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**Project report: dialogue**

**(The three associated briefs are available separately.)**

**STS390, “Media, war and peace”**

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**Science, Technology & Society**

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## **RWANDA AND GENOCIDE: - DIALOGUE**

*Three students discussing their assignment. Pseudonyms have been used.*

Julie: Hi guys, how is your research going for our group assignment on genocide in Rwanda?

Diesel: Well actually I did my short on genocide and Rwanda a few weeks ago in class, so I have quite a few sources to work with. Actually, I didn't really know much about it beforehand, and I found what happened unbelievable and really confronting – how can this happen in a modern day world?

Julie: I totally agree. At times researching the topic has been quite depressing. How are you going Claire?

Claire: I'm so sick of the library, I've been researching for ages but I'm still having difficulty coming up with a comprehensive definition. There are just so many variations of the term 'genocide'. What have you guys found so far?

Julie: When I first think about genocide the Holocaust comes to mind. I know we aren't focusing on the Holocaust but it is an interesting starting point, considering that the founder of

the term 'genocide' was alive during that time. His name was Raphael Lemkin and he was a Polish born advisor to the United States War Ministry. According to Lemkin, genocide signifies 'the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group' and implies the existence of a coordinated plan, aimed at total extermination, to be put into effect against individuals chosen as victims purely, simply and exclusively because they are members of the target group'<sup>1</sup>.

Diesel: Oh yeah, I've read about Lemkin too. He also mentions how genocide differs to other crimes because of the motivations behind it, as the intentions arise solely from 'racial, national or religious' considerations and have nothing to do with the conduct of the war<sup>2</sup>

Claire: Is there one common sense definition that we could use? <sup>3</sup>.

Diesel: Essentially, the most well known and widely used definition of the term is taken from the United Nation's Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, you could still argue that there are definitional problems with this, such as the exclusion of the term 'political'<sup>4</sup>.

Jullie: Another scholar Kurt Jonassohn discusses the one sided nature of genocide<sup>5</sup>. How can this be applied to Rwanda when both the Tutsis and Hutus were killed?

Diesel: Yeah both Hutus and Tutsis were killed during the genocide but the intention was to wipe out the Tutsi population<sup>6</sup>.

Claire: Hang on a minute, who are the Hutus and the Tutsis?

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<sup>1</sup> Destexhe, A. (1995), *The Crime of Genocide, Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, New York University Press & Pluto Press/UK. See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/rwanda/reports/dsetexhe.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Rubenstein, W (2004) 'Genocide and historical debate: William D. Rubinstein ascribes the bitterness of historians' arguments to the lack of an agreed definition and to political agendas, *History Today*, Vol 54, no. 4, pp36-38.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, A (2006), *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, London & New York, p14.

<sup>5</sup> Jacobs, S. L., & Totten, S (2002) *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK), p134

<sup>6</sup> Amstutz, M., R (2006), 'Is Reconciliation possible after genocide?: The case of Rwanda, *Journal of Church and State*, vol 48, no.3, p541.

Diesel: Geez, you really have to get onto this assignment. Let us fill you in on the atrocities of the genocide. To start with, the whole genocide occurred due the tension and conflict that has existed for years between these two groups<sup>7</sup>.

Julie: Well the killings commenced in April 1994, but no one can be sure how many were killed, although the figure is roughly between 500 000 and 1 million Tutsis<sup>8</sup>. Apparently it was the greatest genocide in African history<sup>9</sup>. It began with the assassination of the Rwandan President Habyarimana when his plane was shot down, and the violence and torture escalated from there<sup>10</sup>.

Diesel: Yeah I read somewhere that straight after the President was killed, Rwanda plunged into political violence as Hutu militia began to kill Tutsis and some moderate Hutus using clubs, guns, grenades, and machetes<sup>11</sup>. Killers came from every social class, from doctors and educators to unemployed Hutu youths<sup>12</sup>. Worse still, Hutu civilians were involved in the massacres, including Hutu women and children. They were forced to kill family members and neighbours. Imagine that, having your neighbours turning against you.<sup>13</sup>

Claire: That's horrible! How can people do such terrible things to other human beings?

Diesel: Yeah but not as horrible as the fact that the UN and the international community did nothing to help the Rwandan victims. They failed to intervene and simply left them there to die. There was a huge uproar of international criticism of the UN's role, and of the response of

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, *Op Cit*, p234.

<sup>8</sup> Mamdani, M (2001), *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton University Press, and Oxford, p5.

