Modernities, ethnic conflict and ‘bystanders’ to violence

Dr. Giorgia Doná
University of East London

CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE LA VIOLENZA
NELLE RELAZIONI DI PROSSIMITÀ
GENERAZIONI, GENERE E POLITICHE DI INTERVENTO

Università della Calabria

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Sociology, Ethnic Studies and Violence

- The birth of sociology is situated within western modernity
- Modernity and progress
- The ‘dark side’ of modernity
Sociology, Ethnic Studies and Violence

- Ethnic studies:
  - US civil rights movement and UK to post-imperial migration (Mason 1999)
    - Integration and social cohesion
  - Alternative and multiple modernities (Taylor, 1999)

- Violence is neglected, marginalized or construed as the exception to the norm
Ethnicity and class in pre-colonial feudal Rwanda

- Hutu, Tutsi and Twa

- Class and ethnicity overlap: Hutu farmers, Tutsi cattle herders, Twa hunter-gatherers/potters

- Social mobility: change in class and ethnicity

- Same language and similar culture
Interconnected modernities, ethnic relations and conflict

- Belgian colonialism

- Ethnic identity is sanctioned in Identity Cards and fixed (1933)

- The birth of the Rwandan nation-state (1962), violence and interconnected modernities

- Tutsi diaspora and 1990 war
The 1994 genocide: violence in relations of proximity

- 1994 Genocide: 1,000,000 minority Tutsi (and ‘moderate’ Hutus) were killed by majority Hutu extremists
- Extended families killing their own members
- Neighbors killing neighbors
- Collective violence in public places
Bystanders to the genocide: the invisible majority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Perpetrators</th>
<th>Bystanders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approx. 7 million</td>
<td>Approx. 1 million</td>
<td>170-210,000</td>
<td>Between 4 and half and 6 million people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% Hutu 13-15% Tutsi 1-2% Twa</td>
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<td>1,500,000 gacaca</td>
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Bystanders

• Literally to stand by or to be present (Barnett, 1999)

• ...every contemporary citizen cognizant of a specific ongoing instance ..., regardless of where in the world (Vetlesen 2000)

• Those members of society who are neither perpetrators nor victims, or outside individuals, organisations, and nations ... support, opposition, or indifference of these people largely shapes the course of events (Staub 1989)
Bystanders in the Social Sciences

- Pro-social behaviours in crises (Darley and Latane, 1968)
- Bystander’s effect
- Individual characteristics, motivations, etc
Bystanders and the Holocaust

- In the shadows of virtually every book about the Holocaust are the bystanders: millions of human beings conspicuous not by their absence, but by their silence. (Barnett 1999, xiii-xiv)

- Exposure of the ‘myth of innocence’ (Fulbrook 1999)

- The ‘myth of collective guilt’ in Rwanda
Refusing protection

• When an elderly Tutsi in Bisesero appealed to an old Hutu friend to hide his grandsons, the old friend responded:

• ‘I would like to, but I can’t. The orders are that I must not.’
Helping and not helping targets of genocide

- Reasons for non-helping
  - Fear
  - Punishment
  - The enemy and the accomplices of the enemy

- Helping or not-helping in context
  - Public and private
  - Dangerous or less dangerous
Multiple roles: target and witness

- Tutsi woman
  - “As my husband, who was no longer alive, was Hutu, I had the idea of going to my in-laws. They welcomed me and looked after me during the tragedy. We lived very close to Léoncie. What I did not see with my own eyes I heard from the criminals. But, as I was privileged to be able to move around, I saw a lot with my own eyes....

- Target and bystander
- Gender and mixed marriages
Multiple and changing roles

’I am Hutu. But as I had married into a Tutsi family I followed them to Kabuye hill where there were so many of us it is difficult to count how many. .... The group [of soldiers] asked the Hutu women to leave the Tutsis. That’s how I came to leave with my three children. [They] were killed when I got to my own family.’

- Member of the aggressor group, victim and bystander
- Gender, generations and mixed marriages
Giving and relinquishing protection: from protector to bystander

‘During this period there was a daughter of Sylvestre Muhiza who had faked her identity card and lived at the house of Léoncie’s mother who had agreed to protect her.

Mme Léoncie forced her to take off all her clothes and took her to the roadblock herself where the girl was once again raped before being killed.’
Witnessing

‘The massacre in my sector was sponsored by Bernadette Mukarurangwa...she ordered certain hard-hearted Hutus to kill all the Tutsi in our sector... Certain good-hearted Hutus like myself and others did not appreciate this inhuman gesture as the Tutsis were our neighbours. But through lack of means, we witnessed these horrible events.’
The killing had already started by 11:00 a.m. Seeing this, I decided not to go to the roadblocks anymore. ...

During the genocide I quarrelled with Bernadette twice. Firstly she came to threaten me, asking why I had refused to go on the night patrols. This was about 25 April. She told the militiamen to attack me. But as my family were strong (I was a Hutu like her) my brothers defended me and her intention came to nothing...’
Non-involvement and resistance

- Non-involvement: strategies of invisibility
  - To pay to get out of patrols, to stay indoor, to be sick; to witness

- Resisting involvement
  - To argue, to refuse to kill,..
  - “In such extreme cases, even the refusal to kill (with the attendant danger to one’s own life) was a heroic act” (Prunier 1997:260).
Every survivor owns one’s life to somebody who helped...not in isolation

‘I hid in the bush and in the homes of many Hutu people. Different Hutu people saved my life— they hid me and found ways for me to escape.’ (Abbé Oreste Incimitata)
The ‘atrocities’ triangle in conflict studies

Episodic and long-term bystanders
Multiple overlapping roles
Bystanders in relations to both victims and perpetrators
Non-involvement: can be a form of resistance
Dynamic triangle
Bystanders, violence and interconnected modernities

- Micro-sociological study of violence and conflict tends to focus on the agency of the aggressor, the passivity of the victim and the invisibility of the bystander

- The inter-subjectivity of social actors
Bystanders, violence and interconnected modernities

- Spaces of peace amidst violence and of violence amidst peace: dark, light or shades of gray?

- Interconnected modernities and global sociology

- Call for mainstreaming the study of bystanders, violence and modernities