Sites of Aggressor-Victim Memory: The Rwandan Genocide, Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT: *Beginning with Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory and the great body of sociological, historical, and political-science literature on war and aggression that postdates Halbwachs, the author attempts to identify the elements of aggressor–victim memory through a detailed analysis of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In participant and third-party narratives of the genocide, it is possible to observe a commemorative quality in the campaign of mass murder. The author suggests that the persistence of post-traumatic culture and the failure of dialogue can lead people to kill in remembrance of earlier aggression: in such cases, "acting out" substitutes for "working through," with horrifying consequences.*

Trauma is ubiquitous in human society, and it is easy to resign oneself to the persistence of violence. In the era of globalization and mass media, we share a collective memory of the Shoah, the Rwandan genocide, and other acts of violence on the most egregious scale even if we did not experience them, and even if we do not belong to the families or nations that did. And yet, it often seems unclear whether our collective memory has given us any tools that might prevent the recurrence of mass violence.

Maurice Halbwachs in two canonical works—*Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925) and *La mémoire collective* (1950)—laid out a theory of memory as a complex social phenomenon that functions in a collective framework. Halbwachs presented "collective memory" as a historicized, dynamic version of Emile Durkheim's "group

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mind" endowed with the capacity for remembrance. This collective memory inhabited a variety of social loci, among which Halbwachs highlighted family, class, and religion as the definitive "frames" of collective memory.

One striking lacuna in Halbwachs's framework, however, was the absence of any analysis of collective trauma. As Dario Paez, Nekane Basabe, and Jose Luis Gonzalez have observed, "Halbwachs's framework does not propose clear mechanisms that allow for an explanation of how societies remember conflict-ridden collective events with negative aspects and conflicting meanings" (1997: 162). This omission is all the more noteworthy given that Halbwachs was writing *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* less than a decade after he himself had seen the battlefields and corpses of the Great War, amid a veritable "memory boom" on the part of contemporaries seeking to work through their personal trauma. Paradoxically, Halbwachs seems to have repressed his own trauma, and his repression was so thorough that it led him to exclude the phenomenon of trauma entirely from his treatise on memory. Annette Becker has described Halbwachs's behavior as follows:

> At the very time when an arsenal of unprecedented memories born of the consequences of the Great War was being put into place, here was a man theorizing the notion of collective memory while simultaneously forgetting, in the numerous examples punctuating his work on the subject, to think about the weight of the recent past including his own personal past. (Becker 2005: 103; for a detailed discussion of Halbwachs's life, see Becker 2003)

Given that war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide command the attention of mass audiences as well as academic literature, it is unsurprising that many authors have stepped in to attempt to fill the void left by Halbwachs's trauma avoidance. Studies of collective memory written in the past thirty years abound.[1] The effusion of commemorative monuments, films, and other cultural or political customs following the two world wars has produced its own impressive body of literature over the course of the past twenty years (see especially Becker 1988; Winter 1995), as has the repression of wartime memory (Gross 2001; Rousso 1987; see also Hirszowicz and Neyman in this issue). Out of the literature on war has emerged a separate canon of Holocaust/Shoah trauma studies (Friedländer 1992; LaCapra 1994; Young 1993). General studies of collective memory have also touched at length on issues of collective trauma (Pennebaker, Paez, and Rimé 1997). Finally, the past two decades have seen a renaissance in interdisciplinary literature on ethnic cleansing and genocide (for emphasis on theory, see Fein 1993, and Straus 2001; for emphasis on case studies, see Gellately and Kiernan 2003; Naimark 2001; Sémelin 2005).

These works have succeeded in striking a balance between theoretical reflection and empirical case work on collective trauma. Wulf Kansteiner has even argued that Holocaust/Shoah studies have facilitated "the rise of trauma as one of the key interpretive categories of contemporary politics and culture" (Kansteiner 2004: 193). And yet, we are still missing a systematic study of the collective memory that is the common product of narratives by those who commit violence, those who suffer violence, and those on the outside who observe violence. Residual emotions

of trauma—the fear and anger of victims, the shame and denial of aggressors—appear to preclude a common language (see Jasińska-Kania's contribution to this issue), yet a common collective memory exists that binds these parties together: I call this collective memory *aggressor–victim memory.* Although I will expound at length on the categories of *aggressor* and *victim,* my operational definition is as follows: *aggressors* induce trauma, and *victims* suffer trauma, but in their narratives of the trauma the parties label each other aggressors and themselves victims. It is difficult to understand what is at stake in current political discussions about memory (whether in France, Poland, Rwanda, or Yugoslavia) without reference to *aggressor–victim memory,* for only this memory can tell all sides of the story and perhaps point the way to a shared resolution.[2]

In this article, I will sketch what I believe to be the *sites of memory* that are crucial to understanding aggressor–victim memory, and demonstrate their relevance through a case study of the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994. My central contention is that aggressor–victim memory allows us to understand genocide and other collective traumas as commemorative reenactments of earlier traumas. As I develop this claim, I hope to avoid methodological and terminological compartmentalization, bringing together the analysis of sociologists, historians, political scientists, and philosophers.

Theory: The Sites

Pierre Nora's category of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) works well as a typology for the different elements of *aggressor–victim memory.* Rather than a linear chronology, "sites of memory" implies simultaneously functioning, sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory social processes that shape the identity and behavior of aggressors and victims both during and after instances of collective trauma. As Paul Ricoeur (2004) has suggested, conflict memory represents an "eschatology" of sorts; not only is the past traumatic referent itself continually replayed in the present, but that replaying defies a structured chronology, allowing for the simultaneous activation of different sites as well as their repetition.

