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*THE LIVELIHOOD CONFLICTS APPROACH ON TRIAL IN RWANDA:
TOWARDS A POLITICAL CRITIQUE*

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1. Introduction

There has been growing interest and concern among development agencies for environmentally related conflicts in recent years¹. This trend can be observed in the reports published by organisations such as the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (e.g. OECD, 2000; Ohlsson, 1998). Similarly attention has been paid to how poverty (e.g. de Soysa & Gleditsch, 1999; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998) and inequality (for a discussion, see Cramer², 2001) can increase the risk for conflict. In Sida's publication on *livelihood conflicts*, it is argued that environmental degradation interacted with population growth and inequalities to cause a loss of livelihoods and subsequently rendered a large part of the population as ready perpetrators of violence and genocide in Rwanda (Ohlsson, 2000). Poverty is integrated in the concept in that the loss of livelihood is presented as a "rapid transition from a previous stable condition of relative welfare into a condition of poverty or destitution" (Ohlsson, 2000, p. 3). This, it is contended paves the way for mobilisation of popular support for violent conflict at a rate that would not otherwise be possible to achieve. In so far as livelihood losses are conceived of as a result of the three factors (1) *environmental degradation*, (2) *population growth* and/or (3) *inequalities*, this analytical framework differs little from, and is highly influenced by, the work of Thomas Homer-Dixon (1991; 1994; 1999) on *environmental scarcity* and conflict. In the work presented by Sida and that of Homer-Dixon, these three factors are characterised as sources of conflict. No great effort is made to establish why the environment was degraded, what caused the population to grow or whether inequalities were the result of intentional policies which might have been embedded in conflict. Instead, when the concepts of

¹ These have also attracted the attention of defence and intelligence organisations such as NATO (Lonergan, 1999) and CIA (Uvin, 1998).

² Christopher Cramer (2001, p. 23) grants explanatory value to inequality "only in so far as the economic is considered inseparable from, part of, embedded in the social, political, cultural and historical".

livelihood conflict and environmental conflict are applied to Rwanda, the three factors are taken as apolitical and given.

Seeking possible implications of work on environmental scarcity and conflict, the DAC Working Party on Development Co-operation and Environment has considered “[t]he active prevention of environmental insecurity ... to be an important element of strategies to prevent conflicts caused by, or resulting in environmental disruptions and displacement” (OECD, 2000, p. 2). Pondering on these issues Mark Hallé, their project director asks, “[i]s it not cheaper, and ... more favourable, to plant trees in Ethiopia, enhance soil fertility in Rwanda, or terrace slopes in Honduras, rather than funding the emergency relief that seems inevitably to be required” (OECD, 2000, p. 5)? After posing the question Hallé emphasises the importance of finding the links between environmental care and the creation of a more secure society.

It is not clear, however, that the best way of dealing with the livelihood losses and level of violence prior to the 1994 genocide would have been to ‘enhance soil fertility in Rwanda’. Experiences from other cases show that increasing the availability of the scarce resource might exacerbate the conflict rather than prevent it. The Senegal River Valley project in Mauritania³ provides one such example, where water scarcity was increasing. Dams were constructed which would allow for irrigation of its surroundings. This developmental project, which in effect reduced scarcity, simultaneously increased the value of land in its prospected region⁴. This in turn led Arab elite of the government to remove the right of access to land

³ Advocates of livelihood conflicts and environmental conflicts have used this case as support of their argument, calling it ‘resource capture’ (e.g. Homer-Dixon, 1994; Ohlsson, 1998).

⁴ In relation to this case, Bardhan notes “[o]ne of the frequent sources of ethnic conflict involves the market value of land and its possession ... [a]s ... control increases in value ... [i]t is not uncommon ... for the poor *minority groups* to be dispossessed and deprived of their traditional communal rights to the land”

that black Mauritians had previously enjoyed (Bardhan, 1997). In another case, taken from the Sahel region and documented by Brigitte Thébaud and Simon Batterbury (2001, p. 70), “development efforts to provide secure watering points ... initiated social conflicts rather than created security”.

While the cases at first might appear to provide support for the livelihood conflict framework, they actually show how increased, not reduced, absolute availability encouraged conflict. Both cases point to the need to consider the mechanisms of access and command. These mechanisms can be fundamentally political. Considering Hallé’s statement in the light of these cases draws attention to how the livelihood conflict framework suggests an approach that seeks technical solutions to what might ultimately be political problems. James Fairhead (2000, p. 150) has cautioned for linking conflict to environmental factors because “[c]onsidering conflicts to be ‘environmental-population’ in origin might obscure the political origins of what are so definitively political events”. This depoliticising⁵ exercise not only misrepresents the causes and dynamics of conflict, but may actually contribute to the hostilities through its effect on policy. Hence, by depoliticising problematic situations in this way, development agencies risk adopting at best inefficient⁶, and at worst counterproductive or outright dangerous, policies. This danger, apparent in the two cases above, necessitates questioning the relevance of the livelihood conflict approach.

(Bardhan, 1997, p. 1387 [italics added]). As should be evident from the argument that follows, the essence of this sentence is that those dispossessed by the elite constitute ‘minority groups’, indicating that they are already excluded. This quotation supports Fairhead’s (2000, p. 148) argument that “conflicts are less generated by resource poverty and bankruptcy, than by resource value and wealth”.

⁵ To be understood as decontextualisation, considering the loss of livelihoods as an ‘event’ “detached from its embeddedness within a set of historically specific and locally based economic and political processes” (Hendrie, quoted in Edkins, 2000, p. 53)

⁶ Indeed, Gareth Austin (1996) has argued that economic incentives for inter-ethnic cooperation are unlikely to be effective unless certain political conditions are met.

1.1 Central Questions and Aim of Study

In this paper the analytical framework of livelihood conflicts will be problematised by challenging its apolitical nature. What is being scrutinised, is not whether livelihood losses can act as a mobilising factor for violence, but the notion of apolitical, technical sources of and subsequently solutions to these losses and conflicts. All three of the factors, environmental degradation, population growth and inequalities, deemed as ‘sources’ of environmental scarcity and conflict, could be understood as resulting from political decisions. Environmental degradation cannot be understood separate from the political and economic incentives causing it to occur and reproduction preferences must be understood in the light of the economic and political context. Similarly, inequalities in access to and control over resources cannot be detached from the political economic conflicts already existent in society. In this dissertation the political nature of the third factor, inequalities, will be explored. This will be done by reference to political theories of famine. Writing on the political economy of famine, David Keen has adopted Michael Foucault’s questions “*what use is ... [it], what functions does it assure, in what strategies is it integrated* (Foucault, quoted in Keen, 1994a, p. 111 [italics added]).

