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Between Fiction and Reality in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Reflections on a Social-Psychological Media Intervention for Social Change

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Abstract

This article reflects on the potential and challenges of implementing social psychological interventions in the aftermath of genocide, specifically focusing on an education entertainment media campaign in Rwanda. The analysis is based on the author's experience working with a non-governmental organization in producing "Musekeweya"—a very popular violence prevention and reconciliation radio drama. The article highlights the advantages of using fiction as an effective tool to communicate messages about violence and reconciliation, and provide a safe space to address sensitive topics in post-genocide contexts. In addition, it outlines some of the challenges of translating existing knowledge to interventions that promote reconciliation in specific socio-political settings, such as Rwanda, where the government has implemented a series of programs and policies to achieve unity and reconciliation. The paper ends with a discussion of future directions to further increase social and political psychology's potential to inform effective social interventions in the aftermath of violence.

Keywords: social interventions, media, reconciliation, genocide, applied social psychology, Rwanda

Topics such as mass violence, genocide, and intergroup reconciliation have received increased attention in social psychological research in the past decade. Several edited volumes (e.g., Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013), books (e.g., Jonas & Morton, 2012; Nadler, Malloy, & Fisher, 2008; Tropp, 2012), and numerous articles feature relevant research from different parts of the world. These are encouraging developments in the psychological study of intergroup conflict and reconciliation. In addition to contributing to the advancement of theory and research, much of this work has also a practical orientation, as it aims to guide the development of strategies, programs, and policies to prevent cycles of violence and promote just and peaceful relations between groups. However, several barriers inhibit psychology's potential to influence policy and social change in this domain, including the lower status of applied than basic research in the field, inexperience in implementing programs, and lack of close links to policy-makers and practitioners (for a detailed discussion see Pettigrew, 2011).

The goal of producing research to guide practice and policy raises important ethical and theoretical questions (e.g., Yeager & Walton, 2011), thus it requires a different mindset from that of conducting purely basic research (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2008). For example, while external validity might not always be considered as essential in basic research in social psychology (Mook, 1983), establishing the boundary conditions of psychological principles, and identifying setting-level factors that either inhibit or facilitate a proposed mechanism are of paramount importance when considering practical implications. The socio-political reality informs the motivation and goals of the recipients of an intervention, thus influencing its impact on them. Therefore, a close consideration of the characteristics of the socio-political reality on the ground (e.g., the nature of existing intergroup relations, the nature of the conflict, other ongoing efforts) is imperative when designing or assessing an intervention.

In this article I reflect on the potential and challenges of implementing social psychological interventions in the aftermath of genocide, specifically focusing on an education-entertainment media campaign in Rwanda. I will highlight the role of context—here, the socio-political reality in Rwanda—on the development, implementation and effectiveness of psychology-driven interventions. I will outline some of the challenges of translating existing knowledge to interventions that promote reconciliation in specific socio-political contexts, such as Rwanda, where the government has implemented a series of programs and policies to achieve unity and reconciliation. The analysis draws on my experience overseeing the implementation of social psychological principles in *Musekeweya*, a very popular violence prevention and reconciliation radio serial drama in Rwanda (see Staub, Pearlman, & Bilali, 2008), and on lessons from a number of impact evaluation studies (e.g., Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009; Paluck & Green, 2009). Taking into consideration the current state of the research literature, the paper will discuss future directions to further increase social and political psychology's potential to inform effective social interventions in the aftermath of violence.

Using Education-Entertainment Media to Prevent Violence and Promote Reconciliation in Rwanda

Education-entertainment (edutainment) weaves educational messages in an entertaining format, typically a serial drama that can be delivered through various media channels including radio and TV (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Edutainment has been used increasingly, and with great success to induce social change in various domains, including empowerment of women, development, health issues, family planning, domestic violence, etc. (e.g., Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). Different theoretical frameworks grounded in various disciplines drive the design and explain the effects of education-entertainment media (for a review see Sood, Menard, & Witte, 2004). Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory is one of the main social psychological theories at the basis of education-entertainment: Certain behaviors are encouraged or discouraged by the use of negative, positive and transitional characters in a serial drama. Role modeling is expected to influence efficacy and outcome expectations for engaging in behaviors that drive social change (see Bandura, 2004), as well as shape social norms (Ball, Paluck, & Fletcher, 2013; Paluck, 2009). Other social psychological models often used in the design of education-entertainment programs include the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), belief system theory (Rokeach, 1968), etc.

