

Peacebuilding in Post-Genocide Rwanda

The Role of Cooperatives in the Restoration of Interpersonal Relationships

av

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Abstract

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This thesis is aimed at contributing to the lack of knowledge in the field of peacebuilding from below, notably regarding the mechanisms to be used in order to overcome the painful past between conflicting parties. The study makes this contribution through an empirically based exploration of the relational outcomes resulting from conflicting parties' memberships of the same cooperative organization after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The study is exploratory and qualitative, with a hermeneutic-interpretive orientation. It is restricted to two cases of cooperatives: *Abahuzamugambi coffee* and *Peace basket*. Empirical data were collected on the basis of the study's research questions, while the theoretical framework, combining intergroup contact theory with other theoretical perspectives on relational peacebuilding, was used during the discussion of exploratory findings. The 222 individuals who were subject to interviews included 219 respondents (cooperative members and non-members) from both sides of the conflict and three other informants.

The study found that, despite some internal and external obstacles, the two cases of cooperatives studied played, and continue to play, a positive role in the restoration of relationships between post-genocide conflicting parties, by enabling them to overcome previous negative-dehumanizing relationships (division, miscommunication, fear, suspicion, anger and hatred), while fostering positive-(re)humanizing ones (positive communication and conviviality). The study supports the contact theory, and concludes that when conflicting parties come into contact around a common goal to be successfully achieved cooperatively, they engage in a positive communication that enables truth to emerge, reciprocal acknowledgment of the wrong to occur, and apology and expressions of forgiveness to take place. The study concludes that only genuine and successful cooperatives are likely to play a positive role in the restoration of interpersonal relationships, and proposes that cooperative organizations be taken as alternatives to other mechanisms engaged in the process of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Key words: Cooperative, conflict, genocide, genocide survivor, genocide perpetrator, interpersonal relationships, peacebuilding, post-conflict peacebuilding, relationships restoration, Rwanda.