Following an introduction to the concept of livelihood conflicts and how it has been applied to the genocide in Rwanda, Foucault’s broad questions will be posed more specifically in the case study to seek the strategies influencing, and functions of, livelihood loss in the particular context of Rwanda. This approach will facilitate the identification of political economic agendas which might have caused livelihood losses. Thus the aim of this dissertation shall be achieved, *to provide a political understanding of the inequalities causing loss of livelihoods in Rwanda as a factor enabling the mobilisation for the 1994 genocide.*

1.2 Definitions, Delimitation and Choice of Literature

Genocide will be understood as a “sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim” (Fein, 1990, pp. 23-25, quoted in Väyrynen, 2000, p. 51). Two important characteristics should be noted in this definition. First the policies of the perpetrators must be intentional. Secondly, it includes “the systematic elimination of political opponents (‘politicides’ as opposed to ‘ethnicides’)” (Väyrynen, 2000, p. 52).

The analytical framework of livelihood conflicts will be studied as it is presented by Sida. This study will be delimited to its subcategory environmental conflicts. As will be demonstrated, environmental conflicts constitute a particular form of livelihood conflicts. Livelihood conflicts could originate in other factors and is thus a wider concept. The delimitation is necessary not only because of the limited time frame but also because of a similar delimitation in Sida publications. Furthermore the focus on environmentally caused livelihood conflicts has been chosen because of its apparent apolitical character. This character is not exclusive to the environmental-scarcity category of livelihood conflicts, only more apparent⁷. While the view on environmental conflicts of development agencies in general is of interest, Sida has been particularly supportive of this understanding (Segnestam, 2001) and hence form an interesting focus.

Although the focus of this study is on the political economic agendas influencing

⁷ Similar arguments could be applied to loss of livelihoods resulting from failure e.g. to industrialise as long as a level of intentionality can be traced (for a thorough discussion on beneficiaries of developmental failure, see Ferguson, 1990)

inequalities, similar forces may be influencing environmental degradation and population growth. While theories from political ecology⁸ (e.g. Peet & Watts, 1996) provide a framework for studying conflictual tensions behind environmental degradation, the claim by Hutu extremists that family planning was part of a Tutsi plot to control the Hutu reproduction (African Rights, 1995, p. 43) provides an example of politicisation of reproduction. Politics behind these two sources of environmental scarcity will not be considered further in this dissertation.

1.2.1 Literature on livelihood conflicts

For the purpose of studying livelihood conflicts, this dissertation has largely been focussed on the writings of Leif Ohlsson. This is motivated by the fact that Sida's publications on both livelihood conflicts (Ohlsson, 2000) and its subcategory - links between environment and conflicts (Ohlsson 1998) - have been written by Ohlsson. While he is responsible for the texts, these publications have been initiated and financed by Sida (Segnestam 2001). The aim of these publications has been to "share some thoughts" and "insights gained" by ongoing research in order to contribute to conflict prevention (Segnestam 2000). A further aim has been to integrate environmental issues into discussions of other developmental concerns and for these thoughts to inform Sida's policies on, for example, crisis or crisis-prevention aid as well as the development of new country strategies. Moreover, Sida has commissioned Ohlsson to produce and edit a newsletter, 'Environment, Development, Conflict: EDC-News', on the same topics (Segnestam 2001). Since much of the two Sida publications as well as the newsletter are based on Ohlsson's doctorate thesis, this has been given much attention. In addition, Homer-Dixon's work has been consulted since this is perceived as

⁸ For a related argument see e.g. Michael Redclift (1999, p. 3) who argues that "[i]nstead of regarding environmental change as the back-cloth to security issues" environmental change should be considered as "the outcome of competition over the environment".

ground breaking research on the topic of environmental conflicts. This work has also influenced that of Ohlsson to a great degree. Finally a working paper, co-supervised by Sida, conducted on behalf of the OECD DAC Working Party on Development Co-operation and Environment has been consulted.

1.2.2 Literature for critique

The framework for criticising livelihood conflicts has been gathered from writings on complex emergencies. In particular, political and political-economic theories of famine have been consulted. There are several reasons for engaging with theories on famine. For one, famine can be understood as an ultimate loss of livelihoods (although some authors, e.g. Alex de Waal, (1989) have suggested that people sometimes ‘choose’ famine before loss of ways of lives [livelihoods]). Another is that the Malthusian concern, underlying much of the environmental conflicts approach, involves the threat of famine.

2. Livelihood Conflicts: Poverty & Environment as Causes of Conflict

The livelihood conflict approach emanates from writing on poverty and conflict and environmental scarcity and conflict respectively. Writers like Indira de Soysa and Nils Petter Gleditsch (1999) have identified poverty whereas others such as Homer-Dixon (1991; 1994; 1999) and Robert Kaplan (1994) have emphasised environmental scarcity as a common feature of many violent conflicts. According to Ohlsson (2000, p. 3) neither poverty nor environmental factors are strong enough determinants to explain conflict. The loss of livelihoods, he claims, often constitutes “a missing link” explaining the causal mechanisms of both environmental factors and poverty in explanations of current conflict patterns. Instead

of looking at poverty *per se*, which is often a near-endemic condition in many societies, focussing on the loss of livelihoods, implies studying societies where groups of people have experienced a rapid transition, resulting in a sudden fall into poverty. It is this rapid transition that generates the potential for livelihood conflicts. A rapid devaluation of expectations, forcing people into a much lower situation in society than they have expected to be entitled to (ibid). In order to arrive at the concept livelihood conflicts, Ohlsson (ibid, pp. 8-9) has followed a three-step delineation. First, on the basis of de Soysa and Gleditsch, he acknowledges the hypothesis would be that poverty is an important conflict generating factor; not so much the state of poverty *per se*, but the rapid falling into poverty. Secondly, he seeks the reason for impoverishment. Here the loss of livelihoods is postulated, which necessitates the question why so many people lose their livelihoods. Looking at livelihood conflicts in general would allow him to stop the delineation here and start seeking the economic sectors wherein livelihoods were being lost and finally to seek the mechanisms whereby these are lost and the subsequent social consequences of this. However, the third step involves a delimitation to focus on agriculture, the single largest source of livelihoods in developing countries (ibid, p. 9). Seeking the reasons why agriculture is failing, as an economic sector, to absorb growing populations, Ohlsson employs a further delimitation to study the role of environmental scarcity. Hence this approach of environmentally induced livelihood conflicts views poverty and environmental scarcity as complementary in their causal mechanisms.