With the goal of preventing violence and promoting reconciliation in Rwanda, Radio La Beneveloncija Humanitarian Tools Foundation has launched an initiative that incorporates edutainment techniques with psychological principles

to promote understanding of the roots of violence and its prevention (Staub, 1989, 2006), as well as healing from trauma and reconciliation (Pearlman, 2013; Staub, 2011). The educational content draws on Staub's (1989) work on genocide, and incorporates principles from a variety of theories and factors at different levels of analyses, including the individual (e.g., role-modeling, human needs), group (e.g., social identity, intergroup contact), and structural (e.g., destructive ideologies, societal transitions) levels. The educational content is embedded in a number of communication messages, which can be grouped into four themes: (1) the origins of mass violence (e.g., difficult life conditions such as economic deterioration or political instability), (2) factors at the individual, group and societal levels that increase the likelihood of violence (e.g., historical conflict and past victimization), (3) factors that prevent hostility and violence (e.g., dissent, inter-group contact), and (4) psychological recovery and reconciliation (Staub, 2011; Staub, Pearlman, Bilali, Haven, & Vollhardt, 2006).

Musekeweya (New Dawn)

The main tool for delivering the educational messages is a weekly serial drama—titled *Musekeweya* or *New Dawn*—about a fictional intergroup conflict, which has been broadcast since 2004 (see http://www.labenevolen-cija.org). The main plot portrays the evolution and cycle of conflict and violence between two fictional villages (Bumanzi and Muhumuro), and more recently, the difficult path of reconciliation. The two fictional villages are situated on two opposing hills with a valley in between. Early in the drama listeners learn that a long time ago the government representatives gave sole property ownership of the fertile valley falling within the boundaries of the two villages to Bumanzi. The two villages have lived through years of land dispute because the farming land is limited and its quality varies from place to place. The fictional drama demonstrates how resentment from these past events, coupled with scarcity of resources due to a drought that affected Muhumuro the most, contributed to rising tensions and escalation of conflict. The tensions are further heightened due to different, though unnamed, ethnic identities. First, Muhumuro groups attacked Bumanzi, followed by later revenge attacks by Bumanzi on Muhumuro. After few acts and cycles of violence, the groups working for peace in both villages managed to stop the conflict, and initiated a process of reconciliation, justice, and peacebuilding (for more details on the story see Staub, 2011, pp. 369-372).

Despite some similarities with the Rwandan reality, such as unequal distribution of resources and power by a third party, the fictional plot is, in other ways, different from this reality. For instance, the fictional drama does not address genocide, and it does not intend to provide a narrative of the history and politics of the conflict in the pre- and post-genocide Rwanda. Rather its aim is to more generally raise awareness about the factors that contribute to the escalation of conflicts into violence and of the consequence of violence for individuals and communities.

How Does Musekeweya Influence Social Change?

The fictional story and its characters are very accessible to Rwandans. This is probably why *Musekeweya* attracts large segments of population (about 80% of the population tunes in, Staub et al., 2008), including people from rural backgrounds, different ideological groups, etc. Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that the drama speaks to Rwandans' daily reality: Hundreds of listener letters sent to the producing organization show that Rwandans of different backgrounds personally relate to the story and identify with its characters. Because of its popularity, the serial drama has great potential to influence social and political norms related to conflict and reconciliation (see Paluck, 2009). For instance, in a year-long experimental field study to assess the impact of the *Musekeweya* in Rwanda at the end of the first year of its broadcast, Paluck (2009; Paluck & Green, 2009) found that listeners of *Musekeweya* exhibited social norms and behaviors in line with the goals of the program, including

higher trust, empathy, cooperation, open dissent, and less social distance than the control group (i.e., listeners of a serial drama on health).