This section briefly defines *aggressor–victim memory.* Four "sites" constitute this memory: (1) the traumatic moment itself; (2) testimony; (3) post-traumatic culture; (4) reappraisal. These four sites appear in the order in which I present them here—clearly, reappraisal cannot precede testimony, nor can post-traumatic culture precede trauma—but I have chosen to frame them as "sites" rather than "stages" in strict chronological succession because they may well overlap. Although testimony and post-traumatic culture are distinct conceptually, in some cases it is misleading and perhaps even inaccurate to separate them chronologically. The first act of testimony may open the floodgates of post-traumatic culture even as testimony continues for years. It is therefore important to keep in mind that, while the four sites of aggressor–victim memory do represent a linear logical sequence, their chronology is not strictly linear.

The first site—trauma—can be situated chronologically within each of the narratives that is part of the aggressor–victim memory. The act of aggression, which produces trauma, becomes the historical referent of the other sites of memory. However, the term *act of aggression* can itself be ambiguous: with the passage of time, memory can essentialize an entire series of events into one "act of aggression." This essentialization enables us to speak in shorthand about the Shoah, the Rwandan Genocide, or the Cambodian Genocide as "historical moments." We must keep in mind, however, that each of these was in fact a series of discrete acts of aggression (for example, exterminations and massacres), each of which can also be framed in terms of hundreds or thousands of individual deaths.

The point here is to emphasize that what is often remembered as a single, monolithic aggression (e.g., the "Rwandan Genocide") should be understood also in terms of its component events: distinct massacres of distinct victims who resisted in their own ways and deserve commemoration as groups and individuals in addition to monolithic labels such as "victims of the Rwandan genocide." Testimony, post-traumatic culture, and reappraisal—the other *sites of memory*—were all present during the genocide: radio messages were broadcast, family members informed, exhortations made to the United Nations and the United States. No feat of imagination is required to understand that individuals living under threat of aggression will try to warn others and will cope with their anxiety by talking each other through the threat. (For a case study exploring "life" and death in Auschwitz in these terms, see Pawełczyńska 1979.) Pennebaker and Banasik (1997) have called this *social sharing:* those in a given situation reflect on what is taking place and coordinate a reaction, while those observing from the outside comment intensively. The challenges of paying attention to both single events and series of events complicate any analysis of *aggressor–victim memory,* but they also enrich this analysis immeasurably. It is crucial to look for these sites of memory not only after all aggression has ceased but also within series of aggressions, because the narratives that frame aggressor–victim memory (whether they come from aggressors, victims, or third parties) begin to emerge with the first aggression, not the last.[3]

After the aggression stops, a period of inhibition sets in, often accompanied by repression (Paez, Basabe, and Gonzalez 1997). The response to repression is testimony, which is the second site of aggressor–victim memory—described especially within the field of Holocaust/Shoah studies as "bearing witness." The testimonies of Primo Levi, Anne Frank, and the pianist Władysław Szpilman continue to command attention. Although one act of testimony obviously does not efface an entire group's repression, it can trigger a flow of additional testimony. Only once someone has come forward to give an account of what has taken place, to reconstruct the past through narrative, can commemoration or remembrance begin because "victims" and third parties then demand that "aggressors" account for their place in the narrative recounted by a witness. Paez, Basabe, and Gonzalez (1997) call this "confrontation," and it usually correlates with the revival of social sharing as repression decreases.

The narrative form of testimony is therefore crucial to understanding the relationship between the original event and its reconstruction; after all, the narratives of traumatic events form the framework within which all aggressor–victim memory functions. In Dominick LaCapra's words, "Testimonies serve to bring theoretical concerns in sustained contact with the experience of people who lived through events and suffered often devastating losses" (2001: xiv). Nonetheless, the dynamics of memory's construction out of a multiplicity of testimonies have been contested since the publication of *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire,* and LaCapra himself has been part of a vigorous debate in Holocaust/Shoah studies concerning the intergenerational transmission of collective memory. Although some scholars have questioned the autonomous agency of collective memory, suggesting that it may not survive from one generation to the next (Kansteiner 2004; Winter 2006), others have pointed to the persistence of Holocaust trauma memory as an example of the intergenerational character of collective memory, whose narratives and testimonies become part of the historical record (Friedländer 1997; LaCapra 2001).[4] *Aggressor–victim memory* is thus an intergenerational web of multiple narratives derived from "aggressors," "victims," and the outside world.

To understand the implications of this memory, the meaning of each component narrative must be assessed in virtue of its *social* aspect, which correlates the narrative's identification of the aggressors and the victims with the identifications made by other narratives. Clearly, in any given act of violence, there are, objectively speaking, a perpetrator and a victim.[5] Nonetheless, no act is committed in a vacuum: the *social* aspect of aggression necessitates that we examine context. Objective perpetrators can avoid aggressor status and even claim victim status, and it is crucial to understand why that is the case. As Doris Gödl observes in her contribution to this volume, parties to trauma systematically attribute aggressor status to each other and victim status to themselves. Aggressor–victim memory, however, includes not only these often contradictory claims and counterclaims but also narratives of third-party observers. Indeed, the third-party arbiter's power to render an ethical judgment on the two implicated parties is a crucial revision to the intuitive notion that aggressors and victims alone determine aggressor–victim memory. For scholars seeking to learn the lessons of collective trauma, it is crucial to consider all three sets of narratives framing aggressor–victim memory.