2.1 Environmental Scarcities

According to Homer-Dixon (1991; 1994; 1999) environmental scarcity emanates from three

sources. The first is environmental degradation (pollution etc). This factor reduces the quantity and/or quality of available resources. It can therefore be characterised as a *scarcity of supply*, ‘shrinking the size of the cake’ to be shared by its users. Population growth constitutes the second factor. With demographic pressures the number of people ‘sharing the cake’ increases. This *demand-induced* scarcity reduces the size of the slice available per capita. The last source of environmental scarcity is the one scrutinised in this dissertation. This is called structural scarcity and is due to unequal access to resources. This results in some users having access to disproportionately large ‘slices of the cake’ while others are forced to make a living off disproportionately small ‘slices’.

2.1.1 The conflict mechanism

An increase in any of the above sources of environmental scarcity can reduce the availability of resources to groups in society, so that their capacity to secure sufficient livelihoods is undermined. This would result in a loss of livelihoods, with higher intensity of poverty and unemployment. The dissatisfaction that arises out of such situations provides the breeding ground for violence, and accordingly the risk of violent conflict increases. Ohlsson (2000, p. 5) suggests that,

[t]he conflict mechanisms put in motion by the process include relative deprivation and the strengthening of bonds along ethnic, linguistic, national or regional lines prevalent in almost all societies, but not gaining full significance until livelihoods are threatened in rapid, and sometimes dramatic, processes of change.

2.2 Loss of livelihoods and Genocide in Rwanda

On 6 April 1994, history took a vicious turn in Rwanda. As the late president, Juvenal Habyarimana, was returning from a summit⁹ concerning the Arusha peace negotiations, which had been held since the signing of a cease-fire in mid 1992, his plane was shot down (Prunier, 1995, p.113). Power was seized by the inner circle of his regime, the Akazu, and genocide was unleashed. In a period of 100 days approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutu were killed (CIA 01/09/2001).

The civil war, which had provoked these negotiations, broke out on October 1990, as the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a collection of exiled, mainly Tutsi, Rwandans in Uganda, crossed the border and killed members of the government forces (FAR¹⁰) (Prunier, 1995, p. 93). Although the war was between RPF and the government¹¹, it soon became clear that all Tutsis were considered aligned with the RPF. Hence from having begun as a war for the right of exiles to return and against the undemocratic regime at the time, the civil war adopted an ethnic aspect, with the Hutu FAR fighting the invading Tutsis and various militias conducting occasional attacks on civilian Tutsi citizens. In April, 1994 these attacks ceased to be sporadic. Sharing a common culture, religion and language, the magnitude of the evil in the act of genocide has led to questions about the human nature (Igwara, 1995). In order to attain the level of efficiency that it did, the initiators of the genocide needed the assistance from a large number of civilian Hutus. This massive mobilisation of ‘ordinary’ people for such an evil act, in particular, has puzzled many minds ever since. Indeed, Ohlsson suggests,

⁹ The location of this summit was Dar-es-Salaam. The agenda was regional, with a main focus on Burundi, but discussions were diverted to Habyarimana’s refusal to implement the Arusha agreement (Prunier, 1995, p. 211).

¹⁰ Forces Armées Rwandaises

¹¹ Supported by French troops until December 1993 when they were removed as part of the Arusha accords. Initially support was also provided by Belgian and Zairian troops (Prunier, 1995, pp. 101-109).

“the single most important facet of the Rwandan case to understand ... is how a very large part of the population could be mobilised as perpetrators in the ... genocide” (EDC-News, 27/03/2001).

Set in the context of civil war and enormous land scarcity, explanations have ranged from ethnic hatred to Malthusian determinism. While acknowledging the multitude of factors at work, Ohlsson has applied the understanding of livelihood conflicts to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. He maintains that environmental scarcity caused a loss of livelihoods which ultimately rendered people susceptible to committing the genocide in 1994. (Ohlsson, 1999; 2000.)

2.2.1 Agricultural conditions and population

Prior to the genocide Rwanda had the highest population density in Africa and population growth (Homer-Dixon's 2nd factor) had led to ever smaller plots of land being handed down to the next generation. Since independence population density had risen from 106 inhabitants per square kilometre in 1960 to 280 by 1992 (Uvin, 1998; Ohlsson, 1999). Moreover, it seemed as if the intensification of agriculture had come to a halt, as food production per capita had been decreasing for a decade¹². Soil erosion (the 1st factor) which has been described as particularly high is deemed to have exacerbated this situation. These two factors, together with highly unequal distribution of land¹³ (the 3rd factor), operated as sources of environmental scarcity. Hence scarcity of arable land led to high levels of unemployment [loss of livelihoods] and dissatisfaction among the poor peasantry,

¹² Kilocalories produced/capita/day dropped from 2,055 in 1984 to 1,509 in 1991, i.e. “from a low level to an intolerable one” (Uvin, 2000, p. 175).

¹³ According to a USAID survey 15% of the farmers owned 50% of the land in 1984. Meanwhile, 26% of the population had become landless. (Uvin, 2000, p. 169.)

particularly in the southern region.

To make matters worse, in 1985, the Rwandan economy was severely affected by a decade-long decline in world coffee prices¹⁴. With a population growth outpacing the economic growth of the country, Rwanda experienced an economic crisis during much of the 1980s¹⁵. Indeed, Ohlsson notes “[a]lthough the total production increased by 10 per cent between early 80s and early 90s, per capita supply decreased by almost 20 per cent, resulting in food deficits in the southern and western parts of the country” (Ohlsson, 1999, p. 93). Valerie Percival and Homer-Dixon (1995a, p. 7) make the observation that these problems were less severe in the northern region, home of the Hutu President Habyarimana, which was better endowed with central resources. By 1988 the deficit was so severe that famine struck in large parts of southwestern Rwanda (1988-1989) and 300,000 people (mainly in the south) were in need of food aid (Ohlsson, 1999, pp. 93-95).