Furthermore, fiction is an appropriate and effective tool to communicate messages about sensitive topics such as intergroup violence and reconciliation, and can serve as a safe public forum to tackle real-life concerns, without posing explicit views about the conflict on the ground (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009). Group members' beliefs about the conflict are informed by the ethos of conflict, which is resistant to transformation (Bar-Tal, 2007). Therefore, explicit perspectives and views that contradict people's preexisting beliefs and experiences, or tell them what to think (e.g., Paluck, 2012), might be encountered with resistance, or create backlash. In contrast, fiction raises relevant issues in subtle and non-threatening ways, and therefore might be especially useful in shaping attitudes and behaviors in conflict settings. For instance, Johnson, Jasper, Griffin, and Huffman (2013) found that narrative fiction reduced implicit and explicit prejudice of Americans toward Arab-Muslims, partly by inducing empathy and reducing intergroup anxiety. Fictional narratives also encourage perspective-taking with various characters from both sides of the fictional conflict (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013). Education-entertainment research suggests that the more listeners identify with the characters and immerse themselves in the narrative (i.e., psychological distancing from the reality), the more they will endorse beliefs and attitudes consistent with the subtle messages embedded in the narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). Listeners' absorption in the narrative and their identification with the positive characters reduce the generation of counterarguments, thus increasing message persuasion (e.g., Slater & Rouner, 2002).

An important aspect of the drama design has to do with the balance between similarities and differences between fictional story and the Rwandan reality. On the one hand, similarities might help increase listener's identification with the narrative and its characters. On the other hand, differences from the real conflict are important in order to reduce the likelihood that listeners identify themselves or their ethnic group with one of the fictional villages. That is, the intervention might not be successful if listeners take sides and use pre-existing schemas and beliefs about their conflict to understand the fictional story.

Every intervention operates within a socio-political system and a unique context of inter-group relations. Features of the context might either facilitate or inhibit an intervention's effectiveness. For instance, there are at least two aspects of the Rwandan context that are important to consider when discussing an intervention to promote intergroup reconciliation: (1) the characteristics of intergroup relations in the post-genocide era, and (2) Rwanda's approach to overcoming the genocide and reconciling the country. In the following, I will provide a quick summary of the main characteristics of post-genocide justice and reconciliation in Rwanda. Then, I will discuss how *Musekeweya* addresses some of the challenges of the current context of intergroup relations in Rwanda.

Rwanda in the Aftermath of Genocide: Justice, Unity, and Reconciliation

The government of Rwanda has undertaken a series of initiatives to reconstruct the country in the aftermath of the genocide that killed about 800,000 Tutsi. Since 1994, Rwanda has made great strides toward reconstruction and economic recovery becoming an exemplar in Africa. At the same time, many criticize Rwanda for lack of freedom of speech, human rights abuses, an increase of the government's authoritarian rule, as well as for certain aspects of its national unity and reconciliation campaign (e.g., Clark, 2010; Hodgkin, 2006; Reyntjens, 2011, see below).

In contrast to the approach taken in South Africa through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda emphasized the need for justice to achieve accountability for the genocide. Probably the most well-known aspect of the Rwandan post-genocide justice system is the Gacaca initiative. Gacaca courts were set up in every community, and attendance was compulsory (Ingelaere, 2009). The hope was that the courts would contribute to reconciliation by involving victims in the process, encouraging people to testify, and uncovering the truth (Mukherjee, 2011; Rimé, Kanyangara, Yzerbyt, & Paez, 2011). However, there was some indication of false testimonies in Gacaca to settle private matters, as well as threats, intimidation, and even attacks on survivors meant to deter them from testifying in the court (Longman, 2009; Mukherjee, 2011; Rettig, 2008). Some scholars (e.g., Ingelaere, 2009; Hilker, 2009; Rettig, 2008) argue that this has contributed to further reduction of intergroup trust and unity. Furthermore, Gacaca courts only handled genocide crimes, defined as killings of Tutsi by Hutu, whereas the killings of moderate Hutu during the genocide, or the killings of Hutu by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) were not addressed (Clark, 2010; Longman, 2009). This in turn, might have led to resentment by Hutus, increasing ethnic division and animosity (Longman, 2009).

The Rwandan government also undertook a national unity and reconciliation campaign (see Melvin, 2010). Two aspects of this campaign are most relevant to theory and research in the psychology of intergroup reconciliation: the policy of de-ethnicization (in other words, creating a common Rwandan identity by suppressing ethnic identities) and civic re-education through Ingando camps. Ingando are training camps set up by the government to re-educate the population about the official history of Rwanda and about the government's reconciliation ideology. A large segment of the population is required to go through these camps, including ex-combatants and released prisoners, but also pre-university students (i.e., the future leaders), and others who express views that are incompatible with the official narrative (Melvin, 2010).

