Watch, 1999). RTLM, perhaps, the most classical example of hate media in contemporary intrastate conflicts, spewed similar invectives aimed directly at inciting Hutus to take up arms against Tutsis. Simon Bikindi, the Hutu musician and extremist, composed several songs broadcast ceaselessly on RTLM and Radio Rwanda, in which, among other ethnic tropes, he emphasized a Hutu “heritage that should be carefully maintained . . . and transmitted to prosperity” (p. 91) in apparent nostalgia of the 1959 revolution that massacred countless Tutsis and sent thousands more into exile. Bikindi reminded Hutus: “You are the great majority [rubanba nyamwinshi], pay attention and, descendants of Sebahinzi, remember this evil that should be driven as far away as possible, so that it never returns to Rwanda” p. 92). In the psyche of the Hutus, the evil of the Tutsis of the 1990s was still “the servitude, the whip, the lash, the forced work that exhausted the people” at the hands of Tutsi leadership during the colonial era (p.92). While these structural inequalities are, arguably, a distal truth, extremist Hutus were able to bring this into the contemporary perceptual cognitive makeup of the ordinary Hutu. Galtung (1969) posits in his typology of conflict, violence, and peace that conflict must be conceptualized as a dynamic process. Nested in this dynamic process, as Galtung argues, are “structure, attitudes and behaviour [that] are constantly changing and influencing one another” (Galtung, 2009; Ramsbotham et al., 2005, p.10). In the mind of the genocidal entrepreneurs, the Tutsi was no longer a human being but an inanimate phenomenon and an entrenched enigma confronting the Hutu that must be deracinated, once and for all, from Rwandan society. In the Rwanda genocide, the artistic work of the popular Hutu musician, Simon Bikindi, became synonymous to a call to action, deviously played repeatedly on Radio Télévision Libre de Milles Collines (RTLM) for its psychological effect and tragic impact (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THE GENOCIDE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION PRACTICE

In this section, the researchers looked at the implications the various theoretical observations made from the Rwandan genocide offer for conflict resolution practice. The practitioner in post conflict intervention can deploy a host of intervention tools in the peacebuilding processes such as facilitated dialogues, mediation, problem-solving workshops, and identity reconstruction workshops, among many others. The conflict analyst enters the conflict theater by asking questions instead of relying on settled assumptions and this is only possible where the intervener has both a well-grounded theoretical understanding of the conflict and a repertoire of experience acquired through practice. In an ethnically laden conflict such as the Rwandan genocide, intervention, Black (2008) contends, “requires at its base an understanding of the categories of meaning by which participants themselves comprehend their experience and orient themselves toward one another in their everyday lives” (Black 2008, 165, quoting Rosen 1988). With a deeper evidence-based theoretical understanding of the conflict, the scholar/practitioner is better able to bring a reflective learning process to the intervention process.

A conflict resolution scholar and or practitioner/policymaker in a conflict such as Rwanda will give particular attention to contexts and relationships in order to make meaning of the underlying issues in the conflict (Cheldelin et al., 2004, p.68; Cheldelin et al., 2008). “Here the exchange between research, theory, and practice is immediate, and reflection-in-action is its own implementation” (Ibid., quoting Schön, 1983). Akin to the jargon “garbage in, garbage out,” it is critical that conflict resolution professionals enter the research with a clearly defined and informed understanding of the conflict internalities. Failure to achieve this deeper understanding of the conflict terrain will result in an analysis that is flawed which will, in turn, inform a flawed intervention approach resulting in doing more harm than good. A case in point is the initial conceptualization of the sources of the Rwandan conflict as the UN-backed African Union (AU) mediation team set out to resolve the conflict between the government and the RPF. At the onset of the AU mediation efforts, the RPF which was the major party locked in conflict with the government was excluded from the talks on the basis that it was not a state actor (Maundi *et al.*, 2006, p.43). They point out that the initial AU mediation failed primarily because the mediators lacked a better understanding of the nature and character of the conflict (p. 42). As Marsick and Sauquet (2000) argued, without proper reflection, the assumptions held by the mediators about the conflict dynamics in Rwanda led to a partial and limited assessment of the conflict (p.382). Maundi *et al.* (2006) point out:

There were those – Zaire and, to a certain extent, Kenya – who bought Habyarimana’s argument that the conflict was between Rwanda and Uganda. Others perceived the conflict in the traditional “government-versus-rebels” terms. Still others saw the refugee problem as the major cause of conflict. Because the nature and character of the conflict were not properly comprehended, the summitry approach was bound to face difficulties (p.43).

The initial phase of the AU mediation suffered from what Permanand (2009) calls “the mediator’s baggage” in that it failed to set aside its values, beliefs, culture and assumptions (p.59). At the international community level, even though the indifference shown by the United Nations’ intervention was largely to blame for the eventual failure of the intervention, its peacekeeping mission (UNAMIR) – including the political component of the mission – failed mainly because it did not have a better understanding of the conflict. The Force commander Roméo Dallaire (2003) recounts that all the knowledge the mission had going into the conflict was a sketchy one-page history that had reduced this complex conflict into “a simple inter-tribal conflict” (Dallaire, 2003, p.47). Once in theater, however, the Force Commander acknowledged that “there must be more to this mission than met the eye” (Dallaire, 2003, p.44). Here, the disjunction between practice, theory, and research became immediately apparent.