The third site of aggressor–victim memory is what Hans Gumbrecht (borrowing from Kirby Farrell) has designated "post-traumatic culture" (Gumbrecht 2001). Although Farrell's original usage of the term centered on his negative stance toward late-twentieth-century Western culture, which he criticizes for an overdependency on motifs of trauma (1998), the term has much wider analytical applicability. My position is that *post-traumatic culture* adequately describes the full range of behaviors and discourses shared by aggressors and victims in the wake of witness testimony. These behaviors and discourses fall under two headings that I borrow from Walter Benjamin, who in turn was inspired by Freud. Both *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* translate roughly as "experience," yet there are a number of crucial differences between

the two. Dominick LaCapra borrows from psychoanalysis to distinguish between *Erlebnis* as "acting out" ("reliving, or reenactment") and *Erfahrung* as "working through" (2001: 22, n. 28). Alternately, we can translate *Erlebnis* as "momentary experience" and *Erfahrung* as "reflective experience."[6]

The following elements of post-traumatic culture enter into our discussion of aggressors and victims:

• victimology—a term derived from criminology that describes the victim group's absorption in the commemoration of its victimhood;

• otherization—a term derived from anthropology that has become a cornerstone of totalitarian studies, referring to the use of language to dehumanize a group seen as Other, whom it is then easier to persecute, kill, and attempt to exterminate (Arendt 1951);

• scapegoating—another anthropological term referring to the transferal of blame for one's own ills onto another individual or group (Girard 1972);

• renewed repression—a reprisal of the inhibition immediately following the traumatic act; a "conspiracy of silence" that can facilitate successive acts of aggression (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997).

It is plainly visible that the above list is dominated by *Erlebnis.*[7] The two elements that I have left off of this list are the aggressor–victim cycle (the culmination of *Erlebnis*) and dialogue (the essence of *Erfahrung*). In the cycle, a group memorializing its status as the object of past wrongs, unable to escape repression or to find resolution, casts blame onto another group, dehumanizes that group, and launches its own campaign of aggression (Bar-Tal 2003).

Aggressors may subjectively become victims, just as victims may objectively become aggressors: aggressors need only construct a victimological narrative that, in their eyes, justifies or even necessitates future aggression against those by whom they claim to have been victimized.[8] Although the Hutu killed almost 20,000 Tutsi in Rwanda in 1963–64, they presented themselves as the victims, for they had recently experienced an invasion by an army of Tutsi exiles. Over the next thirty years, again and again Hutu presented themselves as the victims of Tutsi attempts at aggrandizement, and this victimology contributed to widespread belief among Hutu in 1994 that the genocide that they were perpetrating was justified (Mamdani 2001; Newbury 2002). In general, there are multiple reasons why any group might develop its own victimological narrative. Tzvetan Todorov (1995) has written of the moral legitimation that victimhood brings, and Cairns and Roe have suggested that victimhood may entail social benefits: "this sense of shared victimisation in social memory can be seen as an element promoting group cohesion" (2003: 175).

The concept of the aggressor–victim cycle as an element of post-traumatic culture can be useful in explaining various degrees of persecution and violence: from simple discrimination, to expulsion and slavery, to ethnic cleansing and genocide.[9] Moreover, the cycle can be paired with Pennebaker and Banasik's *critical period hypothesis*, which suggests that a flowering of commemorative acts takes place after a period of repression following the original event.[10] Although Pennebaker

and Banasik focus (like Winter 2006 and Gillis 1994) on monuments constructed, films produced, and photographs exhibited (in short, cultural commemorations), I posit that their hypothesis applies at least in part to social and political "commemorations" of a different sort. *Commemorative* practices therefore include not only canonical examples from official and vernacular culture—from public ceremonies and holidays to quiet vigils and family observance—but also ethnic cleansing and genocide: people kill in remembrance of earlier aggression. I would not go so far as to pose the reductionist hypothesis that genocidal violence strictly follows a cyclical periodization dictated by aggressor–victim memory, but statistical analysis shows that higher genocidal risk does correlate with higher frequency of group inequality and ethnic, tribal, or religious violence (Harff 2003). At the very least, it seems useful to examine this potential linkage, the *commemorative* function of a violent role reversal, in which "acting out" substitutes for "working through" with the worst possible consequences.

Despite the apparent predominance of *Erlebnis*, dialogue between aggressors and victims can be a way to resolve the tensions within aggressor–victim memory.[11] Although the original trauma's shadow always hangs over dialogue, dialogue has the potential to liberate both parties from the unrelenting burden of that trauma's memory. It is thus the sole element of post-traumatic culture with the potential to serve as a bridge to the fourth and final site of aggressor–victim memory: reappraisal (Paez, Basabe, and Gonzalez 1997). The literature of memory often alludes to "forgiveness" as an idyllic end goal, yet the moral and ethical implications of forgiveness are unclear. Referring to certain acts of aggression—genocide especially—Paul Ricoeur suggests, "To forgive would be to ratify impunity, which would be a grave injustice committed at the expense of the law and, even more so, of the victims" (2004: 473). What is left then is to seek what Ricoeur calls a "shared *katharsis*" (2004: 484), an agreement for a mutual leap of faith independent of justice that may or may not be done by juridical means.