In order to establish unity and a common identity among Rwandans, the government has outlawed any references to ethnicity (except in commemorations of the genocide and prosecution of offences during the genocide). In the public sphere it is possible to talk only of Rwandans, but not of Hutu or Tutsi. Instead of creating national unity, the policy has the potential for backlash, by increasing further ethnic divides and entrenching ethnic stereotypes (Hilker, 2009; Mgbako, 2005). Ingando re-education camps also propagate a specific narrative of the history of Rwanda and of genocide. The government's version of the history of Rwanda emphasizes historical harmony between Hutus and Tutsis in pre-colonial times, and asserts that ethnic distinctions were a production of colonialism which aimed to divide the country (Mgbako, 2005). All in all, there are very limited spaces in Rwanda for open and honest discussions about the past history, the genocide, or about ethnicity (Hilker, 2009; Zorbas, 2009).

Reconciliation in Rwanda vis-a-vis Reconciliation in Musekeweya

I will focus on three dimensions of Rwanda's unity and reconciliation policies that are most relevant to psychological theory and research—creating a common identity, encouraging positive intergroup interactions, and confronting the past by creating a shared memory—and will discuss how the intervention (i.e., *Musekeweya*) addresses these same issues.

"We Are All Rwandans." Creating a Common Identity by Suppressing Ethnic Identities

Research in social psychology has revealed the benefits of establishing an inclusive common identity: re-categorization of distinct subgroups into an inclusive superordinate category should produce positive intergroup attitudes as former out-groups are considered in-group members at the superordinate level (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). For instance, superordinate national identification has been shown to relate to positive intergroup outcomes in post-conflict settings in Bosnia (Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008), Chile (Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), and Lebanon (Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi, & Branscombe, 2012). However, re-categorization to a superordinate category might also backlash and be resisted by group members, as it arouses distinctiveness threats (for a review see Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007), especially in contexts of asymmetric power relations, where the inclusive category reflects the norms and characteristics of the dominant group (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). Recent evidence supports a dual identity model, which suggests that re-categorization to a common identity should produce more positive outcomes when subgroup identities are also recognized (Dovidio et al., 2007).

This reveals the problematic nature of the Rwandan government's efforts to create national unity by suppressing ethnic identities. Rather than creating unity, the policy seems to have pushed discussions about ethnicity from the public to the private sphere. Ethnographic research in Rwanda demonstrates that ordinary Rwandans resist this policy (Thomson, 2011), and ethnic categorization is still persistent in the lives of Rwandans (Zorbas, 2009). Moreover, there is a high level of mistrust across ethnic lines (Longman, 2009), and a strong need to determine the ethnicity of the other, while at the same time concealing one's ethnicity (Hilker, 2009). Such suppression might make ethnicity more salient and increase reliance on ethnic stereotypes to determine the other's ethnicity (Hilker, 2009). Because there is no public space to challenge pre-existing stereotypes, people can only rely on them (e.g., physical stereotypes and political orientation) to draw conclusions about out-group members.

How does *Musekeweya* address group differences? At least two educational messages are relevant. One message emphasizes establishing commonality between groups through recognition of a shared humanity and construction of an inclusive vision for the future. Another message emphasizes the importance of recognizing group differences, and creating an open dialogue to address them. Prior antagonistic fictional villages create a shared vision for the society through discussions of their commonalities and differences. They form a common identity by breaking down and challenging group stereotypes, thus transforming rather than suppressing their group identities. For instance, the radio series portrays numerous discussions among its characters regarding the future of the two villages, and how they can work together to create a peaceful future despite their violent past. These discussions vary a lot, providing a variety of perspectives of how such collaborations might be set up. But they also include the voices of those who are skeptical or distrustful about the prospects of working together due to intergroup mistrust. Considering that discussions of ethnicity are outlawed in Rwanda, fiction provides a safe space to bring up issues related to group membership and negotiation of identities in the aftermath of violence.

