

Waradas, Thiyagaraja,  
International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

*Paper: Equity*

## **Rwandan conflict: The role of agency and structure**

This paper examines why and how the structural violence of pre- independent Rwanda, turned in to direct violence after its independence. There were various levels of structural violence which existed throughout Rwandan history. But it was only the post-colonial Rwanda that experienced unprecedented level of direct violence. It is important to study why is it the case that only in post- colonial Rwanda that structural violence transformed into direct violence? Scholarly debates surrounding this issue are divided over the difference between the significance of structural factors and agential role. Both of these approaches do not fairly pay attention to the interrelationship between structure and agency in a historical process. The outcome of a historical process cannot be solely determined either by the structure or agency; rather, it is a product of dialectical relationship between structure and agency. Therefore, this paper explores how structural violence turned into direct violence, through a critical analysis of structure-agency relationship.

This paper argues that, despite the existence of structural violence in pre-colonial Rwanda, there were some flexible mechanisms which prevented structural violence turning into direct violence. For instance, there was no binary identification of individuals in the pre-colonial era. But, the intrusive colonial rule changed the pre-colonial political-economic setting into a rigid and centralized structure. It was extremely exclusive in terms of ethnic identification and racial superiority policies. This structure has been maintained and strengthened, in a more rigid and exclusive manner, by post-colonial regimes.

Transformation of structural violence into direct violence in postcolonial Rwanda is a product failure and ruptures the relationship between structure and agency. Ideology had also played a major role in leading Rwanda into direct violence such as genocide. This paper leads us to think about transformative peace building, which encapsulates the progressive change in relations between Structure, Agency and Ideology.

**Keywords: Structural Violence, Direct violence, Colonialism, Agency, Ideology**