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# Transforming the moral landscape: the diffusion of a genocidal norm in Rwanda

LEE ANN FUJII

The Rwandan genocide presents a surfeit of troubling questions, not the least of which concerns the participatory nature of the crime. What do we know about this aspect of the genocide? First, we know that motives for participation varied (Des Forges, 1999; Lemarchand, 2002; Prunier, 1995). Although greed, coercion and obedience were in abundant supply, they cannot account fully for either the magnitude or style of participation (i.e. why some participated and others did not and why some inflicted atrocities during the course of killing).

Second, we know that the genocide, like all mass undertakings with clear goals, depended on discipline and organization for its successful implementation. When either element was missing, the violence usually strayed from its original purpose, thereby undermining the very ends to which it had been put. As Des Forges (1999, p 425) chronicles, for example, despite his commitment to the genocidal project, the burgomaster of Nyakizу, Ladislas Ntaganzwa, was not above murdering three *Interahamwe* for their Suzuki jeep.

Third, it is known that contrary to popular accounts at the time, Rwandans were neither culturally nor historically programmed to committing genocide (which is not to say that history, or rather myths of history, were unimportant in the implementation of the genocidal project—to the contrary). As many scholars have established, the labels Hutu, Tutsi and Twa did not start out as ethnic categories and certainly not as polarized ethnic identities that were conducive for genocide, but at one time constituted fluid and context-dependent labels that variously denoted a person's status, wealth, or place of origin (Gravel, 1968; C. Newbury, 1988; D. Newbury, 1997; Rennie, 1972). In other words, the logic of genocide—the need to exterminate an entire group of people because of some innate and immediate threat the group poses—had to be taught; it could not be assumed. But in proselytizing the genocidal message, the *génocidaires* also had to teach people that genocidal killing was “normal” in the sense of being an acceptable and legitimate course of action to take in certain contexts. Put simply, genocidal leaders had to transform the normative environment such

that actions that were once considered verboten (such as killing thy neighbor) could be viewed as not only legitimate but imperative.

The process of “normalization” is neither simple nor straightforward, however. It takes skill and ingenuity on the part of the norm entrepreneur to establish a new norm, particularly one that conflicts with a longstanding proscription against killing others. What accelerates the process of diffusion are environmental conditions. Norms become *more* important when reality is confusing, contradictory, or changing. The more ambiguous the situation, the more likely people are to rely on norms as guides for behavior; and the clearer the prescription of a given norm, the more likely people will follow that norm and not others. Indeed, people may follow one norm and not others precisely because doing so lessens the present ambiguity, confusion or insecurity (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Swidler, 1986). In the Rwanda case, a genocidal norm provided a clear guideline for what to do in the face of a monolithic Tutsi threat that threatened the very survival of all Hutu.

To say that genocidal leaders succeeded at establishing a genocidal norm is not to claim that everyone who participated in the killings was simply following a norm. Norms are not absolute determinants of behavior. They exist in contested environments, where they must compete with conflicting norms. Neither is it to say that other motivations, such as fear, were not also present. Because fear can prompt many different types of responses (from flight to fight), it was important for genocidal leaders to establish killing as a dominant strategy (so that the majority of people would not flee in the face of the Tutsi threat). In this sense, fear and a norm of genocide easily go hand in hand. As Thompson and Quets (1990, p 254) point out in regards to Germans’ response to the Nazi’s extermination campaign against the Jews:

It can be argued that much of the conforming impulse reflected not so much moral reconstruction as a realistic fear or retribution. But the two elements are not exclusive. A normative order is typically underpinned by concrete sanctions against nonconformity, but these do not nullify its existence or invalidate its character as a normative order.

Indeed, a normative order in which genocide constitutes “normal,” not aberrant, behavior depends directly on the inculcation of fear—of the threat posed by the targeted group as well as the threat of punishment for non-compliance.