James Gasana¹⁶ argues that this ‘failure’ of the state to respond adequately to the famine in southern Rwanda reduced its legitimacy among the peasants in the affected region (Ohlsson, 2000, p. 14). The resulting dissatisfaction fed into the political opposition concentrated in the south. The rebel forces of exiled Rwandans in Uganda (RPF) seized this opportunity of decreased regime legitimacy and dissatisfaction among the peasantry to launch their invasion of Rwanda (Ohlsson, 2000, p. 14).

Ohlsson provides this as an argument for the livelihoods approach, understanding the famine

¹⁴ Coffee export receipts, which was Rwanda’s major source of income, dropped from US\$ 144 million in 1985 to US\$ 30 million in 1993 (Uvin, 2000, p. 175).

¹⁵ GDP/capita decreased from US\$ 355 in 1983 to US\$ 260 in 1990 (Uvin, 2000, p. 175).

¹⁶ Former MRND Minister of Defense.

of the South as the result of soil erosion, drought, population growth and inequalities¹⁷. Hence the environmental scarcity (an apolitical factor), caused a famine (extreme loss of livelihoods). This in turn provided the RPF with the ‘easier target’ of a delegitimised state. However the explanatory function of lost livelihoods does not end here. The breakout of a genocide which required the participation of large proportions of the rural population, it is argued, could not have taken place without the severe loss of livelihoods experienced by the people of Rwanda. Indeed, Ohlsson argues that “[t]he loss of livelihoods as a result of environmental scarcities of arable land and water was demonstrably one of the major factors that enabled the genocidaires of Rwanda to mobilise a large part of the population.” (2000, p. 4)

2.2.2 *The conflict mechanism in Rwanda*

According to the livelihood conflicts approach then, the loss of livelihoods enabled the mobilisation of such large numbers of foot soldiers. The unemployed were easy targets for hate-propaganda directed against the Tutsi population, the most easily available cleavage in an ethnically divided nation at war with Tutsi rebels. Prior to the genocide the state radio, Radio Rwanda, as well as Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines and other media were used extensively to disperse hate-messages directed against the Tutsi population (Olson, 1995, p. 220; Prunier, 1995, pp.188-189). If the RPF came to power it was threatened they would claim scarce land resources for the Tutsi population and suppress the Hutu majority as they had prior to the Hutu revolution. By joining FAR or one of the two militias¹⁸, *Interahamwe* or *Impuzamugambi*, unemployed youth were promised not only a salary and the

¹⁷ The reduced prices of coffee received on the world market is acknowledged in a footnote, but not fully integrated into the analysis, due to Ohlsson’s limitation to look at the subcategory of environmentally related livelihood conflicts.

¹⁸ Both militias were active throughout the genocide. They were closely connected to the government who supplied them with weapons (Prunier, 1995, p. 184). At an early stage they also received training from the French (Prunier, 1995, p. 165).

prospects of looting, but also rewards in land owned by the victims of their onslaught. Together these promises provided strong incentives for participating in the genocide, moreover they constituted the only way for young men to fulfil their expectations¹⁹ (Ohlsson, 1999).

2.2.3 *A primary non-political critique*

Although Rwanda experienced increasing land scarcity, due to population growth, the ecological crisis has been questioned. African Rights (1995, pp. 14-19) points out that large areas of land were being held as protected forests as well as questioned the severity of soil erosion. Moreover, Peter Uvin (1998, pp. 197-201) contends that Rwandan agriculture still was at the most primitive stage in terms of inputs used, which indicates that great progress easily could have been made. In the context of this potential for easing the stress of its ecological scarcity, the causes of genocide, Uvin suggests, should be sought elsewhere.

3. A Political Critique: The Functions of Livelihood Loss

In this critique of the livelihood conflicts approach, it will be argued that by focussing on apolitical ‘sources’ of environmental scarcity it does not pay enough attention to intentionality behind these sources. Taking Helen Fein’s definition of genocide as the result of a ‘purposeful action’ into account, the nature of intentionality in all actions leading to the genocide should be given attention. This in mind, Rwanda will be portrayed as in a state of a complex emergency. According to Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi (1994, p. 21), complex

¹⁹ For a discussion on economic incentives to join the army during civil wars see Keen’s (1998, pp. 45-54) discussion on ‘bottom-up economic violence’.

emergencies are “intentionally created and ... sustained in order to achieve their objectives of cultural genocide and political and economic power ... [through a] potent combination of political and economic factors driving and maintaining disaster-producing conflicts”. Complex emergencies differs from natural disasters in that they often persist over long periods of time during which means to mitigate the threats are often deliberately denied or manipulated (Macrae and Zwi, 1994, p. 21). A further distinction from natural disasters is provided by Macrae and Zwi (ibid) who contend that complex emergencies are “much more than crises of food supply. Rather, they represent the systematic and deliberate violation of individual rights to biological survival, and social and economic rights to produce and to secure an adequate livelihood.” While appreciating the importance of livelihood losses as a mobilising factor for violence, these, it will be argued, might be *intentionally* caused to fail. Only by understanding the functions of failure can the possibility of intentionality be identified. Indeed, Foucault bids “[t]he problem of causes must not be dissociated from that of function” (quoted in Keen, 1994a, p. 111). Writers like Ferguson (1990) and Keen (1994b; 1998) have responded to Foucault’s instruction and while Ferguson has sought the functions of developmental failure, Keen has focussed on those of famine and civil violence. These functions can range from pure economic benefits reaped from market forces²⁰ to broader political aims of weakening the power of oppositions. For our purposes, it is necessary to understand how functions of failures in all of these fields, the developmental, civil conflict and famine, might have interacted and influenced the loss of livelihoods in Rwanda. Applying this framework to our critique of livelihood conflicts we need to adopt and ask Foucault’s questions: ‘What use is ... [livelihood loss], what functions does it assure, in what strategies is it integrated?’

²⁰ In the context of what Keen (1994a) terms ‘forced markets’.

