

The Conceptualization of Psychocide and Psychoethnicide: Psychological Warfare's Impact on Rwandan's Mental Health

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Abstract

The dynamic evolution of military strategy has highlighted the role of psychological manipulation, leading to the emergence of psychological warfare. This strategy utilizes propaganda and psychological operations (PSYOPs) to influence human cognition and decision-making, particularly through mass media. In military conflicts, these techniques are employed to demoralize enemies with false information. Notably, psychological torture or non-touch torture methods have been effective in extracting information from prisoners but come with severe health consequences such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The rise of military regimes and oligarchies, particularly in economically disadvantaged nations, has seen these psychological tactics employed domestically, leading to extreme poverty, human rights abuses, and concealed oppression techniques like gender washing and sports washing. This results in severe social distress hence deteriorating mental health. This deliberate infliction of mass mental harm by a small elite group pursuing absolute power was termed "Psychocide." In ethnocratic regimes, these tactics target specific ethnic groups, leading to trans-generational mental health deterioration and related consequences, a phenomenon termed "psychoethnicide." This paper aims to provide a conceptual framework to understand "psychocide" and "psychoethnicide" concepts which are forms of social groups and ethnicity-based psychological warfare and propaganda and show how these practices contribute to the increasing burden of mental disorders in targeted populations. A scoping review of the literature was complemented with the analysis of social media artifacts to examine the patterns of psychological warfare and its mental health implications in Rwanda. The findings highlight the pervasive nature of group and ethnic-based psychological manipulation, revealing its significant role in exacerbating mental health issues.

Keywords:

Mental Health Degradation,

Propaganda, Psychocide,

Psychoethnicide,

Psychological Warfare.

Introduction

The study interests lie in understanding population mental health crises, particularly in authoritarian governments and conflict-prone regions, where divisive political practices prevail. In such settings, a mind-blowing phenomenon emerges: "psychocide",

a deliberate form of psychological violence aimed at eroding the mental resilience of targeted groups. Building on this concept, "psychoethnicide" refers to the systematic psychological destruction of individuals belonging to a specific ethnic group. These concepts are crucial for understanding the long-term mental health impacts of authoritarianism and repression,

ethnic conflicts and genocides. They provide a framework for post-conflict rehabilitation and mental health support. They emphasize the need for psychological interventions that account for the socio-political contexts in which these traumas occur. We argue that psychoethnicide that psychoethnicide, a form of ethnic-based psychological warfare, plays a critical and underexplored role in the rising burden of mental disorders in conflict-prone regions like Rwanda. By systematically targeting the mental health and social cohesion of specific ethnic groups, psychoethnicide exacerbates trauma, anxiety, and long-term psychological damage, necessitating a rethinking of post-conflict mental health interventions that address the socio-political roots of these traumas. When I published some extracts of my thesis research as an e-book that gave the same title “On the Origins of Rwandans’ Mental Disorders: Re-reknitting the Social Fabric, A Long-Lasting Solution” and its availability shared on twitter now X, without reading the content of the work and producing evidence-based counter-arguments, an article on a blog of the one Ellen Kampire was quickly released and shared on twitter now X with the title “Sebahutu’s Ill-Conceived Notions of Mental Disorder instead qualify him for help for mental disorders” in which she considers the work divisive instead where she states “Evariste Erwin Sebahutu resurrects the long-lost ghosts of Parmehutu” (Parmehutu was a mainly Hutu party that ruled the first Republic: while during the 1959 Rwandan Social Revolution that led to Rwandan independence, political parties and mobilizations were built on ethnic lines by both Rwandan ethnicities Hutu, Twa, and Tutsi; in the current narratives any argument not well sounding in the ears of the current mainly Tutsi ruling elites is automatically considered a resuscitation of old Hutu led republic ideology considered to be the source of all Rwandan evil). According to her, “one can’t help but wonder if Sebahutu’s own mental state is in need of some serious examination...” and “(my work) takes a special kind of delusion to dismiss the tremendous strides Rwanda has taken toward unity and reconciliation.” What was going to follow was an accusation of “genocide denial” in her statement “Sebahutu’s book is a linguistic circus, a maze of convoluted arguments and inflated vocabulary meant to mask the shallowness

of his thesis. One cannot help but be amused by his attempts to impress the reader with an abundance of complex words. The book’s title itself, with its absurd claim of ‘Rwandans’ Mental Disorders,’ borders on ridicule. Such language undermines the gravity of the genocide against the Tutsi and trivializes the immense suffering endured by the Rwandan people.” In her attempt to destroy the message by destroying the messenger she adds “Sebahutu’s work covertly serves as a thinly veiled medium for promoting the insidious Parmehutu ideology. Through a carefully orchestrated manipulation of events and a distortion of facts, he weaves a narrative that perpetuates the very ethnic divisions that Rwanda has been tirelessly striving to overcome. In stark contrast to Sebahutu’s misleading assertions, the current Rwandan government, led by President Paul Kagame, has steadfastly prioritized national unity, reconciliation, and the eradication of ethnic divisions.” Playing the government spokesperson role she adds “President Kagame’s leadership has been instrumental in steering Rwanda towards a brighter future. Under his guidance, the government has implemented policies and initiatives aimed at fostering national cohesion, social integration, and economic development. It is a vision that transcends ethnic boundaries and places the well-being of all Rwandans at its core” and concludes “As we close the chapter on Sebahutu’s book, let us resist the allure of his rhetoric. Rwanda stands as a resolute testament to the power of progress and the triumph of unity over division. The ghosts of Parmehutu may linger in the recesses of Sebahutu’s imagination, but they pale in comparison to the radiant hope emanating from a nation steadfastly moving forward.” My November, 2022 paper entitled “Rwandan Ethnoscape More Than 400 Years Later: The Failure of De-Ethnicization Policy?” through the light of available evidences concluded that ethnicity is still common, even stronger in all Rwandan life spheres. Due to the loopholes in current ethnicity approaches, my paper entitled “The Conceptualization of Victimhood and Perpetratorhood Identities in Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Victors Legitimization of Oppression and Dictatorship?” presents and discuss new social identities which are maturing to become other ethnicities superimposed with old ones. This pushed me to find a long lasting solution that came

in the form of a theory found in my July, 2023 paper entitled “Integrated-Blame Game Theory of Ethnicity and its Significance: Empirical Analysis of the Evolution of Major Inter-ethnic Conflicts of the Modern History.”

This personal account is not an isolated case but a culture, a daily living environment for those with views not supporting the ruling party’s ideology and views. In the aftermath of the genocide against Tutsi, the Tutsi community’s historical socio-economic dominance envy was concealed behind a veil of collective forgetfulness concerning ethnic identities. The orchestrated promotion of a unified Rwanda where Ndi Umunyarwanda (I am a Rwandan) serves as a potent superordinate social identity, aiming to heal historical wounds and foster national cohesion was undertaken but paradoxically, simmering beneath this surface unity are the fissures of discontent and dissent. Sensing a perceived threat to their power, the Tutsi elite employ a meticulously crafted countermeasure, resorting to the mass culpabilization rooted in ethnicity. This strategic approach targets the Hutu counter-elite, attempting to stifle their capacity for critique and challenge. These tactics, while ostensibly aiming to transcend ethnic lines, inadvertently fuel the divisions they aim to mitigate. Amidst this complex landscape, the Hutu counter-elite persist in exposing the underlying power dynamics, revealing the ongoing struggle for authentic reconciliation and equitable socio-political representation within Rwanda. In this post-genocide Rwandans’ struggle for power, a disturbing trend emerges. As tensions mount, propaganda and insidious psychological tactics are deployed with increasing frequency to undermine and devalue the arguments put forth by the Hutu counter-elite. Regrettably, these methods not only amplify existing ethnic divisions but also contribute to the intensification of a phenomenon that I call psychoethnicide. This paper embarks on a critical exploration, grounded in the theory of propaganda and psychological warfare, to expose the insidious dimensions of this ongoing psychoethnicide. Delving into the intricate interplay of psychological manipulation, misinformation, and calculated narrative-shaping, this study aims to shed light on the corrosive impact of these tactics. As the struggle for power rages, the resulting erosion

of national unity initiatives becomes palpable. Concurrently, the sustained degradation of the mental well-being of Rwandans becomes a stark reality. This paper navigates through the layers of propaganda-driven psychoethnicide to reveal its profound implications for Rwanda’s collective psyche, the delicate aspirations for unity, and the imperative for healing and reconciliation.