Transforming the normative environment was a multi-step process that resulted in the exclusion of Tutsi from “the universe of obligation” (Fein, 1993) and in motivating people to join in who may have otherwise looked for a way to opt out. The first step in the process was to spread the genocidal message far and wide. This required not only penetrating all reaches of society (from elites to non-elites and from urban to rural populations), but also monopolizing the discursive space such that no contradictory messages came through that could challenge the inherent logic of the norm. The second step was to give substance to the message. This involved staged events (e.g. the so-called “attack” of October 4, 1990 in Kigali) and rehearsals (e.g. the practice massacres of

1990–1993). The final step was to amplify the immediacy of the genocidal message to such a level that former doubters would become true believers.

### **Background to genocide**

The establishment of a genocidal norm did not occur in a vacuum but at a particularly propitious time of crisis. A quick glance into Rwanda's history, however, reminds us that the outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion. As Lemarchand points out, for example, in the early years of his regime, Habyarimana "went to great lengths to integrate Tutsi elements into society, and publicly stress the need for national reconciliation" (Lemarchand, 2002, p 6). What changed, of course, was the political and economic climate. By the late 1980s, the relative calm and prosperity that many Rwandans had experienced since the coup of 1973 was fast coming to an end. The country was reeling from multiple pressures: world prices for coffee and tea (the country's main exports) had fallen precipitously, resulting in famine, widespread unemployment, a severe drop in government revenues, and the bitter medicine of structural adjustment. Worse, democracy had become the new *cause célèbre* for Western states who now attached strings to their aid packages. Where before, money and arms flowed freely to the Rwandan government, a one-party state since its inception, donor nations suddenly began making demands for political reform—this at a time when the government was already beset with growing internal unrest.

The question was whether Habyarimana could withstand the bevy of political pressures amidst a state of economic crisis. This question was placed in even starker relief on October 1, 1990, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army comprised of Rwandan exiles who had helped bring Yoweri Museveni to power, invaded from neighboring Uganda. Suddenly, Habyarimana found himself fighting a war on four fronts: a military war against the RPF, a political war against Hutu opponents, a public relations war against the West, and a social war against his own people, who, not surprisingly, bore the worst effects of all four.

Amidst the growing crisis, regional rivalries again began threatening the security of the current regime. Habyarimana responded to these threats as his predecessors had done: by exploiting Hutu–Tutsi relations. But this time, any effort to exploit an *ethnic* division had to be powerful enough to overcome the *political* divisions that constituted the real threat to Habyarimana's circle. To control the contest, one has to set the rules. Setting the rules meant controlling how people saw and understood the world; by controlling how people saw the world, one could control how people responded to it. What was needed was a vision of the world that would drown out all others, a hegemonic tale that would reign supreme. This story needed to be self-contained and all-consuming—powerful enough to withstand the distraction of peace talks and the noise of opposition—powerful enough to make the very idea of what it meant to be Hutu and what it meant to be Tutsi an effective weapon for mass mobilization and elite consolidation. The tale, in short, would have to evoke an image so

compelling and so immediate that no one could escape its consequences. This tale was a story of genocide.

### **The diffusion process**

Four factors were critical in making the genocidal story resonate with its intended audience: repetition, reach, monopoly of the discursive space, and skillful use of evidence that lent credibility to the story.

### **The genocidal message**

The story that the *génocidaires* told was grounded in long-accepted historical “truths” that Rwandan schoolchildren learned in school, to wit: Tutsi were foreign invaders from Ethiopia who had stolen Rwanda from its rightful inhabitants; as Hamites, they shared no natural kinship with the Hutu majority who were of Bantu origin and were therefore the Hutu’s “natural enemy” (Kakwenzire and Kamukama, 1999, p 72; see also Sanders, 1969). The *génocidaires* applied these basic tenets to the present situation in the country: the invasion of the RPF not only signaled the Tutsi’s long-held plan to re-instate a feudal way of life and to re-enslave all Hutu, but worse, it revealed their ultimate plan to annihilate Hutu completely and regain absolute power.