Writing on famine, Rangasami suggested that it “is a process in which benefits accrue to one section of the community while losses flow to the other” (quoted in Edkins, 2000, p. 49). Portrayed as a process with winners and losers, one should not consider only its victims. The same holds true for livelihood ‘failures’. Rather than treating livelihood loss as a disastrous event, it needs to be studied in its historical context. Indeed, writing about famine, de Waal (1990, p. 473) pointed out the importance of taking “account of the historical processes leading to vulnerability of all or part of a population”. Comparing the loss of livelihoods to famine, it could equally be understood as “a process during which pressure or force (economic, military, political, social, psychological) is exerted upon the victim community” (Rangasami, quoted in Keen, 1994b, p. 6). When looked upon like this the loss of livelihoods [or famine] becomes less of a disastrous event than an outcome, whose rationale should be sought in its politico-socio-economic process. Just as this view departs from traditional explanations of famine²¹, it facilitates looking beyond the ‘sources’ of livelihood loss and into the rationale embedded in its ‘historically specific and locally based economic and political processes’. Within this framework the rationale of functions is acknowledged and hence “famine [and livelihood losses] can be regarded as an outcome of a process of impoverishment resulting from the transfer of assets from the weak to the politically strong” (Duffield, 1993, p.135).

3.1 The Political Economy of Livelihood Loss in Rwanda

Keeping the primary critique (section 2.2.3) in mind Foucault’s questions could assume

²¹ Including both classical notions of food shortage and Sen’s entitlements approach, stressing the lack of command (Edkins, 2000).

initial shape: If Uvin and the study presented by African Rights are right, that there were unexploited potentials for easing the stress on the environmental scarcity, then the failure to do so should be explained. Why did Rwanda ‘fail’ to exploit this potential (a developmental failure)? In whose interest was this? Did it form part of a greater strategy? Related to this is the question why the government failed to react adequately to the famine in the late 1980s. What functions did this failure serve? Was failure to respond to loss of livelihoods in the south integrated in a greater strategy?

In order to pose more informed questions and launch a political critique of the livelihood conflicts approach, a further understanding is necessary of the politico-socio-economic history of Rwanda. Hence, in what follows, a description of the situation prior to the outbreak of war and the genocide is provided. Questions will be posed and highlighted along the way as the historical account discloses three major divisions in the Rwandan society (Hutu-Tutsi, north-south, political elite-the masses). Particular effort has been made to trace how politics related to these divisions may have influenced the loss of livelihoods.

3.1.1 Historical political division between Hutu and Tutsi

The most evident division in Rwandan society is probably between Hutu and Tutsi²². This social differentiation existed prior to the arrival of the first colonial powers. When the Germans colonised the region in the late 19th century, they enforced indirect rule,

²² Disagreement remains in the rigour of distinction between Hutu and Tutsi. While some hold that they are nothing but socio-economic divisions, others claim they are different races. Drawing on Anderson, Uvin claims “ethnicity is not a matter of historical or physical accuracy, but rather a social construct, an ‘imagined community’ ... preoccupied with the maintenance of social boundaries between in-groups and out-groups” (Uvin, 2000, p. 161). Clearly then for the purposes of the discussion presented here, Hutu and Tutsi can be considered distinct ethnic groups. Moreover, as Austin (1996, p. 2) points out, the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi, has been largely political, as a result of one group or the other having a monopoly over political power. Rwandan society has a third ethnic group, called Twa, which will be left out of the following, since it neither adds nor subtracts from our understanding of the 1994 genocide.

“incorporating natives into a state-enforced customary order” (Mamdani, 1996, p. 18). During this period indirect rule, or the ‘politics of decentralised despotism’, as Mahmood Mamdani (1996, p. 62) portrays it, rendered political power to the king and his fellow Tutsi rulers in return for their cooperation. Hence, by utilising preexistent ethnic cleavages, colonialism strengthened the divisions, both socially and economically between Tutsis and Hutus²³ (African Rights, 1995, p. 47). After the First World War Belgium gained control over Rwanda. The French language, education and Catholicism became new sources of power. These were to accrue to Tutsi along with the prestigious jobs. (Olson, 1995 p.218; Uvin, 2000, p. 162.) Ethnic classification was also systematised²⁴ and identity papers stating ethnic belonging became mandatory. As a result, colonial rule rendered the power of Tutsi significantly more absolute and exploitative. (Uvin, 2000, p. 162)

The Social Revolution 1959-1963

In the late 1950's as popular pressure for independence increased, Belgium switched alliances and began to favour the Hutu population. Pogroms started in 1958 which left large numbers²⁵ of Tutsi killed, while many more fled the country. The violence resulted in an overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy and its replacement by a presidential republic. Seeking to overcome the previous inequities, it became known as the *Social Revolution* (Olson, 1995, p. 218). Elections followed, in which Parmehutu²⁶, a Hutu party with its power base in central-southern Rwanda, turned out victorious. Grégoire Kayibanda, whose first major political expression was a mix of racial enfranchisement, social justice, the extension of economic

²³Bardhan (1997, pp.1381-1383) notes that ‘radical sociologists’ often find this ‘constitution of communal divide’ as reason enough for violent ethnic conflict.

²⁴ Measurement of noses and skull sizes took place (Bate, 1996).

²⁵ Sources differ from ‘hundreds’ (Uvin, 2000) to roughly ten thousand (African Rights, 1995).

²⁶ Party for the Emancipation of the Hutu People

privileges and anti-communism²⁷, was elected president. In 1962 independence and a Hutu president replaced one set of hierarchical, Tutsi-dominated, institutions with another set of Hutu-dominated ones. (African Rights, 1995, p. 12.) Indeed, contrary to the emancipatory notion of a 'social revolution', Austin (1996, p. 4) notes "the 1959 revolution was limited to reversal and revenge ... now the minority not the majority ... were excluded, but ethnic monopoly continued to be the organising principle of the state". This suggests that the struggle for independence also became an ethnic struggle. According to Mamdani,

[t]he form of rule shaped the form of revolt against it. Indirect rule at once reinforced ethnically bound institutions of control and led to their explosion from within. Ethnicity ... thus came to be simultaneously the form of control over natives and the form of revolt against it (Mamdani, 1996, p. 24, quoted in Uvin, 2000, p. 162)

The early years of the 1960s were filled with tension as Tutsi exiles formed guerrilla bands and sought to return by the use of force (African Rights, 1995; Uvin, 2000). Although these were easily stopped, they nevertheless led to reprisal killings by Hutu gangs of up to 30,000 Tutsi civilians in Rwanda (Uvin, 2000). The government also executed about twenty prominent Tutsis (African Rights, 1995). The violence ushered more than 100,000²⁸ Tutsi to flee the country (Uvin, 2000). It was their descendants who formed the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) and in 1990 invaded the country. Further killings of Tutsi were to come in 1967 (Africa Rights, 1995, p. 13).