Methodology

This qualitative study uses an interpretivist-constructivist approach to explore the ongoing phenomenon of psychoethnicide in Rwanda. A scoping review of literature on the theory of psychological warfare and propaganda is combined with an analysis of social media artifacts. Specifically, short videos and posts trending on Twitter (now X) that belittle, humiliate, and dehumanize the Hutu ethnic group are examined, along with messages from elites and government bodies that reveal inaction despite laws against ethnic-based ideologies. These multimedia materials were purposively selected and analyzed through content analysis to uncover the psychological manipulation and propaganda at play. The study aims to reveal how these tactics contribute to the ongoing process of psychoethnicide and hence increasing the burden of mental disorders.

Literature Review

Theory of Propaganda and the Psychological Warfare The etymology of the term “propaganda” finds its roots in a notable historical mission initiated by Pope Gregory XV, aimed at disseminating the doctrine of the Catholic Church to non-believers in the 1600s (Fitzmaurice, 2018). During this period, propaganda was characterized as an organized effort, movement, or scheme for propagating a specific doctrine or practice. As Fitzmaurice notes, the term transitioned from religious to political contexts around the era of the First World War. This marked the transformation of propaganda into a tool of political influence, distinct from its religious connotation. This evolution heralded the emergence of propaganda as a vehicle with political and partisan intent, aiming to sway mass audiences towards adopting specific perspectives. The progression of propaganda eventually led to the

terms “Psychological Warfare” and “Psychological Operations” also known as PSYOPs, frequently used interchangeably within military and international political arenas. Notably, Narula (2004) contends that “Psychological Operations” is the preferred term over “Psychological Warfare,” as the latter carries implications of conflict that might not align with activities directed at friendly or neutral parties. According to Dolev (2022), psychological warfare transcends physical confrontation, encompassing a battle of mental and emotional dimensions. This strategic form of warfare employs specialized techniques like propaganda and coercive statements to manipulate an adversary’s cognition and actions. Desired outcomes include exerting control, inducing pressure, and diminishing the opponent’s mental and physical strength. Dolev emphasizes that propaganda, as a form of communication or advertisement, serves to influence the cognitive processes and decision-making of targeted groups. A propaganda campaign’s core objective is to steer a population towards action that aligns with a designated message, achieved through the dissemination of impactful information. Echoing these perspectives, Modrzejewski (2016) states the Allied Administrative Publication’s definition of psychological operations as planned endeavors utilizing various communication methods to influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavior within authorized audiences. These activities hold the potential to shape political and military objectives, highlighting the multifaceted nature of psychological operations in the pursuit of strategic goals.

Rodriguez (2019) presents an insightful examination of propaganda, emphasizing its strategic objectives and nuanced impact. The essence of propaganda is captured as a tool that aims to seeking adherence to an idea while discouraging discussion or deliberation. By design, propaganda excludes the involvement of political actors beyond those who propagate it, fostering unidirectional communication that precludes open responses. Building on Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell’s perspective, the author portrays propaganda as a systematic endeavor that shapes perceptions, manipulates comprehension, and guides behavior to align with the propagandist’s intended outcome. The potency of propaganda lies in its ability to leverage perceptions, language, and

visual elements, ranging from slogans and posters to symbols and even architecture, to advance its aims. Furthermore, Rodriguez draws from James Ferguson’s insights, highlighting propaganda’s dual role as not only a purveyor of truths or falsehoods but also a generator, eliminator, and profiler of transmitted knowledge. This transformative influence extends to national identities and political power dynamics, underscoring propaganda’s pivotal role in executing specific political projects. The author posits that tactically and operationally, propaganda operates as a mechanism to mold the receiver’s perceptions, behaviors, and thoughts through the manipulation of symbols, slogans, and external cues. Strategically, propaganda requires a foundation rooted in profound political or philosophical frameworks, where tactical elements align with overarching strategic goals. Macdonald’s categorization of propaganda into white, gray, and black forms is also invoked in the same author to illustrate the multifaceted nature of its dissemination. White propaganda originates from recognized, authoritative sources, while black propaganda relies on falsified origins, often as a simulation. On the other hand, gray propaganda operates with less defined sources. Accordingly, Jacques Ellul’s perspective accentuates the manifold dimensions of propaganda, encompassing psychological action for opinion modification, psychological warfare to demoralize foreign adversaries, reeducation and brainwashing for integral transformation, and public and human relations propaganda to isolate individuals from society. Jacques Ellul’s typologies offer a comprehensive framework, encompassing political and sociological propaganda. Sociological propaganda, a precursor to political propaganda, subtly influences societies on a long-term scale. Only after the groundwork of sociological propaganda is laid, can political propaganda gain traction, influencing individual opinions and capabilities. Distinguishing operational and tactical political propaganda, the former establishes overarching thrust through a cohesive set of arguments, while the latter seeks immediate outcomes within that overarching narrative. This rich synthesis illuminates the intricate web of propaganda’s strategies and effects. Russell’s astute observation sheds light on the unfavorable aspect of propaganda, underscoring

how it provides an inequitable advantage to those who wield extensive publicity, often dictated by wealth or influence. Reflecting this, the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in the United States identifies enduring forms of propaganda that persist to this day. Among these techniques, “Name calling” entails using derogatory language to depict adversaries, thereby casting them in an unfavorable light. The “Bandwagon” technique appeals to individuals’ inclination to support ideas or projects by asserting that the majority already backs them, fostering a sense of invincibility. “Testimonies” leverage public figures to attract followers to a cause, while “Assertion” employs dynamic and emphatic language to present something as a factual reality. “Selective Omission” strategically presents only positive information about a project or idea, deliberately excluding any negative aspects. The “Glittering” technique associates the subject of propaganda with words that carry positive connotations. “Plain folks” connects an idea or project with the foundations of society, establishing a relatable connection. Lastly, “Transfer” links two unrelated subjects, aiming to transfer either a positive or negative image from one to the other. These enduring propaganda techniques offer insight into how messages are engineered and conveyed to influence perceptions and attitudes (Rodriguez, 2019).

Propaganda in the authoritarian and dictatorship arena. In the context of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, the manipulative power of propaganda assumes a distinct form. As highlighted by Rodriguez (2019), sociological propaganda is strategically aimed at molding the environment in which individuals develop, not by directly opposing their beliefs, but by introducing new truths that are subtly embraced rather than forcefully accepted. This type of propaganda is about suggestion more than conviction, aiming to foster action over introspection. The emphasis is on affiliating individuals with causes or lifestyles without inviting deep contemplation. Accordingly, within this realm, the concept of “weaponized narrative,” as underscored by Braden Allenby, gains prominence. This notion encapsulates the use of information and communication technologies, tools, and services to propagate stories intended to destabilize and undermine the foundations, identity, and civilization of adversaries. The operation involves instigating

complexity, confusion, and rifts within political and social spheres. This form of asymmetric warfare targets shared beliefs and values inherent in the adversary’s culture. It encompasses a spectrum of practices including misinformation, information warfare, psychological operations (PSYOPs), fake news, social networks, software robots, propaganda, and other tools. These practices draw insights from evolutionary psychology, behavioral economics, cognitive science, modern marketing, media studies, and technological advancements, including artificial intelligence. Described by Herbert Lin as “war in the information environment,” weaponized narrative employs words and images as potent instruments instead of conventional weaponry. The casualties are truth, reason, and critical thinking. As Joel Garreau elaborates, the strategic application of war narrative aims to undermine the core agreements that define a society’s identity. This approach rapidly inundates the target population with a barrage of narrative assaults, leaving little time for reflection and evaluation. The result is cognitive disorientation and emotional manipulation, eroding the opponent’s will to resist (Rodriguez, 2019). Accordingly, despite the focus on a specific range of tactics, Garreau’s perspective offers an insightful framework for understanding the diverse ways various power groups wield information. It serves as a warlike manifestation of public media diplomacy, functioning as a strategic maneuver that capitalizes on the vulnerabilities within the information landscape to reshape perceptions and weaken adversaries’ resolve.

The impact of propaganda in authoritarian and dictatorship regimes: prolonging power amidst resistance. Authoritarian and dictatorship governments have long recognized the potent weapon that propaganda can be in their arsenal. Utilized as a means to manipulate narratives, control information flow, and shape public perception, propaganda serves a dual purpose for these regimes: to solidify their grip on power and, crucially, to extend their tenure at the helm, no matter the cost. The manipulation of information has profound consequences on both their citizenry and resistance movements, effectively becoming a formidable tool to sustain their authority, even in the face of mounting opposition. The below are important author’s summary of important

consequences of propaganda in dictatorial and authoritarian social milieu.

