What are the merits and limitations of using a structural violence lens for understanding contemporary global crises? Illustrate your answer using contemporary example(s).

This essay will examine the merits and limitations of using a structural violence lens, rooted in the case study of the Rwandan genocide. The term 'structural violence' was coined by Johan Galtung and refers to *avoidable* violence or harm that is embedded in and perpetuated by societal structures which create the "difference between the potential and the actual" (Galtung, 1969, 168). Galtung challenges traditional definitions of violence by stating that violence is violence, regardless of if it can be attributed to an actor or not (Galtung, 1969, 170). Medical anthropologist Paul Farmer used the example of how structures fatally discriminate against the poorest members of society, such as by depriving them of healthcare (Farmer, 2003). While this essay focuses on the Rwandan genocide, structural violence is a global phenomenon. For example, life expectancy for men living in the most deprived areas of Scotland was 13.5 years lower than those living in the least deprived (NRS, 2021, 2). The Rwandan genocide was one of the bloodiest chapters in recent history, with over six people murdered every minute over a span of three months (SURF). This essay will show how structural violence contributed to the creation of the genocide and is a useful analytical lens to view it through. However many scholars argue that its breadth risks devaluing physical violence and thus allowing institutions and individuals to shirk responsibility, if they are even able to be identified at all (Biebricher and Johnson, Bourgois and Scheper-Hughes). Despite this, a structural violence lens can still provide a rich, nuanced view of global crises due to its ability to take into account a range of actors, historical contexts, and socio-economic issues.

Moral exclusion is an aspect of structural violence that helps to explain the conditions that lead to acute physical violence. Understanding the structural violence that Rwandans had been enduring contextualises and helps partially explain the genocide. Susan Opotow argued that direct *and* structural violence originate from moral exclusion in which groups of people are viewed as 'others', without which extreme violence would be less likely to occur. The exclusion of individuals leads to the normalisation and then acceptance of structural violence (Opotow, 2001, 103). The deadliness of moral exclusion can clearly be seen during the genocide, with William Donohue referring to the dehumanising language used by the Hutus against the Tutsis as the 'Identity Trap'. Enemies were pulled closer together by discussing potential confrontations, while simultaneously being pushed away through moral exclusion and dehumanising language, as seen through the example of Tutsis being referred to as 'cockroaches' in need of 'extermination' (Donohue, 2012, 16). Peter Urvin argues that a structural violence lens "allows us to focus on the 'little people' who perpetrate the violence"

(Urvin, 1998, 110), whose lives are characterised by a lack of social mobility, chances, and respect. Moreover, Urvin argues widespread structural violence erodes the barriers against using physical violence (Urvin, 1998, 110), showing the clear path from structural violence to other forms of violence. Moral exclusion was built into the structures and administration processes of Rwanda, originating from Belgian colonial rule. This can be seen in the introduction of identity cards in the 1930s which were used by the state to limit an individual's opportunities and freedoms (Newbury, 1998, 11). Moral exclusion creates an environment in which physical violence against a group is seen as morally justifiable and even acceptable. This illustrates how structural violence can create the conditions for physical violence, and thus by using this lens we can better understand how to avoid these manifestations and prevent future atrocities.

A structural violence lens can also reveal the underlying context and cause of a crisis. It may illustrate how the genocide was not a random occurrence or anomaly, but rather the result of decades of colonialism, human rights abuses, and structural inequality. Urvin argued that life in the 1990s for the majority of Rwandans was characterised by a lack of access to resources, healthcare, and land (Urvin, 1998. 105). Poverty, which Farmer argued is one of the clearest examples of structural violence since it is avoidable (Farmer, 2004), was endemic in Rwanda with 53% of the population in 1993 having income per capita below the poverty line (IPRSP, 2000, 3). An unequal distribution of wealth, resources and power directly impacts an individual's choices and life chances. Urvin further argues the lack of social mobility led to hatred against the state and groups that were 'othered' to reach breaking point (Urvin, 1998, 127), showing the link between structural and physical violence.

Structural violence may not adequately account for economics. Isaac Kamola argues that more attention must be given to the role of the international coffee economy in the genocide, and how the social issues created and worsened by the collapse helped to fuel pre-existing ethnic and class tensions (Kamola, 2008, 69). However arguably, this is just another strand of structural violence. At its root, it seeks to control individuals, be it at a local level and their ability to participate in civic life, or at an international level and the desire for states to control other states. This can clearly be seen in the case of coffee prices, which Kamola argued the US wanted to regulate for geopolitical purposes through agreements like the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) (Kamola, 2008, 59). While it was agreed through the United Nations, a body often hailed as being a champion of peace and equality, it is clear that the negotiations were far from equal. Rwanda relied heavily on coffee exports, and yet only received 6 votes when discussing the ICA, whereas the US and Germany received 400 and 101 votes respectively (Kamola, 2008, 60). When the ICA was abandoned in 1972 due to