The Second Regime

In 1973, violence erupted and General Habyarimana launched a coup d'état to restore order.

²⁷ A political expression which was partly responsible for winning Belgian support

²⁸ Again sources differ, with Olson (1995, p. 218) claiming approximately 150,000.

This second regime (1973-1994) was a military dictatorship which killed many of the power holders of its preceding regime (including Kayibanda). With the 1978 Constitution, the country was turned into a one-party state (Prunier, 1995, p.122). Regular popular elections were held, but were counterfeited so that Habyarimana was always re-elected with more than 95% of the votes. Press and intellectual life was tightly controlled (African Rights, 1995) and throughout its history the regime was rated at the bottom of political and human rights surveys²⁹.

In terms of the Hutu-Tutsi divide, both regimes managed to uphold internal legitimacy through ethnic ‘social revolution’ discourse (Uvin, 2000). According to Prunier (1995, p. 75) “there would be not a single Tutsi *bourgmestre* or *préfet*³⁰, there was only one Tutsi officer in the whole army, there were two Tutsi members of parliament out seventy and there was only one Tutsi minister out of a cabinet of between twenty-five and thirty members” during Habyarimana’s regime. Another source of legitimacy was the ‘development’ ideology, which also appealed to the international community. According to Uvin (2000, p. 164; see also Ferguson, 1990) this ideology “holds that the state’s sole objective is the pursuit of economic development for the underdeveloped masses ... [,] legitimizes the government’s intrusiveness in all aspects of social life, and diverts attention from things political, replacing them with a realm of technicality and goodwill.” Acting on this ideology, Habyarimana’s regime managed to achieve sustained economic growth and stability until the mid-1980s³¹. His party, the National Revolutionary Development Movement³² (MRND), which was formed in 1975, adopted the development discourse even in its name. At the same time, human development

²⁹ It received the lowest rating on Charles Humana’s human rights report (Uvin, 2000) and it never reached higher than the second worst rating of political rights in Freedom house’s surveys (Freedomhouse, 01/09/2001).

³⁰ In a footnote Prunier (1995, p. 75) acknowledges that one Tutsi *préfet*, who was to be killed in the genocide, had been initiated towards the very end of the Regime.

³¹ During the period 1970-1980, Rwanda experienced one of the higher annual growth rates in Africa (4.7% Uvin, 2000, p. 167).

³² ‘Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement’.

indicators hardly improved. With access to secondary education at the lowest level in Africa³³, functional illiteracy, according to some sources, remained at 90 per cent in Rwanda (Uvin, 2000, p. 167).

Civil War, The Arusha Accords and Democratisation?

The civil war, which was launched by the RPF in 1990, to a large extent sought to remedy the political exclusion of Tutsis. Although, as demonstrated above, this exclusion was grave for Tutsis in Rwanda, its severity fades in comparison to those exiled Rwandans who were denied even the right to return and regain their citizenship. RPF, which was composed mostly of descendants of Tutsi refugees who had been forced to leave during the social revolution, had spent years unsuccessfully negotiating over the right to return. The attack on 1 October 1990, was their response to this failure. (Olson, 1995, p. 219.)

Simultaneous to the pressure from the RPF, the internal opposition was growing stronger and political parties were established. This, in combination with external pressures, forced Habyarimana to institute political reforms. On 10 June 1991, a new constitution was adopted which gave these parties legal status (Prunier, 1995, p. 126). Two parties were to become particularly important, the main opposition party, MDR³⁴, which was largely created by former Parmehutu, and the CDR³⁵, a right wing Hutu racist party, which would be highly involved in the coming genocide.

In March 1992, Habyarimana agreed that a coalition cabinet would be installed and that peace negotiations would be held with the RPF. The new cabinet was sworn in the following month

³³ In the 1980s, secondary school attendance of kids in the right age was between 2 and 8 % and only 0.1% attained tertiary education. The corresponding figures for low-income country averages was 37% and 3% respectively. (Uvin, 2000, p. 167.)

³⁴ Mouvement Démocratique Républicain

³⁵ Coalition pour la Défence de la Republique

and the MRND(D)³⁶ had to share power for the first time in its history (Prunier, 1995, p. 145). The peace negotiations commenced in Arusha in mid 1992, with a cease-fire signed in July. The following ‘Arusha accords’, signed in August 1993, included protocols detailing the incorporation of the RPF forces into the national army, power sharing amongst the parties, the repatriation of refugees, the rule of law et cetera (African Rights, 1995, pp. 35-36). However, Habyarimana and his Akazu acted simultaneously on two fronts; while they were accommodating at the negotiations, they initiated violence and hate propaganda against Tutsi and opposition Hutus at home. This violence led to a continuous postponement of the inauguration of the new government agreed upon in the Arusha accords (Olson, 1995, p. 220).

3.1.1.1 Functions of Tutsi Livelihood Losses

Although the exclusion of Tutsi from political representation and public sector positions caused them lost livelihoods³⁷, this cannot explain the mobilisation of thousands of Hutu in the genocide. Asking what function the exclusion of Tutsi served reveals that both regimes used the ‘social revolution’ of Hutu power reversal as an internal source of legitimacy. Hence, nurturing the ethnic cleavages would sustain this source of legitimacy and allow for the wider strategy of remaining in power. Once the Habyarimana regime was challenged, it could easily “tap [these] deep currents of popular feeling ...through the powerful use of historical and political myths, fiery speeches and relentless propaganda on the radio” (African Rights, 1995, p. 37) to divert anger and mobilise Hutus against Tutsi citizens. Seen in this light even the genocide itself can be seen as an act of Hutu nation-building, conducted in the interest of its ruling elite. Indeed, drawing on Irving Louis Horowitz, Obi Igwara (1995, p. 14) suggests that

³⁶ The advent of multipartism was celebrated by MRND adding another ‘D’ to its name, to become Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement *et la Démocratie*, hence publicly embracing the new course of Rwandan politics (Prunier, 1995, p. 126).

³⁷ It should be noted Tutsis were over represented in the non-farm private sector and hence often had a more privileged livelihood than Hutus. This Prunier (1995, p. 151) explains was tolerated due to their political ‘untouchability’.

“genocide is a technique for achieving national solidarity, ultimately in a state of order without compassion and of law without justice ... The killing itself was a mechanism for creating a new identity and a new political community for the Hutu”.