With a mutual reappraisal of their common past, aggressors and victims can transform their collective memory from a trauma-obsessed culture into an open road to a common future. France and Germany did just this in the years following World War II, as West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer confessed having "often been ashamed since 1933 of being German" (1946, in Rovan 1987: 90), and the Schuman Plan brought the two countries on equal terms into the European Coal and Steel Community, which formed the foundation of European integration and the eventual European Union.[12]

Case Study: The Rwandan Genocide

Rwanda is one of the few contemporary African states with a precolonial history. By the fifteenth century, the pastoral Tutsi tribe had settled on the same territory as the agrarian Hutu tribe and established a Tutsi-dominated kingdom.[13] By 1900, Rwanda's borders were more or less in line with its borders of today, and successive

colonial control by Germany and Belgium did not change those borders. However, colonialism managed both to ideologize and destabilize the centuries-old tribal class system (Mamdani 2001). Germans promoted the British explorer John Hanning Speke's (1863) thesis that the "Hamitic" Tutsi were racially superior to the Hutu. The Belgians went much further, prescribing this thesis as a juridical reality: in recognition of their putative racial superiority, Tutsi received legally privileged status over Hutu, and the colonial regime cut off social mobility between Hutu and Tutsi categories. In 1959, Hutu frustration exploded in a "social revolution" (Lemarchand 1970; Mamdani 2001), and a three-year civil war followed, with the result that the Hutu established dominance and expelled entire populations of Tutsi. In 1963, exiled Tutsi launched a failed incursion into Rwanda from Burundi, in the aftermath of which the Hutu slaughtered 12,000–20,000 Rwandan Tutsi (Harff 2003).

Trauma

By 1990, a massive Tutsi exile army had formed in Uganda, and it attacked Rwanda, initiating a civil war. Although 1993 saw a negotiated settlement for the enforcement of which the United Nations (UN) provided peacekeepers, both the Hutu government and Tutsi rebels were dissatisfied with the slow pace of reforms. The Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana was assassinated on April 6, 1994, and the Hutu unleashed a campaign of genocide (with machetes if no firearms were available) against the Tutsi in Rwanda that soon spread to include Hutu who refused to join the aggressors' ranks. The UN and the international community failed to intervene—UN secretary-general Kofi Annan denied an explicit request from UN ground commander Lt. General Roméo Dallaire and even reduced the number of peacekeepers in Rwanda—and only an invasion from Uganda by Tutsi exiles stopped the Hutu genocide (Power 2003; Prunier 1995). Between April 6 and July 17, 1994, anywhere from 500,000 to slightly over 1 million—precise figures are impossible to establish—unarmed Rwandans perished at the hands of fellow countrymen.[14] After the Tutsi armed victory in July 1994, thousands of Hutu fled Rwanda, and disastrous conditions in Hutu refugee camps in Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire led to the deaths of thousands from cholera and dysentery. In addition to those slaughtered in the genocide and those who died either fighting in the civil war or escaping its victors, the Rwandan genocide destroyed regional stability, giving rise to civil wars in Zaire and Burundi (Scherrer 2002).

In identifying *sites of memory* in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, I will argue that the 1994 genocide was a commemorative campaign explicitly anchored in aggressor–victim memory of the events of 1963–64: the Hutu remembered Tutsi "aggression" and commemorated their own aggression against the Tutsi with a new, much larger campaign of mass killing.

Testimony

At first glance, the fact that the Rwandan genocide occurred as recently as 1994 complicates the application of the categories of *inhibition* and *confrontation,* which suggest that a period of repression and inhibition should follow the intense *social sharing* that takes place during and immediately after the trauma.[15] Invariably, intense social sharing did occur during the genocide. A seventeen-year-old Hutu aggressor described the extent to which Hutu popular culture encouraged enlistment in the state-sponsored genocidal militia: "For a long time we had loved the football commentaries of Ferdinand Nahimana on the radio. When we saw he wanted to save the country by supporting President [Juvénal] Habyarimana, we all enlisted in the *Interahamwe* [militia]" (Kayitesi 2002–3, cited Sémelin 2005: 332). Meanwhile, Tutsi in Rwanda shared the news of approaching militias in an attempt to save themselves and their neighbors; Tutsi outside Rwanda shared the news to recruit more exile fighters to the army that would subsequently bring down the Hutu government. Moreover, third parties in Rwanda vigorously pursued social sharing: Lt. General Dallaire writing furious yet futile requests to Kofi Annan for reinforcements and permission to defend Tutsi, American missionaries phoning and writing home to try to stir a social consciousness to motivate international intervention (Dallaire and Beardsley 2003).

The period of inhibition following the genocide was brief: only about two years passed before the new Rwandan government under former Tutsi rebel leader Paul Kagame began prosecuting *génocidaires*. By 1999, the UN had created its own body to investigate the genocide, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), and in 2001 Kagame accelerated the national prosecution of *génocidaires* with the creation of a "participatory justice" system called Gacaca. War criminals have been convicted from all levels of Hutu society, from former prime minister Jean Kambanda to youths only seventeen or eighteen years of age when they wielded machetes. Not only have Tutsi spoken out about the horrors they suffered, not only have Hutu confessed to acts of aggression, but third parties have also spoken out: UN commander Dallaire, after a widely publicized bout with post-traumatic stress disorder, published reflections on the genocide in 2003 and was honored with a seat in the Canadian senate in 2005. In June 2006, after twelve years, the UN formally acknowledged through a press release by its ICTR that the Hutu aggression had been a genocide. Even former U.S. president Bill Clinton has made a contribution to the collective memory, publicly apologizing for his failure to intervene at the time (2004: 593, 782).