<sup>9</sup> Umutesi, M., B. (2006), 'Is Reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis possible?', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 60, no.1, p157

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> United Human Rights Council, 'Genocide in Rwanda', See [www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide\\_in\\_rwanda.htm](http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.htm)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Mamdani, *Op Cit*, p6

international humanitarian groups<sup>14</sup>. It seemed like without any public activism, the US and UN turned a blind eye and didn't act until it was absolutely necessary, which was really too late<sup>15</sup>.

Julie: I read that the UN withdrew the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) two weeks after the genocide began<sup>16</sup>. Apparently this force only re-entered a couple of months later as a result of increasingly visible and widely reported atrocities<sup>17</sup>.

Diesel: Oh, I found an interesting website which detailed a timeline of UN action throughout the genocide. Apparently, according to this source, the UN Security Council passed a resolution condemning the killings but excluded the term 'genocide'. Had the term been used the US would have been legally obliged to act<sup>18</sup>.

Claire: Wow, it's amazing how excluding one word can inhibit UN action.

Diesel: And get this! It took Clinton four years to publically apologise and admit that the international community did not act quickly enough<sup>19</sup>.

Claire: It's unimaginable isn't it? The structure of the UN definitely does not encourage quick and decisive responses<sup>20</sup>. There are a range of sources that find the actions, or more precisely the inaction, of the UN to be deplorable. I mean...we are talking about people's lives here!!!!

Julie: The whole event blows me away!

Claire: So what sources did you guys use, I think I need some help?

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<sup>14</sup> Waal, A & Omaar, R (1995) 'The Genocide in Rwanda and the International response', *Current History*, vol 94, no.591, pp156-161

<sup>15</sup> Colgan, A (2006) 'A Tale of Two Genocides: The Failed US Responses to Rwanda and Darfur', *Peacework*, vol33, no.369, p16.

<sup>16</sup> Berman, E (2001) 'The International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda): Lessons and observations from the field', *The American Behavioural Scientist*, vol45, no.4, p616-626

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Frontline: The Triumph of Evil, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/front-line/shows/evil-13k>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Bannon, A (2006) 'The Responsibility to Protect: The UN World Summit and the question of Unilateralism', *The Yale Law Journal*, vol115, no.5, p1157-1165.

Diesel: There is heaps of information available, lots of scholarly sources such as books and journal articles – check out the library website! There is also a range of different websites covering all aspects of genocide and what happened in Rwanda.

Julie: Actually I found an article which spoke about radio propaganda within Rwanda, which encouraged the killings<sup>21</sup>. The Rwanda state radio was controlled by Hutu extremists, and even pinpointed locations of where Tutsis were hiding. But I couldn't find many more sources that spoke of how the media portrayed the event in 1994.

Diesel: I read about that too. Apparently three Rwandan radio and newspaper executives have been sentenced to life imprisonment for directly and publicly inciting the genocide<sup>22</sup>.

Claire: So getting back to the assignment question, how should we approach the briefs? They can't be the same – we have to differentiate them somehow.

Julie: From what I've gathered, our briefs should focus on different aspects of the event. I think we can be from any organisation - we could be a journalist, human rights activist, or peacekeeper.

Diesel: Oh, but we cannot address a media organisation. I was thinking about addressing the UN in the present day and acknowledging what occurred in Rwanda. By reflecting on the absence of their intervention in Rwanda, I would then propose recommendations of what the UN should do if such atrocities should appear imminent in the future.

Julie: I was thinking I might take the perspective of a human rights activist or journalist who was in Rwanda just after the genocide occurred. I could present my brief to the UN, detailing why and how the UN needs to become active in Rwanda to prevent further massacres and bring some type of order and stability to the country.

Claire: They are both really good ideas! Without having done extensive research I think it would be interesting to look at the reconciliation between the Hutus and Tutsis. I would need to

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<sup>21</sup> United Human Rights Council, *op cit*.

<sup>22</sup> Zahar, A (2005), 'The ICTR's "Media" Judgement and the reinvention of direct and public incitement to commit genocide, *Criminal Law Forum*, vol16, p33.

examine the nature of the relationship between the groups before and after the genocide, and whether reconciliation is underway or is even realistically possible to achieve in the near future. Perhaps I could make recommendations to the current Rwandan government? Or maybe I could look at how the perpetrators of the crime have been held accountable through the legal system. I think I saw some info about the ineffectiveness of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and other courts to trial perpetrators of the genocide<sup>23</sup>.

Diesel: Yeah, either would be a good approach and they both sounds fascinating. It seems like we will be covering a broad range of issues concerning the genocide in the assignment.

Julie: For sure. I can sense some top marks if we can pull this one off. Good luck girls!!!

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<sup>23</sup> Gahima, G (2007), 'Accountability for Atrocity: Lessons from Rwanda, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol8, no.2, p107

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