In this updated version of history, Tutsi were not simply a foreign race, Tutsi were fundamentally different from Hutu, as different as men are from women (Chrétien *et al.*, 1995, p 96). This difference was so basic that any mixing between the two groups—social, political, cultural—could only lead to dire consequences since it violated the natural and primordial divisions that existed between the two peoples. The danger lay with Tutsi—all Tutsi—whether living in Rwanda or abroad, civilians or RPF, adults or children, living or dead. Tutsi evil was an innate and ineradicable condition that lurked inside all Tutsi. As a March 1993 article in *Kangura*, one of many extremist newspapers, explained: “The history of Rwanda shows us clearly that a Tutsi stays always exactly the same, that he has never changed. ... Who could tell the difference between the Inyenzi<sup>1</sup> who attacked in October 1990 and those of the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> They are all linked ... their evilness is the same” (Des Forges, 1999, p 73).

The need for Hutu to break off all relations with Tutsi was articulated as early as December 1990, shortly after the October 1 invasion by the RPF (and almost four years before the start of the genocide), in a piece entitled the “Hutu Ten Commandments,” which appeared in *Kangura*. Drawing on crude stereotypes, the document admonished Hutu to “stop having mercy on the Batutsi” and directed every Hutu to spread the “Hutu Ideology,” warning “[a]ny Muhutu who persecutes his brother Muhutu for having read, spread, and taught this ideology” that he will be considered a traitor (Berry and Berry, 1999, pp 114–115). The Hutu Ten Commandments marked the beginning of the extremists’ campaign to make ethnicity the sole lens through which people viewed the country’s current problems and the sole determinant for crafting possible solutions. Though plans

for genocide had not yet begun, by 1992, the climate had changed. Talk of genocide was starting to become more pronounced and open.

The rhetoric escalated dramatically in November 1992 with a speech by Léon Mugusera, a Canadian-educated linguist who was “a favorite of Habyarimana” (Des Forges, 1995, p 46). In his 30-minute speech, which was recorded and later replayed on national radio, Mugusera called repeatedly for the “extermination” and “liquidation” of the Tutsi “vermin” and “scum” (Des Forges, 1999, p 85). Mugusera warned his listeners that the enemy’s goal was extermination and urged them to “rise up … really rise up” in self-defense. He then ended his speech with a “kill or be killed” warning: “Know that the person whose throat you do not cut now will be the one who will cut yours” (Des Forges, 1999, p 86). With this warning, Mugusera brought the story of Hutu and Tutsi full circle. If Tutsi rule depended on Hutu subjugation, then Hutu survival depended on Tutsi extermination. The past cannot be changed but the future can be forged along a different path so long as people do not repeat past mistakes, such as when Tutsi were allowed to flee the country during the revolution of 1959–1961.

You cell members, work together, watch over intruders in your cell, suppress them. Do anything you can so that nobody sneaks out … The fatal mistake that we made in 1959 … is that we let them (Tutsi) out of the country. Their homeland is Ethiopia through a short-cut, i.e. River Nyabarongo. I want to insist on that point; we must effectively react … (Kakwenzire and Kamukama, 1999, p 77)

That these remarks were coming from a respected leader was no coincidence, for Rwandans, as the extremists knew well, revered those with education as well as those with titles, and Mugusera had both.

By 1993, genocide had become “common talk” in Kigali, so common “that a magazine could coldbloodedly publish a headline saying ‘By the way, the Tutsi race could be extinguished’ [and] cause no shock or even surprise” (Prunier, 1995, p 222).

### **Diffusing the message**

What made this message resonate with an ever growing audience was not necessarily its contents (which viewed in a different historical, political context might have appeared like the ramblings of a racist paranoiac), but its reach and repetition—the fact that it was relayed and replayed all over the country over a sustained period of time.