I can offer two explanations as to why this rush of confrontation and testimony curtailed inhibition so quickly. First and foremost, we live in the Information Age, an era of globalized mass media, in which BBC World and CNN provide current information every minute of every day. Images of Rwandan corpses were streaming onto television sets in homes worldwide even as the United Nations and the U.S. government were debating the political implications of reacting to the mass

violence in Rwanda. Globalized mass communication necessarily reduces inhibition and repression because the constant deluge of painful images and facts makes the events evoked by those images difficult to deny.

Second, the international reverberations of the Rwandan genocide perpetuated its trauma, bridging the standard gap between in situ social sharing and ex post facto social sharing. Four countries surrounding Rwanda had to absorb Hutu refugees; moreover, the Rwandan aggression directly catalyzed protracted civil unrest in Zaire and Burundi. Given that the surrounding societies were in a continual state of trauma, it is hardly surprising that the process of confrontation was accelerated.

Likewise, the Cambodian genocide and especially the Shoah had extensive implications ranging far beyond the geographic area within which the aggression was carried out.[16] In fact, we see in general for genocides with a clear salience in the international arena that third-party verification accelerates aggressor and victim confrontation of the trauma, and vice versa. For Rwanda especially, the presence of Dallaire and the UN peacekeepers (in spite of their impotence) legitimated the Tutsi testimony of victimhood. The magnitude of aggression constituted by genocide, instant worldwide communication of information about the genocide by mass media, the tribal dispersion among African states, and the presence of third parties in Rwanda who immediately verified victims' testimony contributed to the accelerated arrival of a post-traumatic culture.[17]

Before we proceed to analyze this post-traumatic culture, however, we should take the question of third-party involvement a bit further. Dallaire's troops never engaged the *génocidaire* militias, yet ten Belgian peacekeepers assigned to guard the prime minister's residence were brutally slaughtered. But there is another thread of third-party involvement that I have not yet mentioned: *Opération Turquoise*, a UN-sanctioned French force that arrived in Rwanda in June 1994, sixty days after the start of the genocide. Announced as a humanitarian mission to aid the victims, the French force in fact primarily shielded Hutu attempting to flee Rwanda as it became increasingly clear that the Tutsi rebel force would defeat the Hutu government. Allegedly, the French may have even fought against the Tutsi force and supplied arms to the Hutu (Saint-Exupéry 2004).

What we see is what in the African context has often been presented as the continuing entanglement of postcolonial powers in struggling African nation-states. Yet the paradox here is that France had never controlled Rwanda. At the same time, commercially and politically, France is widely acknowledged to have provided "notorious support" to the Hutu government of the assassinated Habyarimana (Sémelin 2005: 196). Tutsi testimony before the ICTR accusing the French of aiding Hutu *génocidaires* led to the establishment of a French Parliamentary Commission on Rwanda, which reported its findings in 1998. Moreover, six cases are currently being heard by the Paris Court of Appeals charging "complicity of genocide and/or complicity of crimes against humanity."

The French involvement and the reticence displayed by the United Nations complicate the question of *third-party verification* in the Rwandan Genocide, but

such verification has nonetheless taken place. With respect to genocide, the juridical dimension of third-party verification should be relatively straightforward thanks to the UN Genocide Convention that came into force in January 1951. Article 2 of this convention stipulates that genocide be recognized in "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." Given the clarity of this language, it is troubling that political reservations kept the UN from conceding that "acts of genocide may have been committed" until April 29, 1994, by which time the Red Cross had estimated that 500,000 had already been slaughtered. And politics or no politics, it is incomprehensible that a formal recognition of the genocide by the UN took another twelve years (arriving only on June 16, 2006), several years longer than it had taken Hutu former prime minister Jean Kambanda to bear witness that his government had orchestrated the aggression by *Interahamwe* Hutu militias.

Long before the UN's formal recognition, the United States conceded that the killings in Rwanda did indeed constitute a genocide, and France also recognized the genocide when it initiated a parliamentary review of French "humanitarian" involvement. Juridically, then, external verification was achieved, and this external verification did in fact legitimate the new Tutsi government, giving it shared jurisdiction with the UN over the prosecution of war criminals and allowing for an influx of international aid that permitted the government to begin reconstructing the state's infrastructure. With the explosion of global media attention to the genocide and the publication of over twenty academic and journalistic monographs (with more on the way), it is safe to conclude that the "global community" has indeed verified the genocide as follows: the Hutu were the aggressors against the Tutsi, and now the Tutsi are trying to rebuild.

In addition to external verification, we confront the question of verification by the community in which the genocide has taken place. Our first order of business is to define the "community" making the verification. Barbara Harff (2003) presupposes a "failed state" condition for genocide, and Jeffrey Herbst (2000) has argued that African geographical singularities require a much looser notion of the state than is the case on other continents. Arguably, their theses translate into a dismissal of the state-bounded "community" in favor of nations or tribes taken strictly as social groups. In Rwanda, tribal self-definition clearly trumps national self-definition, and tribal dominance has historically been reflected in political control of the state apparatus. Hutu and Tutsi perceive the Hutu–Tutsi distinction far more strongly than they perceive the distinction between "Rwandan" and "non-Rwandan." Indeed, otherizing, inflammatory goading by Hutu leaders Léon Mugesera and Mbonyumutwa Kayibanda and Tutsi leader Paul Kagame, bears out that distinction (Sémelin 2005: 208–12). The nation of "Rwandans" is at best

an entirely "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's sense (1983), while the Hutu and Tutsi "nations" are very real, aggregated extensions of precolonial tribes racialized under colonialism. The racial and class identities promulgated by German and Belgian colonizers destroyed the delicate balance that had permitted Hutu and Tutsi to coexist as Rwanda for centuries.