In many post-conflict intervention processes, women and other minority or vulnerable groups are often left out of the intervention design and this is true in the Rwanda context. In most of the literature on the intervention, very little knowledge is known about the involvement of women even though in most conflicts, and certainly in Rwanda, women suffer the most horrific experiences during and after the conflict. A practitioner who has a well-grounded understanding of the conflict in Rwanda will see women and the Twa minority group as important stakeholders in all peacebuilding efforts. Cheldelin (2006) asserts, in this regard, that “the majority of peace negotiations do not consider women’s situations . . . Peace settlements become “gendered deals” whereby patriarchal structures . . . are perpetuated in the political and economic institutions . . . as well as in gender relations” (Cheldelin, 2006, p.293).

Over several decades, the ethnic cleavage between Hutu and Tutsi had deepened so much that any simplistic and superficial approach at intervention would prove daunting. However, the well-informed scholar/practitioner can, through approaches such as developmental facilitation and dialogue, and other third-party intervention tools, help the parties transcend those perceived ethnic incompatibilities. Black (2008) argues that “social identity may provide the basis for resolving a dispute by, for example, validating an appeal to shared heritage to legitimize a settlement” (Black, 2008, p.165-166).

Beyond the above, the following are key implications the core issues and observations made present for conflict intervention processes:

1. Through facilitated dialogues, seminars and workshops based on the principles of interactive conflict resolution, third party interveners can help Hutus and Tutsis speak to their common heritage, or chosen glory (Volkan, 1997) by emphasizing positive connectors such as their long history of shared marriages, language, culture and religion. Furthermore, both Hutus and Tutsis can be pointed back to their peaceful coexistence and the fluid nature of social mobility in Rwandan society until the “colonial masters” arrived to take away that common value system. In support, Korostelina (2007) argues that focusing on these shared identities can reduce intergroup hostility by minimizing the attention to ethnic, racial and religious differences and thinking of themselves as “one unit” (Korostelina, 2007, p.237).
2. Because interactive conflict resolution aims at transformational relationships both at the communal and policymaking levels through “an analytical and collaborative reorientation of the parties,” unofficial representatives of Hutu and Tutsis groups such as community and traditional leaders who wield influence must be included in such workshops and dialogues. Fisher (1997) notes, here, that “the more influential and representative the individual participants in ICR [international conflict resolution] workshops are, the greater the potential impact on the political process and policymaking” (Fisher, 1997, p.240). In the Rwandan context, a trusted and skilled third party is required given that the conflict “escalated to high level of intensity and intractability with significant costs and injuries to the parties” (Fisher, 2009, p.326). The skilled intermediary in ICR uses tools that can bring about “some degree of cognitive and behavioral adjustments, initially among the participants, followed by the creation of mutually acceptable principles or actions supporting de-escalation and resolution that ... will be transferred to the interaction of the parties themselves” (Ibid.)
3. In the estimation of Korostelina (2007), stressing the cultural components of the meaning of identity can help transform a mobilized form of identity with a “We-They” perception into a cultural form. That, cultural events and dialogues develop cross-cultural understanding, an appreciation of differences, and a search for common values which can decrease the salience of a particular identity by penetrating borders and increase positive attitudes (Korostelina, 2007, p.220).
4. By applying conflict intervention processes such as identity reconstruction workshops, groups can be moved away from entrenched chosen traumas and chosen glories to a new reconstruction of identity through a de-categorization or super-categorization of the social narrative (Volkan, 1997, p.202). A third-party approach based on de-categorization will bring healing as Hutus and Tutsis go through a re-humanization experience in

which they come to value each other's differences as a source of communal strength and diversity and not a source of tension and incompatibility. Engaging both groups in small-group sessions to discuss issues focusing on a super-categorization of society can transform an entrenched psychology of axiological differences into one where they both see themselves as equal and important members of one big society.