While the extremists had many public platforms from which to diffuse their message, the most important vehicle was media. By 1990, numerous extremist newspapers had sprung up. A 66% literacy rate meant there was always someone who could read out loud to those who could not read or did not have their own newspaper. Many of these newspapers also featured political cartoons with obscenely graphic depictions of political opponents, the meaning of which any “reader” could follow (Des Forges, 1999, p 67).

The most critical medium for popularizing the genocidal message, however,

was radio. Radio ownership in Rwanda was high by African standards, nearly 60% in urban areas and close to 30% in rural (Des Forges, 1999, p 67, note 4). Radio listening was a popular past-time among elites and non-elites alike (Des Forges, 1999, p 67). As one Western journalist who was in Rwanda before and during the genocide explained: “military personnel or peasants, rebels or intellectuals in cafes, in cars in the fields; the Rwandan people spend all their time with a receiver stuck to their ear” (Kellow and Steeves, 1998, p 118).

Until 1992, the only station available was Radio Rwanda, the official voice of the government, which wasted no time in “counter-attacking” after the RPF’s October 1, 1990 invasion from Uganda which marked the beginning of a four-year civil war. On November 22, 1990, for example, it warned its listeners that “since their goal is to exterminate and enslave us, we must not feel any mercy towards them” (Article 19, 1996, p 29). Following demands from the opposition that Radio Rwanda steer a more neutral line, a group of extremists started their own station in July 1993 called *Radio télévision des mille collines* or RTLM (Chrétien *et al.*, 1995; Prunier, 1995; Reyntjens, 1994). Among the station’s founders was Ferdinand Nahimana, a notable Rwandan historian who was also one of the brainchilds of the genocide. He is currently standing trial in Arusha for his role as director of RTLM.

From the start, the station was a showpiece of skillful hate-mongering. Adopting the talk radio format of Western stations, RTLM “revolutionized” (Chalk, 1999, p 98) Rwandese radio broadcasting and turned the genocidal message into popular entertainment. Through a mixture of music, banter, jokes, and editorials, the station reinforced the genocidal message over and over again. It reveled in playing songs that could not be played on state radio, such as the virulently anti-Tutsi songs by pop star Simon Bikindi. The station would play these songs 10 to 15 times a day so that listeners could not help but learn them by heart (Chrétien *et al.*, 1995). Everyone listened to RTLM, even RPF soldiers, who preferred its irreverent style over the more “preachy” Radio Muhabura (the RPF station) (Prunier, 1995). The director of Radio Rwanda summed up RTLM’s popularity this way:

These broadcasts were like a conversation among Rwandans who knew each other well and were relaxing over some banana beer or a bottle of Primus [the local beer] in a bar. It was a conversation without a moderator and without any requirements as to the truth of what was said. ... It was all in fun. (Des Forges, 1999, p 70)

That talk of genocide could be turned into a friendly conversation over beer is testimony to the skill of RTLM’s announcers in making genocidal talk not only intelligible but *a popular subject of everyday conversation*. As Des Forges (1999, pp 315–316) recounts, for example: “At most barriers, there was a radio where the guards stay tuned to RTLM during their long hours of keeping watch. And when patrols went out to kill, they went off singing the songs heard on RTLM ...”

The importance of RTLM, in short, was not only to motivate willing participants before and during the genocide, but also to make genocide a familiar

concept that was no more remarkable than the concept of drinking beer with friends.