In Rwanda, then, the "community" consisted solely of aggressors and victims; the Hutu militias guaranteed this when they began killing those Hutu who refused to become *génocidaires*. Indeed, in many cases of wars of attrition or extermination campaigns, the entire community is forced to join sides with either the aggressors or the victims. The rapid ideologization of aggression, armies, and murder in twentieth-century states has created a Manichean order that stratifies society into aggressors and victims (Arendt 1951; Hull 2003).

Thus, when we speak of *community verification,* we mean that victims *testify* at the same time as aggressors *confess.* This is what took place at Nuremberg, and this took place in Rwanda as well. Indeed, with the blurring of the boundaries between state and society in the modern state (Arendt 1951; Scott 1998), social groups that hold political power have found it to their advantage to announce openly their aggressive aims. Although Hitler did not announce his Final Solution at the beginning of his reign or even of World War II, he alluded to it in numerous Manichean statements such as his January 30, 1942 statement, "the war can end only when either the Aryan peoples are exterminated or the Jews disappear from Europe" (Gellately 2001: 148). In subsequent genocides, leaders were even more direct. In 1971, Pakistani president Yahya Khan prefaced the genocide of the Bangladeshis in East Pakistan with the line, "Kill three million of them, and the rest will eat out of our hands." In Cambodia, a standard Khmer Rouge slogan was "To spare you is no profit; to destroy you is no loss." (On Pakistan, see Jahan 2004; on Cambodia, Kiernan 2002.) In Rwanda—"know that the one whose throat you do not slit is the very one who will slit yours," announced by Hutu intellectual Léon Mugesera as early as November 1992 (Des Forges 1999: 104–5). After the genocide, former prime minister Kambanda advanced the same sentiment in his ICTR testimony, and it led to a full confession of aggressor status.

Post-traumatic Culture

All of the literature on Rwanda notes the bloody civil war of 1959–62 and the subsequent rebellion and bloody reprisal of Hutu against Tutsi, yet the relationship between those events and the 1994 genocide, while widely affirmed, remains unclear.[18] According to Barbara Harff (2003), between December 1963 and June 1964, as many as 20,000 Tutsi perished at the hands of Hutu militia.[19]

What does this periodization tell us? In the theoretical discussion, I suggested that the Pennebaker–Banasik critical period hypothesis allows us to see recurrent infliction of trauma as a commemorative behavior. Less than thirty years after the end of one Hutu genocide of Tutsi, another took place, carried out in the same

fashion (militia-executed mass murder), only on a much larger scale. Like the genocide of 1963–64, the 1994 genocide occurred in response to an incursion by an armed force of exiled Tutsi. Harff has her own recurrence hypothesis: "The risks of new episodes were more than three times greater when state failures occurred in countries that had prior geno-/politicides" (2003: 66).

The language of Harff's hypothesis limits her argument's scope to the political site of the nation-state, so I would like to reframe that argument as a social hypothesis about aggressor–victim memory: in societies in which mass trauma has taken place, the risk of genocide is increased. If we combine this hypothesis with the *critical period* hypothesis, we find in the Rwandan case that the increased risk of genocide correlated with the elements of post-traumatic culture. The victims (in this case the Tutsi) stewed in their victimology, blaming the Hutu for the annihilation of their tribal brethren, resurrecting the otherizing racist discourse generated by the German colonizers. At the same time, the Hutu aggressors in 1963–64 scapegoated the Tutsi for the early failures of the Rwandan republic; by killing the Tutsi, they both sanctified their victims and damned them to perpetual victimhood. Thirty years of discrimination followed, to which the Tutsi ultimately responded with another incursion. The aggressor–victim cycle perpetuated, with victimized Tutsi becoming aggressors in a new invasion, the Tutsi once again fell prey to Hutu who in commemoration of their mass killing of the Tutsi thirty years earlier tried to finish the job.

This interpretation raises obvious questions tied to the practical reality of Hutu–Tutsi relations. In 1990, Tutsi exiles invaded Rwanda, and in 1994 they allegedly were responsible for assassinating Rwanda's Hutu president. Were these actions also supposedly commemorative? At what point do we draw the line between acts of remembrance and the haphazard homogenization of all events postdating trauma by thirty years into the commemorative category?

This last question is particularly complex. With respect to the assassination of President Habyarimana, however, statements by prominent Hutu leaders made immediately following the assassination suggest that at least they interpreted the event as the ritual prelude to an escalation of aggression. The son of former Rwandan president Mbonyumutwa Kayibanda, a Hutu who had been involved in the Tutsi genocide of 1963–64, gave a radio address declaring that Tutsi clearly "are going to exterminate, exterminate, exterminate, exterminate. They are going to exterminate until they are left alone to guard for 1,000 years the power their forefathers held for 400" (Sémelin 2005: 211). In Kayibanda's language, the Tutsi pursuit of a resurrected glorious past involves both commemoration and violence; implicitly, Kayibanda therefore called for Hutu to preempt such Tutsi commemorative acts with their own campaign of extermination. This Hutu leader both otherized the Tutsi and anchored them explicitly in an aggressor–victim memory that he portrayed as stretching back centuries.