While in principle discussions across group lines seem appropriate, the implementation of educational messages in such discussions is not straightforward, even in fiction. Open discussions and expressions of diverse perspectives with regard to sensitive and highly divisive issues might escalate conflict and reduce social cohesion, especially when the wounds of violence are still fresh (e.g., Paluck, 2010). Therefore, in the absence of models or guidelines for setting up intergroup discussions that take into account the history of the conflict and the ongoing political context, the implementation of the message might be superficial, and might even have unintended consequences. For instance, Rwanda has a complex history of conflict and power dynamics between its ethnic groups. The radio

program does not address how such dynamics might impact intergroup discussions and the negotiation of a common identity.

Encouraging Positive Intergroup Contact and Cross-Group Friendships

One message of the serial drama focuses on encouraging meaningful and high-quality contact among group members. In line with this, the serial drama models and encourages positive intergroup contact. Therefore, imagined intergroup contact might be one mechanism through which the serial drama exerts its impact on listeners. Specifically, *Musekeweya* evokes imagery of a variety of interactions with individuals and group members associated with diverse views and perspectives. It provides models of intergroup contact by portraying members of the two villages as spouses, friends, neighbors or co-workers. They share food, help each other in times of distress, work together in community projects, and of course work to establish peaceful relations between villages. In this manner, the drama might influence listeners' attitudes by evoking images of such inter-group interactions (Crisp & Turner, 2009). Recent research suggests that mental imagery of intergroup interactions has effects similar to real contact experiences by influencing emotional and motivational processes related to positive intergroup outcomes (Crisp & Turner, 2009; Turner & Crisp, 2010).

Importantly, the story walks listeners through a trust-building process. The characters are initially mistrustful and cautious about developing cross-group friendships, but trust is built over time as they start to know each other better. In doing this, *Musekeweya* gives voice to Rwandans' fears and anxieties with regard to cross-group inter-actions, acknowledging the difficulties of building trust after a genocide in which a large number of killings involved neighbors and acquaintances. For instance, in the serial drama, group members who have undergone traumatic experiences are particularly distrustful of the other group; they are however encouraged to discuss their fears and anxieties with trusted friends and family, who support them in overcoming these fears. The characters also discuss the value of these interactions for transforming their opinions (i.e., stereotypes) and feelings about the outgroup.

Musekeweya portrays a realistic, though still optimistic, picture of the difficult road to reconciliation, by also high-lighting potential breaches of trust. Sometimes negative characters intimidate or make plans to harm members of the community who might testify to their crimes. Such stories speak to some Rwandans' real-life experiences in the aftermath of genocide and during the Gacaca process. In these cases, the focus of the drama is on the community's actions in preventing and coping with these acts, and inhibiting their potential to perpetuate further conflict and violence. Nevertheless, there is a risk that such portrayals might also serve as negative reinforcement, and have an undesirable impact by making listeners more cynical about the prospects of establishing positive relations with outgroup members. Furthermore, if listeners identify with the negative role models—a phenomenon known as *Archie Bunker effect*—then the show might reinforce rather than reduce negative intergroup outcomes (Singhal & Rogers, 2002).

Confronting the Past and Creating a Shared Collective Memory

Confronting the past is an important element in *Musekeweya*. This topic is the focus of one communication message that emphasizes the role of "establishing the complex truth about past group relations, and developing a shared view of history" to achieve intergroup reconciliation. This message is often implemented in conjunction with another message on "varied perspectives, open communication, and moderate respect for authority…" Instead of imposing a specific version of history, in the serial drama the conflictual past is addressed through a dialogic process that encourages expressions of diverse perspectives coming from different fictional characters, including victims,

bystanders, and perpetrators. It is through this process that a common narrative is created about the roots of conflict and its consequences on intergroup animosity. Although the show gives voice to perspectives on both sides of the conflict, it does so within a common normative framework that condemns violence, hostility, and discrimination (e.g., Gibson, 2004).