3.1.2 Historical political division between north and south

Colonial rule came to strengthen regional divisions just as it had reinforced ethnic ones. The north and the south already had very different histories before colonial times, with the south dominated by the Tutsi monarchy and the northern region independent (African Rights, 1995, p. 14). Indirect rule assisted the Tutsi to gain more absolute control over most of Rwanda, except for a small Hutu kingdom in the northwest³⁸. This was the home region of the president to become, Habyarimana, and it was to host large-scale massacres against Tutsi in 1959-63 and in 1990-1993 (Uvin, 2000, p. 161).

This historical division in mind and with “[t]he chief power struggle in Rwanda at this time ... [being] between the northern and the southern Hutu” (African Rights, 1995, p. 14), the fact that Habyarimana’s home region was the northwest, highlights the importance of the change that came with the second regime. Although Habyarimana initially invoked a policy of ‘balance’ to distribute resources equitably between groups and regions, with time, it came to exclude Tutsis as much as possible and reward the northwest; the educational system favoured children from the northwest³⁹, administrators across the country were disproportionately northwesterners, and government investment went almost exclusively to Habyarimana’s home

³⁸ To the extent that this region was to be dominated by the Tutsi kingdom, the fact that their customary local authorities were removed from above, by these alien rulers, was deeply resented by the northerners (André & Platteau, 1998, p. 38).

³⁹ Pupils from the northwest needed only a test score of 50 to be admitted to secondary education, while those from the rest of the country had to have 80 or 90 (Olson, 1995, p. 219).

region⁴⁰ (African Rights, 1995; Olson, 1995, p. 219). “Probably”, Uvin contends, “in the last two decades, Hutu from the south were as discriminated against as Tutsi” (Uvin, 2000, p. 165; see also André & Platteau, 1998).

3.1.2.1 Functions of Southern Hutu Livelihood Losses

With the ‘chief power struggle’ being between the south and the north, this discrimination must be understood as part of that struggle. Since investments were being withheld deliberately from the south, it should be no surprise that the south was the worst affected by the economic and agricultural downturn. As mentioned in section 2.2.1 this allowed for a severe loss of livelihood, a famine, in this region in the late 1980s. Moreover the government was seen as ‘failing’ to respond adequately to this crisis (Ohlsson, 2000). But just as African Rights (1995, p. 14) notes that “[i]t is not accidental that the majority of Hutus who were targeted for execution in April ... are from the south” it is equally non-accidental that the government ‘failed’ to respond to this crisis. Asking the questions, ‘what use ... [was this livelihood loss], what functions [did] it assure?’ provides us with the likely answer that it weakened the economic base of the opposition.

Considering the hardened climate against Tutsi, the Habyarimana regime’s strategy of Hutu extremism seems to be a rational response to “intraethnic competition”, which according to Bardhan (1997, p. 1389) “hardens ethnic posturing as a political aggregation device ... to paper over the many fissures” within the own ethnic community. Indeed, African Rights (1995, p. 37) suggests “Hutu extremism from the north was in part a strategy to outflank the MDR, and in part an attempt to deny the reality of the north-south divide by stressing Hutu solidarity.”

⁴⁰ According to the World Bank, 90 per cent of investment went to Kigali, Ruhengeri, Gisenyi, and Cyangugu, (the capital plus the north), while Gitarama, the most populous region after Kigali, received 0.16% and Kibuye 0.84% (Uvin, 2000, p. 176).

3.1.3 Political elites and the masses

In both divisions above we have seen that the state failed to act as an impartial mediator and guarantor of rights. It sided clearly with Hutu against Tutsi, by excluding Tutsi from administrative posts and instigating hate propaganda against Tutsi. Similarly it was highly preferential towards the north by almost exclusively directing government investment to its home region. Again we must ask what functions this 'failure' served. What use did the failure to act impartially and to guarantee rights serve? Was this integrated into a wider strategy?

3.1.3.1 Functions of Livelihood Losses of the Masses

In order to find the functions of this failure we must drop traditional theories of the state as an impartial (or benevolent) mediator⁴¹ and instead accept Claude Ake's (1997, p. 5) characterisation of the state as "an enormous power resource, as beneficial to those who control it as it is dangerous to those who are in no position to control it". This characterisation suggests a third division in Rwandan society, between the ruling elite and the masses. This division will prove to be important to answer Foucault's third question, 'in what strategies is it [causing livelihood loss] integrated? Ake (1997, p. 5) further holds that "[p]olitical society is a contested terrain where alien social groups go to fight for the appropriation of state power or to limit their exposure to its abuse". While the northern Hutu may have enjoyed a limited exposure to state abuses, thanks to the appropriation of state power by Habyarimana, a fellow northern Hutu, this power resource would only be truly beneficial to those in a position to control it. Controlling the state implied access to resources of the most powerful agency⁴² and this had been monopolised in the hands of the political elite ever since the coup.

⁴¹ Kalevi Holsti (2000, p. 254) notes that traditional theories stretch from Hobbes' Leviathan, and the liberal notion of a 'night-watchman' state, to the radical position of Marx, claiming that the 'bourgeois' state engages in the exploitation of the working class. None of these theories considers the possibility of a state that engages in genocide.

⁴² Bardhan (1997, p. 1383) holds that "[e]ven when the private sector pays more, the public sector ensures more job security and opportunities for corrupt income, and in any case in many poor countries the government is the major employer in the formal sector".

The economic benefits derived by the political elite can be comprehended when considering the nature of the market for land, which was flourishing during the period prior to the genocide. With prices at more than £2,500/ha in the late 1980s (Fairhead, 2000, p. 165) and the annual income of farmers rarely exceeding £300, these prices excluded buyers who did not have access to off-farm income (Fairhead, 2000, p. 165; André & Platteau, 1998). The most obvious source for this kind of income was in the public administration. These conditions did not profit the northern region directly, instead benefit accrued to those connected to the state as a source of income. In a rural society like Rwanda, then, access to non-farm employment and opportunities held the key to rural prosperity - the ability to buy land. Since this key was largely in the hands of the public administration, we can see that this would have rendered the political elite, and those well connected to it, in a position where they could enrich themselves at the expense of the population. These conditions provided opportunity for a predatory state. According to Holsti (2000, p. 252), a predatory state is one in which the political elite uses the state to enrich themselves and where “rule ultimately is based on a combination of purchased loyalty of a few, formal or informal exclusion of all who protest or resist”. As seen in the previous section 3.1.2, the Habyarimana regime was highly engaged in purchasing support of the northern Hutu to ensure their power position, while Tutsis, and to a lesser extent southern Hutus, were excluded from positions of political power. In further comments on the nature of predatory states, Holsti (2000, p. 252) notes, “[t]he policies used to maintain power and to silence the opposition range from informal means of exclusion, such as fraudulent elections, to formal means such as outlawing opposition political parties”. As noted (section 3.1.1) both of these characteristics were present in Rwanda. Elections were counterfeited, and opposition parties were banned.