More fundamentally, the empirical relevance of the aggressor–victim cycle in the Rwandan genocide seems impossible to deny. As Mamdani has written, "The

continuing tragedy of Rwanda is that each round of violence gives us yet another set of victims-turned-perpetrators" (2001: 268). Dehumanization and scapegoating have been systematically employed in Rwanda, literally disfiguring the humanity of the "blamed" groups. Jacques Sémelin writes, "To be able to kill him [the enemy] implies that he be dehumanized, not by the imaginary site of propaganda, but now, through action: to cut off his nose or ears is to satisfy oneself right off that he no longer has a human face" (2005: 352). As Nico H. Frijda has written, commemoration involves ritualistic representation of a past occurrence, specifically through "transition rituals" that "enact the transformation of the past into the present" (1997: 112). Any reenactment of past violence betrays a ritualistic element, but intentional physical dehumanization literally reconfigures the bodies of members of victimized groups into present representations of a traumatic past. The enacted transformation in Rwanda was an attempt at mass annihilation. Will we see yet another such "commemoration" in twenty years?

Reappraisal

Whether or not the critical period hypothesis is indeed relevant to periodization of aggressor–victim acts of remembrance (i.e., genocide) in Rwanda, it is clear that Rwanda is sorely in need of a reappraisal to avoid repression and repeated entrapment in the aggressor–victim cycle. In 2000, a French memorandum surfaced detailing Tutsi testimony to the UN in 1997 that had implicated current Rwandan (Tutsi) president Paul Kagame in the 1994 assassination of Hutu president Habyarimana that sparked the genocide. Kagame flatly denied the allegations and refused to open an investigation. Compare Kagame's reaction with the statement of Argentine president Carlos Saúl Menem, responding to demands for an open public discussion of mass murder committed during Argentina's 1976–83 "dirty war": "Publicly coming forward to give such testimony is a way of returning to a horrible past that we are trying to forget" (cited in Osiel 1997: 1). Like Menem, is Kagame advocating state-sponsored repression of the past? Is this the beginning of a new phase of victimology and otherization, the prelude to yet another run through the aggressor–victim cycle?[20]

I offer a tentative answer by reference to the concepts of *official* and *vernacular* culture. Whether the official culture is "invented" (following Hobsbawm 1983) or real, nonfailed states are a part of their citizens' daily lives: these individuals act not only as family members and local residents but also as nation-state citizens. In Rwanda, the vernacular and the official cultures are not in tension, yet this is generally so because both reflect the predominance of one tribe: the tribal power disparity still trumps any hope of nation-state unity. Power when held by the Hutu reflected a post-traumatic culture transmitted through social sharing and bound up in victimhood. The aggressor–victim cycle was fueled by the rhetoric of political elites as much as vernacular icons like the sports announcer who won a flock of teenaged recruits to the *Interahamwe,* and the cycle followed a critical period after

the genocide of 1963–64. Otherization became so deeply engrained that it separated the social group not represented in power (the Tutsi) from the nation-state, both through exile (the groups in Uganda and Burundi) and genocide (the Tutsi who remained in Rwanda and were killed in 1994).

The question then is not, as Alon Confino would pose it for societies at peace, how "the nation-state came to be a vernacular memory" (1997: 1402) but rather whether a change in the nation-state can transform vernacular memory. In a recent lecture, Paul Kagame (2006) acknowledged an imperative for "Rwandan society" to make a "decisive break with its ugly past," but such a break is possible only if that society includes both Tutsi and Hutu, that is, if Rwandan vernacular memory ceases to hinge on the Hutu–Tutsi distinction. If Kagame's refusal to dignify accusations of involvement in the 1994 assassination results solely from his wish not to reduce the Tutsi share of power, this refusal bodes ill for Rwanda, irrespective of Kagame's recent forward-looking rhetoric. Moreover, Mahmood Mamdani notes that, in 1996, an aide to the Rwandan vice-president told him that history teaching in schools had stopped because "history in Rwanda comes in two versions: Hutu and Tutsi" (2001: 267). If fear of conflicting histories has resulted in a conscious decision not to engage the past, will Rwanda ever be able to forge a shared history and, more important, a shared future?

Conclusions

Pierre Nora wrote that "the dissolution of the unifying framework of the nation-state has exploded the traditional system that was its concentrated symbolic expression" (1998: 614). Although Nora's analysis concerned a French nation driven by 1968 away from the unified national heritage of the French Revolution, it pertains equally to the state of collective memory in today's globalized community: commemoration has run wild, and the commemorative impulse often dictates action in politics and society. If, as I have suggested, the 1994 Rwandan genocide indeed constitutes a commemorative act, this would suggest that this case of collective trauma was in some sense determined by the rules and tendencies governing collective memory.

This article has been an attempt to outline and illustrate how aggressor–victim sites of memory can help us to analyze concrete cases of collective trauma. The parties to any given trauma will portray each other as aggressors and themselves as victims; their narratives can be understood only in conjunction with narratives from third-party observers. In light of the narratives of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, it is possible to observe a *commemorative* quality in the campaign of mass murder. The persistence of post-traumatic culture and the failure of dialogue can lead people to kill in remembrance of earlier aggression: in such cases, "acting out" substitutes for "working through," with horrifying consequences. I suspect that the commemorative function has played a role not only in Rwanda, and not

only in other genocides, but more broadly in collective trauma throughout human society. It may therefore be useful for social scientists and historians to analyze the mechanics of aggressor–victim memory in the hopes of reducing the likelihood of future genocides and other aggressions.