importer countries not wanting the price of coffee to rise, the price collapsed and had a detrimental impact on Rwanda, with Rwanda's coffee export receipts dropping from $144 million in 1985 to $30 million by 1993 (Urvin, 1998, 54). The resulting economic hardship and unemployment in Rwanda made many disillusioned with the state, with some even joining paramilitary wings, such as the Interahamwe. This exhibits how structural violence at a global level and the power imbalance that exists within international bodies, with the wealthy, importer countries lording the economic power over often formerly colonised countries, has an impact at a local level. This inequality is further highlighted by foreign debt that Rwanda amassed during this period (Urvin, 1998, 56). While examining the impact of the world economy does partially explain how the conditions of the genocide were created, analysis ought to include social and historical factors. Urvin argues to fully understand how genocidal conditions were created, we must look into the structural violence that is often associated with foreign aid, intervention, and dependency (Urvin, 1998, 49). Moreover, a structural violence lens can reframe the economic situation of a country not as something that is 'natural' or their own fault, but rather the product of years of direct and structural violence and thus challenges traditional victim-blaming answers to global inequality and encourages solutions to be found (Farmer, 2004, 309).

A structural violence lens can be less useful in the context of post-conflict justice and reconciliation. Scott Straus argued that using a genocide focused lens ignores other acts of violence that were simultaneously taking place, including those committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) (Straus, 2019, 508). The use of a narrower lens of analysis runs the risk of missing trends that a macro scale analysis can reveal, such as the patterns of violence in neighbouring states like the Democratic Republic of Congo that Straus observed. This highlights the advantage of the broad, nuanced perspective that a structural violence lens provides. This is of particular importance in the aftermath of a crisis when seeking justice, which the *Gacaca* justice courts showcase. Initially they had jurisdiction over genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, however in 2004 war crimes were removed from their remit, meaning that crimes committed by the RPF were no longer covered. The president at the time, Kagame argued that RPF crimes were unrelated acts of revenge (Human Rights Watch, 2011, 5) . This led Straus to call the courts "distinctly one-sided" (Straus, 2019, 517). This shortfall highlights how viewing violence as a broad and complex phenomenon, with a range of actors, can help deliver post-conflict justice and reconciliation in a more holistic manner. However, as Galtung noted, often there is no one actor or institution responsible for structural violence (Galtung, 1969, 171). This raises questions about the validity of using a structural violence lens when considering how to deliver justice, due to the lack of clear accountability. While understanding the root causes of an issue is imperative, if there are no

solutions to be offered, actors to be punished or institutions to be reformed, then the practicality of this lens as a method for reconciliation must be called into question. Therefore while this lens may offer a more nuanced view of a crisis, it may not be the best lens to shape practical judicial proceedings through.

A key limitation of structural violence is its potential broadness, which arguably devalues physical violence. Biebricher and Johnson argued that the "radically expansive" usage of the term violence had made the concept of violence weaker, since "if everything is bound up with violence, the very claim that there is violence becomes trivialized" (Biebricher and Johnson, 2012, 209). In line with Galtung's concept of normalisation, structural violence is accepted as part of life. Using a structural violence lens treats this violence seriously and accurately, instead of sensationally focusing on physical violence (Galtung, 1990, 295). Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues that while sometimes structural violence has been viewed as 'hidden' violence, it is not 'hidden' in the sense of being kept a secret, but rather we are unable to see it due to its constant presence (Scheper-Hughes, 1996, 889). Moreover, it is clear that structural violence is still causing the same, if not worse, harm than physical violence, and thus deserves to be labelled as such. Furthermore, this argument can be seen to be weak by virtue of the fact that violence by any other name, structural or not, would have the same outcome and results. Thus categorising what is systematic oppression and discrimination, and ultimately causing harm, as 'violence', can be viewed as apt. There must be a process of 'desantizing' and acknowledging structural violence as the avoidable evil that it is (Galtung, 1971, 83), for if it is allowed to be accepted and ignored by those wielding power then nothing will change . Structural violence's broadness was further challenged by Philippe Bourgois and Nancy Scheper-Hughes who argued that Farmer's application of structural violence was too much of a "black box" (Bourgois, Scheper-Hughes, 2004, 318) which lacked clarity and conciseness. Because structural violence does not offer priorities, there is no clear place to start when addressing it. However, the same could be argued of solutions to physical violence, showing how this issue is not unique to structural violence. Moreover, from an analytical perspective, a lens loses its value if it is all encompassing to the point that it no longer *explains* the world, but just reflects it (De Maio, 2015, 686).

To conclude, the merits of using a structural violence lens outweigh its limitations. It allows us to better understand the daily violence that people face. By highlighting the avoidable nature of violence it challenges dominant rhetoric about inequality and poverty that victim-blames or accepts it as inevitable. Through the case study of the Rwandan genocide, it is clear that structural violence can lead to acute acts of physical violence, in the form of economic hardship and moral exclusion. This aids in our understanding of atrocities and

hopefully, by extension, our ability to prevent future occurrences. However one lens cannot cover all aspects of violence. Undoubtedly due to its endemic nature and lack of clear perpetrators, structural violence has been ignored by those in positions of power. However this does not change the fact that violence has occurred, and thus it ought to be labelled as such. Hopefully with more time and research practical solutions to issues uncovered by this lens can be found.

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