Controlled narrative dissemination: Propaganda becomes the instrument through which these governments orchestrate the narrative that suits their ambitions. The power to dictate which information reaches the populace empowers them to mold public opinion to their benefit. Through selective information release and framing, these regimes can suppress alternative viewpoints and hinder critical thinking, cultivating a citizenry that remains loyal to the established order.

Manipulation of public opinion: The art of propaganda is honed to perfection by these governments, meticulously employing emotional triggers, persuasive language, and strategic omissions to sway public sentiment. The manipulation of emotions and perceptions fosters a populace more inclined to support policies, even if they run contrary to their interests. This manipulation ensures that citizens are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively influenced to align with the government's narrative.

Diminished awareness: The deployment of propaganda has a two-pronged effect on awareness. Firstly, it perpetuates a skewed version of reality, restricting access to diverse perspectives and impeding informed decision-making. Secondly, it fosters an environment where citizens are content with consuming pre-packaged narratives, leading to a population largely unaware of the nuances and complexities that underpin societal issues.

Curtailed resistance: Propaganda's subtle yet powerful impact is felt acutely by resistance movements. Through the creation of fear, misinformation, and confusion, the regime seeks to deter dissent and subdue potential uprisings. The prospect of challenging the government becomes daunting as individuals weigh the potential consequences, leading to a chilling effect on resistance efforts.

Divide and conquer: Authoritarian governments masterfully exploit societal divisions, exacerbating fault lines to distract from their actions. By pitting various groups against each other, these regimes redirect attention away from their own shortcomings, thereby inhibiting cohesive resistance movements

that might challenge their rule.

Promotion of conformity: The conveyor belt of propaganda promotes a conformist mindset. This uniform messaging fosters conformity, discouraging individualism and dampening critical thinking. Citizens, subjected to a relentless stream of consistent narratives, are more likely to adopt prescribed norms and behaviors.

Suppression of resistance movements: When resistance does emerge, propaganda is swiftly weaponized to discredit opposition movements. Resistance is labeled as destabilizing, a threat to national security, and an obstacle to progress. These narratives fragment resistance efforts, isolating dissenters from potential supporters. In their quest to perpetuate their rule, these regimes employ propaganda as an art form, with the objective of crafting perceptions that align with their interests. The manipulation of information undermines the foundational principles of democracy and fosters an environment where dissent is suppressed and opposition is silenced. The very essence of resistance becomes fraught with challenges as the government deploys counter-propaganda and intensifies repression.

Propaganda's peril: targeting ethnicity and social groups. The manipulation of information, a cornerstone of propaganda, is a powerful tool that can wield immense influence over societies. When this manipulation is purposefully directed at an ethnicity or any specific social group, the consequences unfold as a complex tapestry of strife, discrimination, and fractured unity. In this essay, we delve into the ramifications of propagandistic maneuvers aimed at particular groups, unraveling the cascade of effects that ensue. The below are important author's summary of important consequences of propaganda in dictatorial and authoritarian social milieu when specific ethnic or social groups are targeted.

Intensified social fragmentation: The targeted propagation of propaganda serves to exacerbate existing divisions or construct new fissures within society. By exploiting sensitivities and prejudices, such tactics engender an environment of mistrust, disdain, and animosity between various segments of the population.

Fostering prejudice and marginalization:

Propaganda's arsenal often includes derogatory language and negative portrayals. When directed against a specific ethnicity or social group, these tools perpetuate and even amplify prejudices, ingraining them in societal norms. This, in turn, paves the way for institutionalized discrimination and marginalization.

Undermining social harmony: At the heart of such propaganda lies the erosion of social harmony. Divisiveness becomes the norm as shared identities and a sense of unity disintegrate. The very fabric of society is marred by a lack of cohesion, which reverberates through every facet of life.

Escalation to polarization and conflict: The manipulated perceptions and heightened biases cultivated by targeted propaganda can escalate into open conflicts. Hostility, inflamed by propaganda, can culminate in violence as grievances and tensions boil over.

Psychological strain on the targeted group: Enduring exposure to negative portrayals and stereotypes takes a psychological toll on the targeted group. Self-esteem diminishes, replaced by anxiety, depression, and a prevailing sense of alienation from the larger society.

Eroding trust in institutions: When institutions or leaders perpetuate such propaganda, the foundation of trust they rest upon begins to crumble. This erosion of faith has broader implications, impacting public confidence in governance, leadership, and the machinery of democracy.

Retreat from societal engagement: As the targeted group feels increasingly alienated and oppressed, they may disengage from civic participation. This withdrawal hampers representation and engagement across sectors, perpetuating a cycle of under-representation.

Lingering inter-generational impact: Propaganda's influence echoes across generations, shaping the attitudes and perspectives of successors. Biases passed through the generations pose a formidable challenge to societal healing and reconciliation efforts.

Impeding reconciliation: In post-conflict scenarios, propaganda's toxicity can prove a formidable impediment to reconciliation. The festering resentment perpetuated by targeted propaganda thwarts efforts to bridge divides and build mutual understanding.

Unleashing human rights violations: In its most grievous manifestation, targeted propaganda can set the stage for gross human rights violations. Persecution,

forced displacement, and violence become palpable risks when propaganda becomes a vehicle for hate and hostility. Generally, the deployment of propaganda against specific ethnicities or social groups sets in motion a chain reaction of corrosive consequences. Unity is shattered, prejudices entrenched, and harmony shattered. In safeguarding societal equity, inclusivity, and compassion, vigilance against such manipulative tactics is of paramount importance. A society's strength lies in its diversity and unity, and only by recognizing and challenging the divisive forces of propaganda can we cultivate a truly inclusive and harmonious future.

Psychological Torture

What do we know about psychological torture? Pérez-Sales (2020) argues that the concept itself is part of universal folk language; this is the case even though partisans may have limited cues about its depth and breadth. Before recognizing the significance of psychological aspect of torture; torture as a whole was defined in 1984 by United Nations Convention against Torture as: "The term 'torture' means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions" (Wisniewski, 2010). Accordingly, the International Committee of the Red Cross defines torture and related concepts. "Torture: existence of a specific purpose plus intentional infliction of severe suffering or pain; Cruel or inhuman treatment: no specific purpose, significant level of suffering or pain inflicted; Outrages upon personal dignity: no specific purpose, significant level of humiliation or degradation." while The World Medical Association in its 1975 Tokyo Declaration (revised in 2006) define torture as following "For the purpose of this Declaration, torture is defined as the deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the

orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason” (Wisnewski, 2010). With intent to circumvent international declarations of torture, retaining the fact that any physical torture affects mental health, the torturers found innovative ways of targeting mental health without recourse to physical violence. This is psychological torture. Pérez-Sales (2020) formulated and reproduced well-crafted definitions of the concept with emphasis on target and purpose, emphasis on method, and emphasis on impact. With emphasis on target and purpose, psychological torture can be defined as: “Methods used to break down a detainee psychologically; Methods aimed at profoundly disrupting the senses or the personality; The use of methods upon a person intended to obliterate the personality of the victim or to diminish his physical or mental capacities, even if they do not cause physical pain or mental anguish.” Accordingly, with emphasis on method, it is defined as: “Methods which cause aversive stimuli not based on producing physical pain or that do not physically attack the body; It is a no touch-torture; A set of practices to inflict pain or suffering without resorting to direct physical violence, thus including those techniques in which there is no aggression but there is physical pain (like being held in stress positions).” With emphasis on impact: “Brain torture: Physical torture that targets the brain (i.e. blows to the head, anoxia, chemicals or drugs); Mental torture: Actions producing severe mental pain or suffering. This suffering can be described in non-clinical terms (e.g. despair, loneliness, disorientation, terror, depression, confusion, claustrophobia, anxiety or loss of personality) or it may take the form of clinically recognized psychiatric conditions, although it need not.” In his meticulous analysis, the author suggests three conceptions of psychological torture with respect to the interplay between the physical and psychological elements of distress: Situations where the person is submitted to pure cognitive and emotional