### **Interpreting the world**

What gave extra force to RTLM's message was the station's nationwide reach which it acquired through its sister station relationship with Radio Rwanda. In a country where 90% of the people lived in rural areas, the ability to disseminate centrally-controlled information in the language of the majority people (i.e. Kinyarwanda as opposed to French) was no small feat. Before the genocide, RTLM had become the dominant source of information for most people. Once the genocide began, and travel and communication became difficult, people became even more dependent on the station, not only as the sole source of news and information, but more importantly, as "the sole authority for interpreting its meaning" (Des Forges, 1999, p 71). By interpreting the meaning of various events, the *génocidaires* could control how people reacted to them. As communication scholars Kellow and Steeves (1998, p 117) explain, media's ability to generate "collective reaction effects" (which they define as "the joint reactions, unplanned or unpredicted, of many in a shared experience") is based in part on the tendency for people to become more dependent on media for "information and guidance" during times of crisis or instability. Hence, in crisis, media acquire more, not less, power over listeners' perceptions of events and media control these perceptions through framing and agenda-setting techniques. Agenda-setting is the way in which media order the importance of issues, while framing relates to the parts of a story that media choose to highlight and make salient. Through agenda-setting, media "tell us how to think about particular issues and, consequently, what to think," while framing determines "the way people interpret a message's meaning" (Kellow and Steeves, 1998, p 110).

Using these techniques, the extremists were able to construct a world of polarized destinies, where "kill or be killed" became the only salient frame for people to understand what was going on around them. The extremists constructed this world by framing their ideas in historical references. As Kellow and Steeves (1998, p 123) point out, for example, the reference to killing as "work" "resonated historically" because work was the same term used during the 1959–1962 revolution. Using historical frames, the extremists were able to define the nature of the conflict as Hutu v. Tutsi, and to justify violence against Tutsi as acts of self-defense rooted in historical injustices, rather than the vicissitudes of present politics.

Through this controlled setting, the *génocidaires* were able to create a normative framework for mobilizing people to join in the genocidal campaign. This is not to argue that Rwandans were easily swayed to commit genocide because they believed everything they heard on the radio; rather, it is to suggest that the effective use of media and other methods of message dissemination meant that no one could escape the image of Tutsi as the ultimate threat to Hutu survival. For this message was repeatedly and consistently promoted over a

period of four years, not only through media, but also at political meetings and rallies, and at every level of the administrative chain. As Tharcisse Gatwa (1995, p 19) notes: “This seems to [have] be[en] the official message of the Habyarimana regime from the very beginning of the RPF attacks in October 1990.” Indeed, it was the skilled coordination of a consistent message supported by real and “created” events (discussed below) that circumscribed a world where “collective reaction” was the only possible response—the only hope for coming out alive. To be sure, people’s reactions to this hermetically-sealed world of genocidal thinking varied. There were those who found a way to maintain their own moral compass; for every Tutsi who survived, at least one Hutu friend, neighbor, or stranger risked his or her life to save that person (Des Forges, 1999, p 13). But there were also those who were sufficiently convinced that the Tutsi were coming to kill them that they joined in the killing for no other reason. As one perpetrator confessed to journalist Bill Berkeley in June 1994: “I did not believe the Tutsis were coming to kill us and take our land, but when the government continued to broadcast that the RPF is coming to take our land, is coming to kill the Hutu—when this was repeated over and over, I began to feel some kind of fear” (Berkeley, 2002, p 74).

In the conclusion of their article, Kellow and Steeves (1998) cite Cantril’s 1940 study on the reaction of American listeners to Orson Welles’s radio drama *Invasion from Mars* to explain the “collective reaction effects” that media can produce. “In this rare instance,” they explain, “there could be little doubt that radio had triggered a mass effect. The broadcast caused fear, fear caused panic, and panic led to verifiable reactions” (Kellow and Steeves, 1998, p 109). While conceding significant differences between Rwanda in 1994 and America in 1938 (the date of Welles’s broadcast), Kellow and Steeves (1998, pp 124–145) draw three important parallels. First, like Rwanda in the 1990s, America in the 1930s had “great faith” in radio, which had replaced newspapers as people’s primary source of news. Second, Welles’s ground-breaking show was broadcast at a time of economic and political instability, that is, during a time when people were likely to be more, not less, dependent on media for “information and guidance.” Finally, Welles’s high production values—his use of interviews by experts, on-the-spot reporting, and the mention of real names—added to the show’s credibility. The result in both cases—America in the 1930s and Rwanda in the 1990s—was that people acted on what they believed to be true and real.