In a recent study, Bilali and Vollhardt (2013) assessed whether *Musekeweya* influenced people's willingness to engage with different versions of history. After a six month period during which the 'confronting the past' message was embedded in the drama, researchers used priming as a method to assess the radio drama's impact. Participants completed an audio-delivered questionnaire in which the items were recorded either in the voice of one of the positive characters of the radio drama or in the voice of an unknown actor. To avoid demand characteristics, participants were kept blind to the study's goals and its connection to *Musekeweya* until after they completed the questionnaire. Listeners who were primed with *Musekeweya* through the voice of one of the characters were less likely to agree that their story of the conflict in Rwanda is the only true history, they were more likely to favor open expressions of different conflict narratives, and reported higher engagement with the other group's history of the conflict (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013). In addition, priming of the serial drama was also related to less competitive and more inclusive victimhood, both of which are linked to more positive intergroup outcomes (e.g. Noor et al., 2008; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014).

These findings are promising considering that other societal factors, including the Rwandan government's efforts to impose a single narrative, might push in the opposite direction. However, it is also possible that this message might be especially appealing to those Rwandans who feel silenced due to the government's efforts to disseminate a single narrative. *Musekeweya* might give voice to silenced narratives through the characters' stories, increasing the impact of the serial drama. Because information about participants' ethnicity and political orientation is not available, it is not possible to determine whether these factors moderate the effects of the radio drama.

How the Socio-Political Context Affects the Design and Reception of the Intervention?

Operating Within an Overarching Policy of Reconciliation

An intervention's success is not only dependent on the validity of the theory of change it endorses, but also on the characteristics of the context, including other ongoing or previous interventions and policies. For instance, the education-entertainment campaign, despite its different approach, has goals consistent with Rwandan government's stated policy (i.e., to promote reconciliation in Rwanda) as well as with other interventions focusing on intergroup reconciliation. Therefore, it is important to consider how such an overarching governmental reconciliation agenda might impact the reception and effectiveness of the intervention. In the third year of the program's broadcast, Paluck (2007) asked listeners what they thought the messages and goals of *Musekeweya* are, and who produces it. The most popular answer pertaining to the goal of the program was "unity and reconciliation," the umbrella term that the government uses to implement its reconciliation campaign and policies in Rwanda. At the same time, the vast majority of participants correctly identified Radio LaBenevolencija as the producer of the show. Thus, listeners do not identify the program with the government, but they view it as consistent with its reconciliation policy. It is unclear however, whether this enhances or reduces the effectiveness of the intervention. On the one hand, it is possible that such interventions might be particularly effective when operating under an overarching reconciliation

policy. On the other hand, listeners who resent government's policies might resist the program's messages, thus reducing the overall effectiveness of the program. Answers to such questions have important practical implications as they inform the conditions and settings under which social-psychological interventions are most effective, or where they might create backlash.

Can Reality Constrain Fiction? Socio-Political Influences on the Development of the Intervention

Every year the local scriptwriters and staff, representatives of various civil society organizations and the Rwandan government, and a psychologist, come together to design the storyline of the following year of *Musekeweya*. Considering the diversity of stakeholders and opinions represented in these workshops, the storyline developed is often a negotiated product. Difficult discussions that I have witnessed during these workshops include questions such as: Should the fictive conflict be a victim-perpetrator story, or should it involve cycles of violence in which both groups were victims and perpetrators? What forms of justice are appropriate for perpetrators of violence? Should perpetrators be excluded from leadership positions after they serve their sentence? Because of the sensitivity of these topics, the fiction becomes a platform where contested perspectives are discussed and negotiated. Participants' opinions are informed by their own backgrounds, experiences, and political orientations, but because these are not openly discussed, they can inadvertently influence the story and the communication of the messages. In this manner, the socio-political context shapes the boundaries of possible conflict and post-conflict representations in the fictive story.

Lost in Translation? Bridging the Gap Between Research, Theory and Practice

Moving research ideas and theories to social intervention and policy involves a multi-step translational process. The first step involves the identification of psychological principles that will serve as communication messages. In the edutainment approach, the messages are supposed to be accurate, concise, and considered agreed-upon facts (de Fossard, 2005). The second step constitutes the implementation of the psychological principle, for example by embedding it in a serial drama. Take for instance, an edutainment program promoting safe-sex practices: The message should raise awareness about the benefits of safe sex, provide specific instructions about its practice, and reveal the negative consequences of unprotected sex. Thus, a communication message identifies a cause-effect link (see de Fossard, 2005). Within the domain of intergroup conflict and reconciliation, it is harder to identify simple principles that we know for a fact to be universally accurate, and through which behaviors can be identified that have specific positive consequences for the individuals involved. For example, research suggests that intergroup mistrust has a negative impact on intergroup relations, whereas intergroup trust contributes to positive group relations (for a review see Tropp, 2008). Yet, under certain conditions, high trust might also make people more vulnerable to harm. For instance, Bhavnani and Backer (2000), in a study of localized violence in Rwanda and Burundi found that high levels of trust in community predicted intense episodes of violence, whereas low levels of trust predicted moderate though persistent violence. They reasoned that higher levels of trust made group members more vulnerable to attacks by misjudging out-groups' trustworthiness, thus failing to take measures to defend themselves such as fleeing the area.