suffering, with two main instruments: threats and fear, and questioning the core self through emotions (humiliation, shame and guilt); Situations where the person is submitted to cognitive and emotional attacks through no-touch physical manipulation of the body such as solitary confinement, music or painful sounds, hunger or sleep deprivation; and situations where the person is submitted to a physical attack that in fact is transactional to a critical psychological attack where the body is used as a means to critically target the mind such as asphyxia or prolonged stress positions. Pérez-Sales (2020) argues that in psychological torture, the ultimate goal of the battle is not seeing the body in pain but “the ‘I’, the self, the identity” hence “the ultimate target of torture is the human being, understood as a consciousness that feels.” He argues that while body pain may be the main source of suffering in the short term, the ultimate goal of torture in the long term is “submission, dignity and will.” He reproduced the observation from the famous 1963 CIA Kubark manual that “physical torture often creates resistance while psychological torture destroys it” hence the CIA’s Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual defined contemporary torture as “to progressively reduce the victim to an infantile regressive state where the person will surrender to the will of the perpetrator, while not letting the person enter into apathy and passive avoidance.” In his capacity and expertise, the author defines torture as “the use of techniques of physical, cognitive, emotional or sensory attacks that target the conscious mind aiming to coerce, break the will and ultimately produce an identity breakdown of the person” and psychological torture as “attacking or manipulating the inputs and processes of the conscious mind that allow the person to stay oriented in the surrounding world, retain control and have the adequate conditions to judge, understand and freely make decisions which are the essential constitutive ingredients of an unharmed self.” It is important to note that these decisions are made in the interests of the torturer.

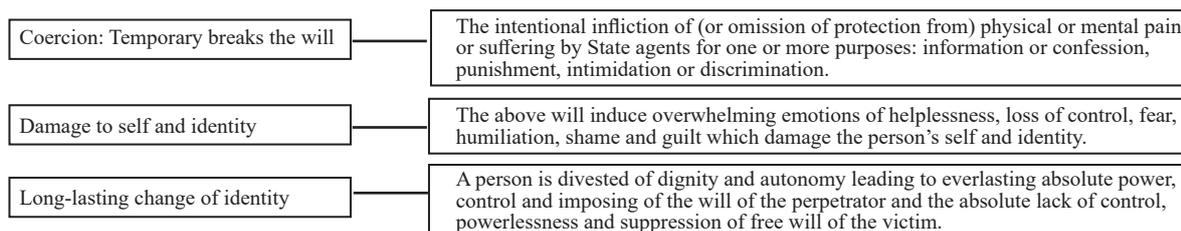


Figure 1: Torture and identity destruction: Adapted from Pérez-Sales (2020)

What is very interesting according to the author is that in contemporary torture, the victim plays an important and active role in his or her own suffering by “displacing the focus from the external infliction of pain by the torturer to subtle no-touch methods of pitting the person against his own body and mind, leading, through these battles, to a process of cognitive and emotional exhaustion.” In the end, the target and objectives of the perpetrators include confusion, fear, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, humiliation, guilt, shame, impaired reasoning, impairment of the capacity for reflection, reasoned judgment and decision making, questioning the self/identity, submissive pseudo-self, identity loss, submissive attitudes, lasting changes in belief systems and worldviews, complex PTSD, modified/changed/grafted identity, and identification with aggressor/perpetrator among others (Pérez-Sales, 2020).

Selected social media artifacts

According to Purdeková and Mwambari (2021), examining the discussions that unfold on social media platforms like Twitter provides a unique perspective that goes beyond the constrained content found in traditional media. It serves as a more precise gauge of public sentiment and the extent to which political figures engage with it. Recently, scholars have shown a growing interest in how individuals express themselves on online platforms, particularly in countries where freedom of expression faces limitations. Constance Duncom’s study, for instance, according to the same authors, highlights how the online realm significantly influences our offline lives, emphasizing that social media blurs the boundaries between our virtual and real-world social interactions. Additionally, it underscores that Twitter can both mirror and stimulate emotions, a factor that can be pivotal in either intensifying or mitigating conflicts.

Video #1: A female in her twenties

“... *Abahutu muri babi koko! Abahutu muri babi. Ngaho ugiye ku mwana w’umututsi ngo uramukameyeeee! Sha abahutu muri babi. Abahuuuuutu, Abahutu muri babi weeehhh. Abahutukazi, Abahutu! Ngaho kamera, kamera! Kamera ushyire kuri ntuze baguhe viyuzi. Ubwo ibyo biragushimisha. Wantema Wa Wa Wakubise hano (kwijosi) umuhoro se! Ukareba ukuntu amaraso y’umututsikazi amanuka! Ibyo nibyo*

mwakameraga muri jenocide...” My translation: “... Hutus are bad people indeed! Hutus are bad people. Now you start filming a Tutsi’s child! Hutus are bad people! Hutus, Hutus are bad people indeed. Female Hutus, Hutus! Continue filming, film! Film and upload on, so that you get views! You are getting entertained! Cut me, cut me with a machete here [on the neck] so that you can see how the blood of a female Tutsi flows! That is what you used to film in the genocide...”

Video #2: A male in his forties-fifties

“... *Abahutu bariyemera, Ngaba. Reka ndebe, Reka ndebe ko bamfunga. Reka ndebe ko bamfunga. Abahutu, Abahutu ni babi! Iryo jambo (...) ni ingengabitekerezo. Abahutu ni babi. Baragaswera ba nyina! Gashino ka banyina! Abahutu ni imbeciles! Do, dore Umuhutu wujuje... Umuhutu wishe abantu muyu! Aracyahari. Abahutu ni babi...*” My translation: “... Hutus are arrogant! Here they are! Let me see, Let me see if I end up in prison. Let me see if I end up in prison. Hutus are bad people. This is an ideology [in Rwandan discourse the word “ideology” is equated to genocide ideology or ethnicity based ideology]. Hutus are bad people. They may fuck their mothers! They may be their mothers’ genitals! Hutus are imbeciles! Look, Look at this full Hutu, A Hutu that killed people, here he is! He is still here. Hutus are bad people...” Rwanda’s history bears the scars of long-standing inter-ethnic tensions, most notably between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. These tensions were exacerbated during the colonial era when the Belgians introduced identity cards bearing the ethnicity of the beholder, thereby formalizing and intensifying ethnic divisions. Understanding this historical context is vital in comprehending the profound significance of the provided extracts, which starkly depict the persisting legacy of hate and discrimination that continues to afflict Rwanda, with a particular focus on the current dynamics where the Hutu ethnicity is targeted by the Tutsi community, despite government efforts aimed at eradicating ethnic hatred and supremacy. The first extract hints at the recognized 1994 genocide against Tutsis, an appalling event in which extremist Hutu factions orchestrated the mass slaughter of Tutsis. The vivid language used in the extract serves as a haunting reminder of the extreme hatred and dehumanization that pervaded society during that harrowing period. Hate speech as evident in both

extracts, were potent tools that fueled violence and mass atrocities. The Hutu Power movement, through media and communication channels, systematically dehumanized Tutsis, creating an environment marked by fear and animosity. In the aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda embarked on a journey of recovery, with a primary focus on reconciliation, justice, and economic development. Hate speech and discrimination were actively discouraged, and extensive efforts were made to heal the wounds of the past. However, the troubling current reality reveals that the country is still haunted by ethnicity based divisionism as evident in current hate speeches mainly against Hutus. This harmful stereotype fosters mistrust and poses a significant obstacle to reconciliation efforts as all efforts made in this journey failed. Worryingly, ethnic tensions persist, with the government's goal of eradicating hatred and ethnic supremacism seemingly undermined by the targeting of the Hutu ethnicity by the Tutsi community. This underscores the urgent need for continued vigilance, education, and the nurturing of a culture of unity and reconciliation to prevent a recurrence of the tragic history that Rwanda seeks to leave behind. How will this be even possible with the current government's indifference towards Hutu's dehumanization and selective legal procedures, where the justice is one-sided?