Cantril’s study and Kellow and Steeves’ analysis remind us that belief is consonant with context. People are dependent on, and hence vulnerable to, certain types and sources of information under certain conditions. Thus, one cannot dismiss the critical role that RTLM (and extremist media in general) played in establishing a genocidal norm. The power of RTLM was its ability to provide an overall framework for understanding what was going on in the world, and for understanding how to *react* to these events. By interpreting the world for its listeners, the station was able to prescribe particular actions that under normal circumstances most people would have found objectionable and immoral. Thus, its ultimate value may not have been what it persuaded people to believe but

rather, what it persuaded people to forget. As journalist and human rights activist André Sibomana (1999, p 49) explained in a speech delivered in December 1992, 17 months before the genocide began:

Through a game of repetition, drop by drop, the media build moral and cultural constructs which eventually become permanent features ... Gradually, the public which is targeted moves from the horror of the first killing to a state of immunisation against the drama which each and every killing represents. In the end, the readers or the listeners say to themselves: killings happen, they're tolerable.

Understanding how the genocidal message was received by once moderate leaders as well as the general masses requires understanding the context in which these exterminationist ideas were relayed and replayed. It is to this political context that we now turn.

### **Rehearsing the message**

Motivating non-killers to kill and to kill repeatedly takes practice. People must not only be emotionally charged and psychologically prepared, they must also be logically trained in the rudiments of mass murder: when to start, when to stop, who to target, and who to spare. The extremists were not interested in provoking uncontrolled violence, which would not serve their ends, but in channeling fear and terror into organized acts to achieve specific ends. Only through directed and purposive violence could the genocidal entrepreneurs hope to make the ending of their story “real.”

The extremists did not wait for a propitious moment to press their campaign. Instead, they staged their own events that were designed to lend credence to their story. Following the October 1, 1990 invasion by the RPF, for example, the extremists staged an attack in Kigali (the capital city) in the early morning hours of October 4, 1990. There was shooting but no casualties and only little damage. The government pinned the attack on the RPF and called on people to be vigilant and watchful. It then arrested thousands of Tutsi and Hutu political opponents across the country and threw them in jail (Prunier, 1995).

A week after the faked insurrection, over 300 Tutsi were massacred and 500 houses burnt to the ground in the commune of Kibirira (FIDH, 1993; Prunier, 1995). Thenceforth, the government followed a predictable pattern of massacring Tutsi civilians in response to actual political or military threats. These “practice” massacres, which continued through 1993, had the added benefit of establishing “patterns of behaviour that would enable genocide” (Wagner, 1998, p 30). Under the guise of “civil defense” they provided ordinary Rwandans with hands-on experience in the rudiments of mass killing. As Michele Wagner (1998, p 30) explains:

Civil defense gave people the experience of conducting roadblocks, house searches, security meetings, and night patrols. It also developed the shared vocabulary, as well as the techniques, for identifying and seeking out “enemies of the people” and their “accomplices.” Multiparty politics, as it took hold in Rwanda, exposed citizens to the open

and aggressive promotion of an in-group, as well as to acts of intimidation and violence against those outside the group.

The targets were well chosen, usually taking place in Habyarimana strongholds where the regime could be “sure of success” (Des Forges, 1999, p 87). The murders were carried out by local populations under the direction of a local official or, later, under the lead of the *Interahamwe* or soldiers brought in to assist with the killing. Local officials would mobilize people by telling them that taking part in the massacres was part of their *umuganda* or communal work obligation. At other times, authorities would break down people’s initial resistance to killing by directing them to pillage the homes of their Tutsi neighbors; it was but one short step to get people to destroy the homes themselves including the residents inside (Des Forges, 1999, pp 89–90).