Furthermore, listeners are not passive recipients of the messages, thus we often can not predict how a message will be interpreted, or whether it will be misunderstood. As argued above, the conditions in the ground—the socio-political atmosphere and people's relevant experiences—inform the goals and motivation of listeners, which in turn influence message reception.

Several steps can be taken to reduce potential errors at different stages of the translational process from theory and research to intervention. For instance, the following steps were taken in the production of *Musekeweya*: First, the psychological principles are discussed with local experts and representatives of different groups to assess their relevance and adapt them to the Rwandan context. A baseline research assesses the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the target population, which in turn feeds into the design and scope of the intervention. Then, pilot programs are developed and tested. In ongoing formative research, listener groups are created and meet regularly to offer feedback on different aspects of the program (e.g., whether the messages are understood, whether the show is interesting, etc.). Lastly, periodic evaluation studies assess the impact of the intervention. Yearly design workshops re-evaluate the scope and focus of the intervention for the following year taking into consideration the changes in the socio-political context, the research findings, and feedback from the listeners.

Conclusion

The goal of the present article was to trigger a discussion about the potential and challenges of using psychological principles to design and implement interventions in the aftermath of violence. The positive findings of impact evaluation studies of *Musekeweya* (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009; Paluck & Green, 2009) reveal the potential of social psychological interventions to have a positive influence in difficult settings, such as in the aftermath of violence. Yet, the article also draws attention to the difficulties and challenges of applying existing knowledge to specific settings. In doing so, my goal was to identify potential avenues for future research that would increase social psychology's potential to influence positive change in the aftermath of mass violence. For instance, *Musekeweya* includes an amalgam of psychological principles and potential mechanisms of change (e.g., perspective taking, role modeling, social norms, etc.). However, we do not know which specific messages or mechanisms have the most impact, and whether some other mechanisms might actually inhibit its full potential. Originally, the producers of *Musekeweya* hypothesized that raising awareness about the factors that influence the evolution of violence would be the key to transforming intergroup attitudes and behavior. That is, if people understood the factors that lead them to support or engage in violence, they would use this knowledge to resist such influences. Yet, despite the overall positive impact of the intervention, we do not have evidence that supports this specific mechanism of change (e.g., Paluck, 2009).

Another important goal of this article was to highlight the role of socio-political settings in the design, implementation and effectiveness of social-psychological interventions related to intergroup conflict and reconciliation. I argued that the design and meaning of an intervention, and hence its effectiveness, might change depending on the context and settings in which it is implemented (see also Yeager & Walton, 2011). Therefore, implementing successful and sustainable social-psychological interventions for peace requires theories and research that systematically assess the link between macro-, meso- and micro-level processes (Pettigrew, 2011). For instance, the literature on intergroup conflict should systematically take into account the role of macro-level factors, such as the nature, stage, and history of an intergroup conflict, or the type of political regime and other societal conditions, on psychological processes and outcomes (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2008). These factors have important consequences on individual and group psychology (e.g., motives, goals, perceived threats), thus they should moderate social psychological processes.

Collaborations between scholars and practitioners might prove very fruitful both for the advancement of theory and for practice. Scholars can assist practitioners to identify the state of the art of knowledge in the specific area

that would guide interventions. They can work with practitioners to isolate and study the specific mechanisms of change involved in an intervention program, either by isolating these processes in a field study or by bringing questions rising from the field to study in the lab. They can test and refine their theories by translating psychological principles to social interventions, and rigorously assessing their impact. Research programs in the social psychology of peace and violence can be carefully planned in a way that basic research, field research, and practice mutually inform each other.

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