With distress sales, motivated by the need to finance emergency expenditures, reaching 65 per

cent⁴³ and the public administrators with regular non-agricultural incomes buying the land, it is no wonder that the legitimacy of the state was questioned. Catherine André and Jean-Philippe Platteau (1998, p. 28) have characterised what was taking place as “dispossession mechanisms driving vulnerable sections of the population ... below the subsistence margin”. This mechanism was increasingly taking the shape of market transactions⁴⁴. Considering that inequality in the distribution of land was already high in 1984, the fact that the income share of the richest decile in Rwanda had increased from 22 per cent in 1982 to 52 per cent in 1994 (Uvin, 2000, p. 169) made this mechanism extremely vicious. Pierre Erny (quoted in Uvin, 2000, p. 169) maintains that the population was becoming “extremely unhappy with the accumulation of land by the privileged of the regime”. Holsti (2000, p. 252) contends that preying on its citizens is one main source of reduced legitimacy for the state, since “[t]hose who are victims of graft and corruption, and those who do not have privileged access to centres of authority, are likely to form oppositions”. As seen in section 3.1.1, this is precisely what happened. In the early 1990s, as state legitimacy declined, the monopoly of privilege enjoyed by the political elite was being contested by opposition parties as well by the RPF. The first independent party to appear, UPR⁴⁵, challenged the Habyarimana regime for its political assassinations, corruption, press intimidation and arbitrary arrests (Prunier, 1995, p. 121). As pressures mounted on Habyarimana, and the Akazu to surrender their privileged position, enjoying monopolised access to state power and accompanying opportunity for self-enrichment, they escalated the violence towards Tutsi civilians and opposition Hutus. The ‘final solution’ was descended upon by the Akazu on 6 April 1994 in the wake of Habyarimana’s death. By this time it had managed to instil enough hate, fear and lost livelihoods to be able to mobilise ‘a very large part of the population’ as perpetrators in

⁴³ According to a study of the sale of 247 land parcels (André & Platteau, 1998, p. 24).

⁴⁴ The relative contribution of market purchases to inequality of land distribution had risen from less than one fourth in 1988 to almost a half in 1993 (André & Platteau, 1998, p. 22).

⁴⁵ Union du Peuple Rwandais

genocide.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to provide a political understanding of inequality as a source of livelihood loss as a factor enabling the mobilisation for the genocide in Rwanda. While loss of livelihoods is an important concept in explaining how the sudden impoverishment of parts of the population facilitated their mobilisation for the ‘final solution’, it does not reveal anything about in what way conflicts and divisions in society may have influenced policies which ultimately caused the loss of livelihoods.

In this case study political economic theories of famine have been applied to the loss of livelihoods in Rwanda. Just as these theories show that famine is a process in which benefit accrues to one section in society, while others are deprived, when applied to livelihood losses, they reveal that sections of society might be benefiting from these losses. Indeed, by studying Rwanda’s socio-politico-economic history, a pattern of functions has emerged. This political economic pattern can be traced in three divisions of the Rwandan society, ultimately serving the strategy of political survival and self-enrichment of the Habyarimana regime. First, the loss of Tutsi livelihoods fed into the Hutu nation building, hence providing legitimacy to the regime. The active exclusion of Tutsis from political representation rendered them second class citizens onto whom dissatisfaction could be diverted. By using Tutsis as scapegoats, the regime could gloss over the intraethnic division, mobilise resentment against Tutsis, and thereby reunite the Hutus in order to remain in power. Secondly, the concentration of investments to the northern region served two purposes. It caused lost livelihoods in the south

and weakened the economic foundation of the southern-based opposition, while it simultaneously purchased support from the northern citizens upon whom the regime depended. Both of these functions were instrumental for the survival of the Habyarimana regime. Finally, by failing to develop a widespread efficiency of the agricultural and other economic sectors the regime provided itself with a flourishing market for agricultural land. Bearing in mind that the members of the political elite were the most powerful buyers, and a large proportion of sales were conducted in desperation, this became a very potent source of self-enrichment.

The fact that powerful elite did benefit shows that there are not only losers but also those who gain in the process of livelihood losses. Once these functions are recognised, they provide the possibility of intentionality; the Habyarimana regime was faced with political economic incentives to 'fail' to sustain peacetime livelihoods. In the extreme case of Tutsi exclusion, the government even had a strong incentive to actively destroy livelihoods. Faced with mounting internal political opposition, the government tapped into the cleavages which it had nurtured. Seen in this light the loss of livelihoods and the subsequent war and genocide ceases to be a disastrous 'event' causing the subsequent war and genocide. In fact, this provides for a view in which the distinction between peace and war is blurred, with war seen rather as an extension of what was there before in society: divisions, exclusion, exploitation.

The functions identified above pose questions to the relevance of the livelihood approach. Taking the issue of intentionality seriously, and considering what functions are at work allows us to further understand the rationale of the functions. This rationale reveals divisions, conflicts and exploitation in society. If it is the rationale of these conflicts that drives the sources of livelihood loss, then these 'sources' cannot be understood as causing conflict.

Since the functions only gain their rationale through the divisions identified in this study in the first place, the losses of livelihoods seems rather to be used as a tool for pursuing these political economic aims. In the case of Rwanda this included the mobilisation of people for conflict and genocide. Fein argues that “[g]enocide is preventable because it is ... a rational act” (quoted in Lemarchand, 1995, p. 60). When the loss of livelihoods is not perceived as much a disastrous event as an outcome driven by rationale of powerful agents, then the influence of this rationale should be limited. This is where the political critique informs livelihood conflicts approach, it suggests that those acting should be held accountable. This has been expressed clearly by de Waal (1997, p. 191) who notes, “if famine reflects a failure of accountability, genocide can be said to be the most extreme manifestation of lack of accountability.”

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