5. Through problem-solving workshops conducted in small groups, problems can be reconceptualized in such a way that they deemphasize identity-based needs and refocus on genuine interest-based needs reframed in terms of shared problems to be solved.
6. In the current political dispensation in Rwanda, women have seen a dramatic rise in access to political power and other areas of society where they can influence the formulation of constructive policies and also assert their independence. Even more important, is the need to empower women by building their capacity in peacebuilding processes at the local and communal level. This way, they can proactively engage the communities in which they live in *provention* initiatives to prevent future eruption of violent conflict. Third parties can play a critical role in this regard through the training of women and other local nongovernmental organizations in developmental facilitation processes to empower them to overcome both content and communication processes involved in effective facilitation.
7. Dialogues and workshops that confront the sources of genocide as a major topic is a necessary and, indeed, an essential part in achieving reconciliation after such a devastating event that had been rooted in decades of mistrust and hatred. Sustainable peace will require justice as an integral part of conflict resolution. In seminars and workshop done on a similar theme in Rwanda, Staub (2006) notes that as participants came to see the genocide they suffered as one of a number of genocides, the perpetrators' actions as psychologically and culturally understandable, although terribly horrible, and genocide as not an unfathomable evil but the outcome of understandable human processes even if extreme and terrible in their consequences, they seemed to feel humanized or rehumanized. They expressed the newfound belief that they were not the victims of blind evil or God's punishment and the hope that through understanding the roots of violence, they can act to prevent it (Staub, 2006; Staub & Pearlman, 2005).
8. At the macro level of intervention, third parties can work with the government and the international community to help the Rwanda government undergo an institutional renewal of its state institutions. It is important for the intervener to recognize that at the core of real issues in the conflict was the denial of access to political, educational, and economic opportunities in the state. While the Hutus suffered the same fate under Belgian/Tutsi rule, the structures remained the same when the Hutus came to power evidenced in state policies such as the quota system which denied most Tutsis access to education and employment. The lack of diversity in the military officer corps contributed significantly to making the planning within the Habyarimana military inner circle go undetected long before the execution of the genocide. Kuperman (2000) notes that "virtually all of Rwanda's elite military units were controlled by extremist Hutu" (Kuperman, 2000, p.111).
9. Training in participatory and inclusive governance is critical for the political process. While the Kagame government has made major strides in bringing about unity in the Rwandan society, there are still traits of the "old" politics. Staub (2006) states that over the decades the government has become gradually intolerant of "divisionism," at times applying the term, and the more extreme accusation of propagating genocidal ideology, to individuals and groups who oppose the government (Staub, 2006, p.870).
10. Reforming the educational sector will, for instance, include working with the government to institutionalize curricula that put emphasis on the shared history of the Rwandan society and away from themes that highlight Hutu and Tutsi perceived ethnic differences. In addition, a pedagogy that encourages the integration of peace studies and conflict analysis and resolution studies as a core component of the academic experience will contribute to an awareness and empowerment of individuals and the society as a whole to deal peacefully with issues of violence and conflict. Also important will be collaboration with journalism schools and the media in training current and future journalists on how to cover conflict responsibly.
11. Media institutional renewal is very crucial to preventing future violent conflict given the incendiary role it played during the genocide. The genocidal norm became possible and mass-participatory, for the most part, because the media broadcast and published hate propaganda targeted at moderate Hutus and all Tutsis. Here, third party interveners can assist in two ways. First, they can help train media institutions to encourage alternative voices that emphasize shared values, democratic participation and diversity. At the macro level, the government can be assisted to encourage media diversity not only in ownership but in the diversity of

staff. Radio Rwanda and RTLM were highly underrepresented in Tutsis since both were either state-owned or owned by pro-Habyarimana cronies.

12. Finally, communication is an essential tool for peaceful coexistence. It is also key to effective peacebuilding. It is clear from the Rwandan genocide that the media agenda-setting capacity hugely contributed to the conflict situation. The language of instigation, verbal and non-verbal communications which inflamed passions unnecessarily all complicated the conflict situation. Thus, to prevent future violent conflicts, it is important for stakeholders including conflict resolution practitioners to help develop a framework to guide communicators and public speakers in their reportage and commentary on issues which especially have ethnic, racial, religious and political undertones. Local and national workshops on conflict prevention strategies must emphasize the compelling relevance of civil communication as a critical peacebuilding tool. Public communication should be characterized by civility, decorum and respect in the interest of societal progress.

V. CONCLUSIONS

It can be argued that understanding a complex conflict theater such as the Rwandan genocide requires holistic and all-encompassing paradigms that are both properly informed and contextually appropriate. It should be stressed that the convergence of the political manipulation of real and perceived fear rooted in decades of discrimination, societal inequality, hatred and mistrust between Hutus and Tutsis made the Rwandan genocide both possible and intelligible. Achieving success in conflict resolution intervention after such a horrific genocide will therefore require an extensive and integrative repository of knowledge and expertise conceptualized, designed and implemented using both multimodal and multi-actor approaches. Such an intervention framework in the Rwandan context calls for different actors with different skill sets to help achieve an overarching conflict resolution goal. At the broader level, it is worthy to note that societal progress and transformation always encompass a variety of actors and models deployed to effect changes that are both structurally sound and psychologically appropriate. Admittedly, realizing this goal may appear relatively daunting. However, the ability to meet such a daunting task requires a third-party approach that is informed, reflective, and conceptualized from an adequate theoretical analysis of the situation and cutting-edge research findings. Conflict resolution practitioners will continue to struggle to achieve desired results if they fail to incorporate well-grounded theoretical underpinnings and time-tested philosophical constructions of conflicts and conflict situations into their approaches and strategies. Finally, the role of communication in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes cannot be over-emphasized. It is even more vital towards the promotion of sustainable peace and sustainable development in general. Conversations on how to promote peace and peaceful coexistence will be incomplete without regard to the necessary communication models, techniques and strategies which should inform peacebuilding framework.

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