Notes

1. Jay Winter (2006) has even spoken of a "memory boom."

2. Wulf Kansteiner has suggested that existing trauma literature "conflates the experiences of victims, perpetrators and spectators of traumatic events" (2004: 193), rendering claims about collective trauma dubious historically as well as morally. However, *aggressor–victim memory* averts such conflation, focusing on the interactions between aggressor, victim, and observer narratives while avoiding essentialism. Kansteiner is correct to draw attention to the dangers of grouping aggressors with victims and observers as well as the dangers of erasing the distinction between the "traumatic" and the "non-traumatic" (194), but to dogmatize Kansteiner's warnings is to reify divided, antagonistic memory. If examined, the internal dynamics of shared memory of trauma can serve as the basis for a common language of dialogue, while failure to examine shared memory hampers reconciliation, instead begetting repression and perhaps even renewed aggression.

3. I thank Jan T. Gross for his suggestions on the entire article, but especially with regard to the definitions of *aggression* and *trauma.*

4. Paul Connerton has returned this debate to the general field of memory studies, certainly including but not limited to trauma studies. I accept his premise from *How Societies Remember* as a point of departure for the present study, namely, that "participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory" (1989: 3).

5. I am grateful to Tadeusz K. Krauze for his suggestions on the entire article, but especially on the identification of *aggressors* and *victims.*

6. I am indebted to Anson G. Rabinbach for his suggestions on the entire article, but especially for the translations of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung.*

7. The exception is victimology, which, if accompanied by dialogue, can also serve *Erfahrung.*

8. Hannah Arendt's *Antisemitism* and *Totalitarianism*—the first and third books of *Origins of Totalitarianism*—brilliantly illustrate how this process took place in Europe prior to and through the Shoah.

9. By *ethnic cleansing* here I mean "the intent of driving victims from the territory claimed by the perpetrators" (Naimark 2001), while *genocide* refers to the "process of annihilating a people" (Lemkin 1944; see next section for the juridical definition promulgated by the UN Genocide Convention).

10. Pennebaker and Banasik fix this period at twenty-five to thirty years based on their analysis of traumatic events in post–World War II American history. However, for other events in different geographical locations, it would be hasty to generalize this periodization, especially given the global revolution in communication and information sharing that has been in progress over the past two decades. I therefore leave for a subsequent study the more general question of how to determine "critical periods."

11. After all, peaceful coexistence and cooperation are far more common than aggression among ethnicities and nations; see Fearon and Laitin (1996) and Jasińska-Kania (2002).

12. On the other hand, Franco-German reconciliation contrasts starkly with Japan's failure to reconcile with China and South Korea, reflected in the ongoing controversy over textbooks and the Japanese prime ministers' visits to wartime shrines. For a comparison of the German and Japanese cases, see Conrad (2003).

13. Mahmood Mamdani makes the point that the agrarian-pastoralist dichotomy was historicized during colonial times into a racialized mythology used to separate Hutu from Tutsi. While I certainly reject this racialized distinction, I lack the space to reconstruct Mamdani's nuanced genealogy, and I therefore point readers to his extended discussion (2001: 41–102).

14. For systematic analysis of how the genocide was perpetrated, consult the work of Scott Straus, particularly, *The Order of Genocide* (2006).

15. Again, *social sharing* is Pennebaker and Banasik's term for talking, analyzing, and planning by participants as well as third parties.

16. Without risking too hasty a generalization, it is worth noting that inhibition and repression have ended very quickly in all of the most extreme cases of genocide. For the Nuremberg Trials, which began in November 1945, mere months separated the closing of the last Nazi concentration camp from the "confrontation" phase opened by courtroom proceedings. For Cambodia, just five years after the end of the genocide, with war still raging between Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese force occupying Cambodia, a filmed version of *The Killing Fields* shook audiences across the Western world in 1984.

17. I take *post-traumatic culture* to be a dynamic rather than static phenomenon, yet it is possible to identify a moment in which the culture "arrives" (rather than evolving unnoticed) as the moment following testimony when the elements listed in the theory section begin to appear: victimology, otherization, scapegoating, and renewed repression.

18. The closest I have seen to a synthetic assessment of causal links between the 1959–64 events and the 1994 genocide is Catherine Newbury's claim that the 1994 genocide reflected a "continuation of the evolving tensions of late colonial rule" (2002: 75). Scott Straus offers an instructive contrast between 1959–64 and 1994 as part of a broader history of violence in postcolonial Rwanda: "In various episodes of pre-1994 violence, the national authorities ultimately acted to deflate the violence. But in 1994, the opposite happened" (2006: 200).

19. Harff has compiled quantitative data of all mass killings in the twentieth century, which she classifies as either *genocides* or *politicides,* and she has conducted extensive statistical analysis of this data.

20. As I submit this text to press, I read that Rwanda has broken diplomatic relations with France (November 24, 2006) in the wake of arrest warrants issued by a French judge for nine aides of Rwandan president Paul Kagame in connection with Habyarimana's assassination. It seems that state-sponsored repression of the past continues, with potentially significant ramifications for international relations.

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