Video #3: A male Rwandan official. Ambassador to Belgium

"... Les tutsis, come on. If faut que ça cesse! If faut etre fière de ce que vous êtes! Comme vous êtes! Comme vous le santez! Il n'y a rien a cacher! On s'est casher on nous a tuer! Mena il faut se présenter. Ah tutsi, Trop c'est trop! Gukambakambaaaa!!! Eee? No!..."
 My translation: "... Tutsis, come on. This must end! You have to be proud of who you are! The way you are! The way you feel it! There is nothing to hide! We hid, but still we got killed! Now present yourself. Tutsis, enough is enough! Crawling! Eee? No!..." In the current context of Rwanda, where ethnic tensions persist and the government is superficially actively working to combat ethnic hatred and supremacy, the recent statement from a government official is troubling and the absence of the condemnation on the side of government in higher echelon indicate indifference and support. This statement call for ethnic unity, encouraging Tutsis to embrace their identity with pride

and authenticity, a discourse that may trigger legal jeopardy for any member of other Rwandan ethnic groups. While it has been a hidden common practice, now the official underscores the need to abandon the practice of concealing one's ethnicity. In fact this is an exception for the Tutsi ethnicity. The official's passionate appeal for Tutsis to openly and proudly declare their ethnicity reinforces Tutsi supremacy ideology, the real root of Rwandan evil. By declaring enough is enough, the official is urging Tutsis to stand up and be counted, openly proclaiming their ethnicity, their Tutsihood without fear. The mention of "crawling" symbolizes the idea of living in constant fear and secrecy regarding expressing ethnicity, which the government official is vehemently opposing. While they have been building everything with ethnic supremacy in mind, for the government official it is time to be public. What is indeed problematic it is that he declared this during the commemoration of genocide, a recognized genocide against Tutsis which is still disputed in terms of a number of issues such as who really shot down the presidential plane, the massacres of Hutu civilians by Tutsi army in the same genocide, after and the Hutu refugees in the Congo, and even the number of victims where many scholars argue that Hutu were indeed the most perished. This government official's statement, rather than fostering unity and inclusivity in the current proclaimed non-ethnic Rwanda, appears to inadvertently undermine the nation's progress toward a society where ethnicity holds no significance and unveil the ill-intention behind this failed policy. Instead of promoting a shared sense of identity and collective responsibility among Rwandans, it potentially sows seeds of division by emphasizing ethnic distinctions in a nation that is striving to move beyond such classifications. This approach risks hindering the country's efforts to build a more harmonious and inclusive future that transcends ethnic boundaries.

Video #4: A female in her thirties

"... Bampohotera bakoresheje umunwa, icyo bita itoteza, Abaturanyi banjye. Bambwira ko umugabo wanjye atari umugenerwa bikorwa, agomba kuva ahongaho. Iyo nzu nnya kuyihabwa nategeko rivugako ntagomba gushaka nabwiwe! Ntabwo nzi rero niba naba naranyuranyije n'amategeko kuburyo umugabo wange ahora kunkeke abwirwa ko atari umugenerwa

bikorwa, atagomba kuba ahongaho...” My translation “... I am always a subject of verbal threats, what is known as harassment, from my neighbors. They tell me that my husband is not a beneficiary [of FARG, a fund for Tutsi genocide survivors], that he has to leave the place. When they gave me the house, they didn’t tell me that I can’t get married! I don’t know if I broke the law so that my husband continues to be a subject of torture and harassment, being told that he is not a beneficiary and asked to leave the place...” The distressing situation described here unequivocally constitutes a form of discrimination against Hutus. The verbal threats, harassment, and the demand that the Hutu husband, who is not a beneficiary of the fund for Tutsi genocide survivors, leave the area, all reflect a deeply troubling bias based on ethnicity. This discrimination is not isolated but rather emblematic of broader challenges regarding coexistence and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda. Addressing such discrimination is imperative for the country’s continued efforts to heal, rebuild, and foster a truly inclusive society that transcends ethnic divisions.

Video #5: A male in his twenties

“...Uuuh! Niba ari ubututsi bwo turabufite Imana yarabuduhaye! Eeeeh! Jyewe ubundi mba Umwega Frank niyo mazina yange. Umuntu uzi yuko ari Umwega, udafite inka ari Umwega. Ndavuga kuri family yange, first family. Ntago uri Umwega, just ubwoko uba warabwiyitiriye! Eeeeh! Ee! Ariko mba Umututsi! Uzi kuba Umwega ukaba ikishywa cy’Abasinga! Ntanamaraso y’abahutu ngira!....” My translation: “...Uuuh! If it is about Tutsihood, we got it, God gave it to us! Eeeeh! My names are Umwega Frank. For whoever belonging to Abega clan, Umwega without cows. I speak of my family, first family. You are not Umwega. You claimed a clan that is not yours! Eeeeh! Ee! I am a Tutsi! Do you know how it feels to be Umwega and a nephew of Abasinga! There is no Hutu blood in my veins!...” The extent of hatred and ethnic division in this passage is profoundly alarming, to the point where even teenagers express a fervent belief in the superiority of their Tutsi identity and vehemently disavow any Hutu heritage. The individual’s assertion of being untainted by Hutu blood underscores the deep-seated prejudice that persists in Rwandan society, perpetuating an environment where ethnic identities are fiercely guarded, and the divisions

between Hutus and Tutsis continue to be a source of conflict and tension. Such sentiments not only reveal the ongoing challenges of reconciliation but also highlight the urgent need for comprehensive efforts to promote tolerance, understanding, and a shared national identity that transcends these divisive ethnic distinctions.

Video #6: A female in her forties-fifties

“...Niko barezwe, niyo mashereka bonse, ntushobora kugirango ufate umwana w’imbwa umuhindure umwana w’inka. Bamaze imyaka Magana ane ari imbwa, jyewe ndabivuga simbitinya. Murabyumva? Iyo umuntu wamuhaye ubutegets, Umubiligi agaha ubutegets umuteruzi w’ikibindi w’umugaragu akamugira umuntu rezilita niziriya! Jyewe ndabivuga rwose nemye sindya iminwa. Ikindi guhangana, mpora mbivuga buri munsu. Bazaze turahari, twarabyaye, dufite abana, abasore beza b’ibigango, bazongere! Jyewe ndabibabwiye kandi nzi ko benshi murimo munyumva mubijyane. Tuzabereka abana banyweye amata imyaka mirongo itatu uko bambara. Murabyumva neza? Mwangegera zirahongaho zirimwo zumva. Erega ndababona, ndababona ndabazi. Nimugende mubwire benewanyu, muzajye mumokera hanze nk’imbwa ziziritse. Gutukana nibyo muzi muri abashumba mwabana mwe b’ingegera. Muzaze duhangane. Ibyo nibyo jye navuga...” My translation: “This is how they [Hutu] were nurtured, that’s the breast milk they were fed on. You cannot transform a puppy into a calf. They spent 400 years as dogs. I have no fear to say this loud and clear. Do you understand? When you give power to people, the Belgians give power to a peasant serf and turn him into a person; that is the result you get. I can say this standing upright on my feet without mincing my words. Another point, confrontations, I say it every day; let them come. We are parents; we have children, handsome young boys, who are physically fit. Let them try again. Let me tell them and I am sure that many of them are listening, spread the message. We will show you children grown up drinking milk for thirty years, how they perform. Do you get it well? You scoundrels who are there listening? I can see you, I see you, and I know you. Go and tell your people, continue balking outside like dogs on the leash. You only know how to insult you herdsmen, sons of scoundrels. Come and we confront each other. This is what I can say.”

This female and her video have sparked controversy. A circulated photo of her alongside the First Lady suggests her proximity to the regime and alignment with the views of top government officials. Her ideas are also contentious, as she alludes to the pre-colonial and colonial Rwandan social landscape concerning ethnic relations. When she states that the Hutu “spent 400 years as slaves,” it is a fact that they were indeed subjected to servitude during the monarchy and colonial periods in Rwandan history. The complex inter-ethnic dynamics between the Rwandan Hutu and Tutsi communities have been extensively studied (Sebahutu, 2022, 2023b, 2023a). It's worth noting that the question of why those who were historically subjugated do not express the same level of anger as she does may be attributed to the relatively recent shift in power dynamics, with Tutsi losing their political influence to the Hutu for no more than 30 years. Nevertheless, framing this as a source of shame is a matter of perspective. While the Hutu government has been criticized for human rights abuses, Reyntgens (2018) highlights that, despite the revolution leading to the replacement of one elite group with another, political practices remained largely consistent. It's crucial to acknowledge that during the expansion of Tutsi Nyiginya dynasty, the Germans played a role in the annexation of Hutu principalities and chiefdoms, particularly in the northern regions, as Reyntgens (2018) notes, “It took the Germans until 1912 [from 1896] to quell several insurgencies, and they did so in a brutal fashion, slaughtering people, burning villages, and executing the ringleaders. So the extension of court power throughout present-day Rwanda was the result of colonial conquest rather than local political dynamics.” It is acknowledged by some that the Belgians helped Hutu during the social revolution however what is interesting is that any bad things that happened to Hutu as evident in the video, is not worth mentioning as if there are not humans. The dehumanization and demonization of the Hutu population occur openly, and what raises questions is her call for interethnic violence, met with apparent indifference from government officials. This situation warrants careful consideration and scrutiny. Why are the government and its arms such as the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement indifferent? Simply because practices like this are imbedded

in the founding philosophy for the current regime. Tito Rutaremara is among the founding members and prominent ideologue of the RPF, a mainly Tutsi political party currently on power since the end of 1994 genocide against Tutsi and Hutu massacres. On the 7th October, 2021 he wrote a 17 tweets long thread on his tweeter account (now X) @titorutaremara4 and here is some selected tweets:

Tweet 1: “*Amateka: Ese byagenze bite kugirango abahutu bagere ku rwego rwo kwica abatutsi barenga miliyoni mu 1994? Mu 1965 nibwo nibwo ishyaka rya Parmehutu ryashizeho methodologie ya mobilizations yo kwigisha urubyiruko uhereye kwishyiga kwanga no kubereka ko abatutsi ari abagome.*” My translation: “History: What happened for Hutu to attain the level of killing more than a million Tutsis in 1994? In 1965 it is the time when Parmehutu party initiated the youth mobilization methodology starting at evening family gatherings to teach them that Tutsis are dangerous.”

Tweet 2: “*Uburyo bwakoreshejwe: habayeho kwigisha mu magambo na pratique hibandwa cyane kurubwiruko. Mu rubyiruko abana ku ishyiga bakorerwaga ibintu bibi bakabwirwa ko ari abatutsi babikoze. Reka dutange ingero 2*” My translation: “The method used: Both theory and practice were used by focusing on youth. Where children surrounded fire in family gathering at evening, were subjected to bad deeds and Tutsis framed. Let's take two examples.”

Tweet 5: “*Urugero rwa kabiri: Iyo abana babaga baryamyeye nijoro, umuntu mukuru yarazaga akaborosora ikirago babaga biyoroshe, abana bagakangurwa n'imbeho nabagataka wa wundi wabaga yabihishe akaza ababwira ko byari byatwawe n'ingengera z'abatutsi.*” My translation: “Second example: when children were in bed at night, the elder came and pull off the cover and due to coldness their wake up and shout and the elder came and tell them that the cover was taken by Tutsi brigands.” In post-genocide Rwanda, a troubling narrative is propagated by elements within the Tutsi elite with the explicit aim of vilifying all Hutus and sowing seeds of hatred among Tutsis. This narrative is designed to collectively blame Hutus and inflame animosity within the Tutsi community by portraying Hutus as the sole culprits of past violence and atrocities. It employs historical events, such as the initiation of a youth mobilization strategy by the Parmehutu party in 1965, as supposed

evidence to support this narrative. However, even the RPA military men were mainly the *kagodo* meaning child soldiers recruited through the same process. These elements within the Tutsi elite emphasize the use of both theory and practice to shape the perspectives of young minds, providing specific examples that manipulate situations to foster negative perceptions of Hutus. This narrative underscores the urgency of promoting reconciliation efforts and fostering a culture of understanding to prevent the perpetuation of ethnic divisions and hatred in Rwanda. All of these deeds lie in what McDoom (2011) call “threat-opportunity mechanism: a threat to existing, incumbent interests, and an opportunity for new, challenger interests.” My Integrated-blame game theory of ethnicity delved deeper into this issue and proposed long lasting solutions (Sebahutu, 2023a).

Tweet 9&10: “*Muri za secondary, abana batangiraga kwigishwa amateka ajyanye n’uko abatutsi bari babi ku rwego rwo hejuru. Urugero: Ko Kanjogera yahagurukiraga n’inkota ku bana b’abahutu, ko umwami yashahuraga abahutu agashyira ibishahu ku ngoma, abahutu bahingiraga abatutsi ngo kubera abatutsi ari abanebwe...*” My translation: “In secondary schools, students started being taught the history of Tutsi being the worst evil. Examples: That Queen Kanjogera pierced the chest of a baby Hutus when getting up, that the King emasculated Hutu and put their genitals on the drum, and that Hutus had to cultivate for Tutsis as they were lazy...” It is evident that certain elements within the Tutsi elite aim to illustrate that Hutus were systematically taught to harbor animosity towards Tutsis, even within the educational system. And this is done also to instigate anger and hatred among Tutsi. What is problematic is their selective omission and obliteration of facts regarding what Tutsi did hence their self-whitewash. The animosity of Queen Kanjogera is well documented in Vansina (2004) and Desforges (2011). Regarding Hutu emasculation, Morrock (2010) crafted this statement: “A symbol of the Rwandan state was the *Kalinga*, the sacred royal drum, which was decorated with the testicles of defeated Hutu chiefs; needless to say, this item was hardly fit to qualify as a symbol of national unity.”

Tweet 14: “*Utaragize amahirwe yo kugera mu mashuri ya za kaminuza yabaga yarabyigishijwe*

muri za association, mu manama, mu muryango, mu madini, mu binyamakuru aho bigishwaga ko umututsi ari inyaryenge kandi ari umugome ko kuri we atabasha kubana n’umuhutu atamutegetse bakabwirwako kugirango umuhutu abeho neza ari ukwikiza umututsi.” My translation: “Those who were not lucky to enter higher education, got their education is associations, meetings, family, churches, media where they were taught that Tutsi are clever and dangerous. That on her/his side she/ he can’t cohabit with Hutu without being under her/his authority. They were told that for Hutu’s welfare he must get rid of Tutsi.” In light of this context, it becomes clear that the intent of this so called elder in the RPF in these extracts is to fuel animosity towards Hutu individuals, portraying them in a negative light and perpetuating negative stereotypes about the Hutu population. The extracts suggest intent to demonize and vilify Hutu individuals especially intellectuals by framing them as genocide ideology experts and as a threat to the well-being of other ethnic groups, particularly the Tutsi. This kind of rhetoric and narrative can be harmful, contributing to interethnic tensions and hostilities. In responding to these tweets, @charleskambanda stated “*Mzee, amateka y’imibanire y’amoko mu rwanda arangwa nukubeshya kubyabaye cyane cyane hagamije guharabika ubwoko ‘bwabo’. kumva ko ubwoko ‘bwacu’ ni victims mu gihe ubwoko ‘bwabo’ ni abagizi banabi nibyo nyirabayazana ya ‘ethnic supremacism’ iri mu Rwanda. Birababaje kuba twarahisemo kubakira u Rwanda kuri foundation ntindi ya ‘victor vs, vinqushed’ narrative/ideology. Iteka abafite ubuyobozi bakoresha ubwoko bwabo kubeshya ko abo bambuye ubutegetsi atari abantu. Ibi nibyo bituma iyo bamwe bafite ubuyobozi abandi bagombye guhunga.*” My translation: “Old man, the history of ethnic interactions in Rwanda is characterized by lies about past events (distorted facts) in order to disgrace ‘their’ ethnic group. Recognizing “our” ethnic group as sole ‘victims’ while ‘their’ ethnic group are perpetrators is the origin of the current ‘ethnic supremacism’ in Rwanda. It is very sad that we chose to build Rwanda upon the worst foundation of ‘victors vs vinqushed’ narrative/ ideology. Always those on power use their ethnicity to dehumanize those who lost power. This is the reason why when some are on power others have to flee.” @be_johns stated “*Ubu ni uburozi ba Tito Rutaremara*

bajiyi badutamika mu masomo ya #RPFInkotanyi yitwaga #SIASA. None muri 2021 atangiye kubutamika uruburiko rw'u #Rwanda kuko abona ubutegetsu bwa @PaulKagame buri mu marembera. Namaganye uyu musaza ushaje nabi.” My translation: “This is the kind of poison that Tito Rutaremara and the alike used to feed us in the #RPFInkotanyi’s indoctrination courses called #SIASA. Even in 2021 he starts feeding the same poison the Rwandan youth because he sees the @PaulKagame’s government at the last leg. I denounce this man who is getting older in bad deeds.” Such responses suggest a strong divide among Rwandans regarding interpretation of their history. Tom Ndauro, a prominent RPF ideologue, a disputed genocide scholar due to the non-availability of his scholarship records; attacking Dr. Charles Onana, a political scientist and expert of the great lakes region of Africa, on the 24th August, 2023 wrote a long tweet quoted below: “Infamous #CharlesOnana is a Franco-Cameroonian pseudo-researcher. He is a distinguished propagandist serving the anti-Tutsi genocidaires. He is a plagiarizer or simply a disciple of Hassan Ngeze and his incendiary Kangura magazine, which was a key tool in the inciting future perpetrators of genocide during the Habyarimana government between 1990-1994. Kangura N° 4 of November 1990 was an inspiration for Onana’s book with propaganda for the creation of a chimerical Hima-Tutsi empire or colony of the Great Lakes Region. These are illusions he shared with the late Honoré Ngbanda, a former security chief under Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko. These provided references which he published in his own words cannot in any way be neutral or scientific. He paraphrased pg. 2 of the attached Kangura. It is blatant and unacceptable to grant any journalistic or research value without scientific methodology to this bogus peddler of hatred, hostility and malignity against the Tutsi people. For him the death of over a million Tutsi during the Genocide in 1994, was not enough loss. #CharlesOnana works tirelessly with anyone, wicked or naive from the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and beyond, who wants to wipe out the rest of the Tutsi on our planet. This man's publications whose ferocity and diabolical hatred which are almost part of his DNA, should no longer circulate freely in the world. It is sacrilegious in the face of the principle of the United Nations "Never Again". It's an abomination to the principle of the

inviolability of the right to life. #CharlesOnana stands as a self-determined and proud criminal. In short, he is a public danger and sort of a vampire with divisive venom whose spit or sprayed, destroys harmony between peoples in the Great Lakes Region.” This is an example of how prominent scholars and reputed journalists are portrayed by the regime whenever they try to dig into Rwandan matters. They are portrayed exactly in the same way as the outcasted Hutu ethnic group. It is a common knowledge among Rwandans that the country in every sphere is run on instructions rather than laws and in every socio-economic measures taken such as expropriation without compensation and crack on street vendors, they make sure a large fraction of people hit are those marginalized from the beginning, Hutu peasants or few existing elites.

Results and Discussion

The deeper I explore the “origin” of modern diseases and contemplate how the world could be free of them, the more realize that there is nothing truly “social” left. What we once understood as social processes are, in fact, natural dynamics. What we face today are byproducts of politics (compromised politics, to be precise) shaping the conditions that give rise to many of these diseases. What is even more intriguing is that modern bioscience has disproven the long-held belief in the immutable biological foundation of human heredity. Studies now reveal that politically driven social processes, particularly those characterized by chronic distress, can penetrate beneath the surface, quite literally getting under the skin. These processes have the power to alter gene expression and even influence DNA transcription, fundamentally reshaping our understanding of how external social factors affect human biology at its core. Modern neuroscience has demonstrated that daily social distress can affect the human body, leading to mental and physical disturbances through mechanisms like neuroplasticity and psychosocial genomics (Hatala, 2012). Although the human mind cannot be located physically within the brain, Khan (2022) argues that it is a nonphysical product of brain activity. While the author argues that no single gene is responsible for complex human behaviors, the mind, like the body, is still influenced by genetics; which means that anything

affecting the expression of genes also affects the mind. Researches show that only about half of the genome is consistently expressed, regardless of external conditions, while the other half is highly responsive to social and environmental factors. These genes can be turned on or off depending on the individual's social environment, highlighting the profound influence of social interactions on genetic expression. This challenges the traditional view of DNA as a static blueprint and underscores the adaptability of the human genome to its surroundings (Slavich et al., 2023; Slavich & Cole, 2013). One of the most concerning contributors to the global burden of disease is mental illnesses. Current research indicates that modern political driven social distress plays a significant role in causing these disorders. What makes this even more alarming is that these stress-induced changes can alter DNA, primarily through epigenetic mechanisms, suggesting that mental disorders may not only affect the current generation but also be passed down to future generations, making them transgenerational (Arzate-Mejía & Mansuy, 2022; Fitz-James & Cavalli, 2022). Modern research in human social genomics has uncovered the profound ways in which social environments can influence genetic expression, directly impacting health outcomes. One of the key mechanisms through which social stress affects the body is through social signal transduction, the process by which external social experiences are translated into biological signals. When individuals are exposed to chronic stress such as social isolation, poverty, or discrimination; the brain perceives these stressors as threats, activating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. This response leads to the release of stress hormones, primarily cortisol, which interact with immune cells and other tissues. Over time, these stress hormones promote the transcription of pro-inflammatory genes while suppressing genes involved in antiviral defense and tissue repair. This creates a chronic state of inflammation, which has been linked to a variety of health conditions including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and autoimmune disorders. The body, under continuous stress, essentially shifts its immune system from protecting against pathogens to producing inflammation, which contributes to the development of diseases (Goel et al., 2024; Slavich et al., 2023; Slavich & Cole, 2013).

Beyond inflammation, social experiences also modify gene expression through epigenetic mechanisms. Epigenetics refers to changes in gene activity that do not alter the DNA sequence but affect how genes are expressed. Two primary processes involved in this are DNA methylation and histone modification. When individuals are exposed to sustained social adversity, such as ongoing stress or traumatic experiences, these epigenetic markers are altered, “turning on” or “turning off” specific genes. For example, genes that regulate the stress response can become permanently activated or suppressed, leading to maladaptive responses to future stressors. This epigenetic reprogramming not only affects the individual but can also be passed down to future generations, making certain genetic patterns such as heightened inflammation or impaired stress responses heritable. These findings suggest that the social environment doesn't just impact health in the present but can influence biological susceptibility to disease across generations. This emerging understanding highlights the need for social interventions aimed at reducing stress and inequality to prevent the transmission of these health vulnerabilities (Goel et al., 2024; Slavich et al., 2023; Slavich & Cole, 2013).

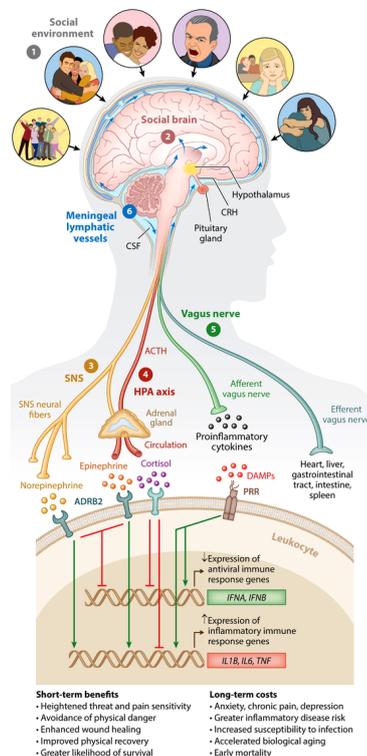


Figure 2: Human social signal transduction.

Social signal transduction is the process by which the CNS monitors and appraises the (1) social environment, interprets social signals and behaviors, and judges the extent to which the surrounding environment is socially safe versus threatening. These appraisals are subserved by the (2) social brain. When a threat is subjectively perceived, the brain activates a multilevel response that is mediated by several potential social signal transduction pathways namely, the (3) SNS, (4) HPA axis, (5) vagus nerve, and (6) meningeal lymphatic vessels. These pathways enable the brain to alter genome-wide transcriptional dynamics in peripheral tissues (e.g., white blood cells). In response to social adversity, the main end products of the SNS, epinephrine and norepinephrine, suppress transcription of antiviral type interferon genes (e.g., *IFNA* and *IFNB*) and upregulate transcription of pro-inflammatory immune response genes (e.g., *IL1B*, *IL6*, and *TNF*), known as the Conserved Transcriptional Response to Adversity. In contrast, the main end product of the HPA axis, cortisol, generally reduces both antiviral and inflammatory gene expression (although chronic social stress can trigger glucocorticoid insensitivity/resistance, which can allow increased inflammatory gene expression). The vagus nerve, in turn, plays a putative role in suppressing inflammatory activity, whereas meningeal lymphatic vessels enable immune mediators originating in the CNS to traffic to the periphery, where they can potentially exert systemic effects. CNS, central nervous system; HPA, hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal; *IFNA*, interferon alpha; *IFNB*, interferon beta; *IL1B*, interleukin 1 beta; *IL6*, interleukin 6; SNS, sympathetic nervous system; *TNF*, tumor necrosis factor. Figure and interpretation reproduced from Slavich et al. (2023) under creative common license.

Social signal transduction is the process by which the CNS monitors and appraises the (1) social environment, interprets social signals and behaviors, and judges the extent to which the surrounding environment is socially safe versus threatening. These appraisals are subserved by the (2) social brain. When a threat is subjectively perceived, the brain activates a multilevel response that is mediated by several potential social signal transduction pathways namely, the (3) SNS, (4) HPA axis, (5) vagus nerve, and (6) meningeal lymphatic vessels. These pathways

enable the brain to alter genome-wide transcriptional dynamics in peripheral tissues (e.g., white blood cells). In response to social adversity, the main end products of the SNS, epinephrine and norepinephrine, suppress transcription of antiviral type interferon genes (e.g., *IFNA* and *IFNB*) and upregulate transcription of pro-inflammatory immune response genes (e.g., *IL1B*, *IL6*, and *TNF*), known as the Conserved Transcriptional Response to Adversity. In contrast, the main end product of the HPA axis, cortisol, generally reduces both antiviral and inflammatory gene expression (although chronic social stress can trigger glucocorticoid insensitivity/resistance, which can allow increased inflammatory gene expression). The vagus nerve, in turn, plays a putative role in suppressing inflammatory activity, whereas meningeal lymphatic vessels enable immune mediators originating in the CNS to traffic to the periphery, where they can potentially exert systemic effects. CNS, central nervous system; HPA, hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal; *IFNA*, interferon alpha; *IFNB*, interferon beta; *IL1B*, interleukin 1 beta; *IL6*, interleukin 6; SNS, sympathetic nervous system; *TNF*, tumor necrosis factor. Figure and interpretation reproduced from Slavich et al. (2023) under creative common license.

Mental health issues arise from a variety of causes, including genetic, environmental, and social factors (politically driven social factors in most modern societies). In the context of Rwanda, where ethnic-based psychological warfare continues to perpetuate social distress, these factors significantly contribute to the rising burden of mental disorders. The evidence presented shows that these systematic forms of psychological violence target specific groups, leading to long-term distress, trauma, and destabilization of mental resilience. Although individual coping mechanisms may vary, the cumulative impact of such sustained social and psychological stressors on the population is undeniable. As a result, the role of psychocide and psychoethnicide in exacerbating Rwanda's mental health crisis is an established fact, adding to the already heavy burden of mental disorders resulting from other past traumatic events such as the genocide against Tutsis and other crimes against humanity committed during and after the same genocide. When propaganda and psychological warfare

are ethnicity motivated with intent to strengthen ethnocentric authoritarian regimes; it is a bad stone to build a foundation of the country upon. Besides the burden of mental disorders the victims form a potential future threat to national security since these futureless young people may easily be manipulated as regarding Rwandan genocide against Tutsi, Turshen (2001: 62) observed as quoted in Hintjens and Kiwuwa (2006) “Embittered and desperate young men, with no land, jobs or schooling – and without land or job, no prospect of marriage and family – made up the majority of militia and army recruits.” Are Hutu the only affected by psychoethnicide in terms of mental health degradation? I strongly believe that this is not the case. As the primary victims Hutu and their descendants are the most hit since they are marginalized, impoverished and dehumanized. However, psychoethnicide as a double edged sword should be studied. Why perpetrators are also affected? Pressure and threat to their status quo and such a situation lead to their insecurity, mental stress, distress and deterioration.

The Concept of Psychocide and Psychoethnicide

Propaganda and psychological torture are insidious tools with far-reaching consequences on the mental well-being of individuals, particularly when employed within the context of authoritarian regimes or conflict situations. While they have traditionally been acknowledged for their utility in military contexts, their application against civilian populations by authoritarian and dictatorial regimes needs special attention due to its devastating impact on victims and the broader social fabric. The effects of propaganda and psychological torture extend beyond the immediate victims to encompass the entire society. In many cases, these techniques not only seek to control or manipulate the thoughts and behaviors of individuals but also aim to redefine their identity and perception of self. The process of hereditization of the victimhood identity where every Tutsi is considered a genocide survivor and their next generations all considered survivors and perpetratorhood identity where every Hutu is considered a genocidaire hence their descendants considered genocidaires by nature (Kuradusenge, 2016) became a strengthening stone to the new discriminatory post-genocide regime (Jefremova, 2000). This not only perpetuates division

but also ensures that the psychological trauma is passed down through generations, cementing the cycle of discrimination and conflict. Recalling the bloody 1959 social revolution also known as Hutu revolution and the pride they lost, considering what they call liberation struggle that took them to power again and conceptualizing what they call a re-birth of the country starting when Tutsi seized power and re-built ethnocracy in the shadows of ethnic amnesia and a single collective identity Ndi Umunyarwanda (I am a Rwandan) (Buckley-Zistel, 2006; Reyntgens, 2023; Vandeginste, 2014); and seeing eminent threat from Hutu elite to their power they wish and struggle to consolidate and monopolize, they found propaganda and psychological torture as powerful weapons in their arsenal. This deliberate and systematic destruction of the mental well-being or psychological health of a particular segment of the population or social group was termed “psychocide” when an ethnic group is targeted, in this case Hutu ethnic group, with purpose of eternal discrimination, domination and exploitation in all socio-economic-political spheres has been termed “psychoethnicide.” The term that combines words “psycho” (related to the mind or psychology), “ethnic” (pertaining to a specific ethnic group), and “cide” (derived from the Latin “caedere,” meaning to kill or destroy). While it may not result in physical death, psychoethnicide represents the calculated destruction of the mental well-being and identity of a targeted group, leaving lasting scars on individuals and communities. Recognizing the existence and consequences of psychoethnicide is crucial in addressing the long-term psychological trauma and fostering reconciliation and healing in post-conflict societies. It also underscores the need for international attention and intervention to prevent the perpetuation of such psychological warfare in the future.

Conclusion

Studies indicate that a significant portion of the world’s population lives under authoritarian regimes that systematically employ propaganda and psychological warfare as tools of social control. These techniques, often intended to consolidate power, involve manipulating information, inciting fear, and dehumanizing specific social or ethnic

groups. The psychological violence inflicted by these regimes serves to weaken mental resilience and erode the collective will of targeted populations. This phenomenon is termed “psychocide”, and when directed at specific ethnic groups, the phenomenon was termed “psychoethnocide”. The methods used in these processes such as media manipulation, mass humiliation, and the criminalization of particular identities; are potent tools in inflicting psychological harm, significantly contributing to the rising burden of mental health disorders. The impact of psychocide and psychoethnocide extends far beyond the immediate psychological damage they inflict. Emerging research in social genomics reveals that chronic exposure to political and social stressors can lead to long-term changes in gene expression, particularly in genes related to stress responses and inflammation. These genetic modifications are not just markers of current trauma; they can be passed down to future generations through epigenetic inheritance. This transgenerational transmission means that the psychological wounds caused by psychocide and psychoethnocide continue to affect subsequent generations, embedding the legacy of trauma within the population’s genetic fabric. The enduring nature of these changes makes it critical to address not only the immediate mental health needs but also the long-term consequences for future generations.

Moreover, the social and political environments that foster psychocide create conditions that encourage maladaptive coping mechanisms. These coping strategies, such as substance abuse, prostitution and alcoholism worsen the public health crisis, extending beyond mental health and contributing to somatic diseases. The overlapping crises of mental disorders and physical illnesses are further compounded in areas with inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited sanitation, and overcrowding. These conditions also make populations more vulnerable to infectious diseases, particularly in communities subjected to prolonged stress and social violence. Addressing this requires an integrated approach that not only focuses on the immediate mental health needs of the affected populations but also acknowledges the broader public health risks posed by these environments. Although this paper is theoretical with aim to create new concepts for better understanding

the complexity of modern mental health and related issues, it underscores the importance of public health professionals working through policy channels to engage the same governments that contribute to social distress and its health consequences. I proposed the biopsychopolitical (BPP) model to guide preventive and curative endeavors elsewhere (Sebahutu, 2023c). Traditional epidemiological methods which rely on external parameters like self-reporting or hospital data often fall short in accurately capturing the full scope of mental health issues caused by political manipulation. This is partly due to underreporting in countries with poor healthcare systems, and because individuals exposed to the same social stressors may develop different maladaptive disorders based on their coping mechanisms. Therefore, the search for appropriate distress biomarkers is critical for accurately identifying affected individuals and those at risk, offering a more reliable tool for public health intervention and policy development.

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