In preparation, authorities would create a climate of heightened fear by spreading rumors and false reports about Tutsi attacks on Hutu or Tutsi plans for exterminating all Hutu in a given area. On March 3, 1992, for example, Radio Rwanda reported five times that a source in Nairobi had discovered plans for the assassination of 20 Hutu leaders in Bugesera (Des Forges, 1999; Kakwenzire and Kamukama, 1999; Kellow and Steeves, 1998). Such rumors and false reports, which local officials would repeat over and over again, helped to “bring the threat inside and to make the danger real.” In one northwestern commune, as Des Forges (1999, p 88) relates, these techniques worked so well that “the burgo-master had trouble persuading the Hutu not to flee—their immediate reaction—but instead to stay and attack their Bagogwe [a Tutsi subgroup] neighbors.”

These practice massacres thus served as a kind of *kinesthetic* blueprint for mass murder. Through these organized killings, people learned how to kill on cue, that killing was a form of self-defense, not murder, and that reward, not punishment, awaited those who took part. These killings, in short, helped to reinforce the norm toward “fight,” instead of flight, in response to fear. Finally, the massacres served to inure a population, already struggling under the strains of war, to the mass killings of civilians. As Wagner (1998, p 34) again explains: “Full-fledged genocide was then but a short step from the mundane routinized violence that had already taken over everyday life.” These massacres, in other words, were a crucial element of the text—the genocidal story that the extremists were busy writing and making real.

### **Turning reality into the message**

In addition to orchestrated massacres, there were also actual events that added yet more credence to the extremists’ story. The significance of these events was not only their timing, but also their link to the past. For it was this link that underscored the extremists’ claims that a cause and effect relationship existed between past “mistakes” and current “troubles.” Some of these links were invented or fantasized; others straddled the line between fact and fiction, memory and myth. In the orgy of political violence, truth became incidental.

What mattered most was not what was actually true, only what people believed to be true.

Three historically-linkable events were key to spreading a genocidal norm: first, the persistence of a majoritarian—i.e. Hutu—ideology which had its roots in the revolution of 1959–1962; second, the civil war with the RPF, which provided opportunities for exploitation by all sides and unintended consequences for a few; and, finally, the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first popularly elected Hutu president of neighboring Burundi, in October 1993. These factors helped to carve a cognitive pathway between Tutsi as revanchist–foreigner to Tutsi as an enemy so vile and threatening as to be relegated outside the universe of moral obligation. Let us take each in turn.

### **Revolution and raids**

As Lemarchand (2000) points out, the genocide of the 1990s must be viewed through the lens of the revolution of the 1950s–1960s since it was during this combustible period that the image of Tutsi as Hamite–foreigner was first turned on its head. Where previously the Hamitic myth (which proclaimed the racial superiority of Tutsi over Hutu) served to justify exclusive Tutsi rule, in the hands of the Hutu counter-elite, it now served to justify overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy and *rejection of Tutsi rule henceforth*. This inverted image enabled Tutsi to be branded as “enemies of the revolution” since in the logic of revolution, only Hutu, as the numerical majority, had a legitimate claim to the new, “democratic” throne.

What transformed the image of Tutsi as “enemies of the revolution” to “foreign enemy” was a string of cross-border raids that took place between 1963 and 1967, the years immediately following the country’s independence. These raids, carried out by bands of Tutsi exiles (the majority of whom supported the return of the Tutsi monarchy) bolstered, crystallized even, the image of Tutsi as foreign enemy. For even though these attacks did not result in large numbers of Hutu casualties, they nonetheless drove home the fact that the former keepers of the state would not be going quietly into the night. On the contrary. Night time was when the rebels conducted their raids, a practice which prompted the appellation *Inyenzi*, meaning “cockroach.”

The raids demonstrated, in short, that Tutsi still constituted a threat to Hutu. And if Tutsi anywhere were threatening, then Tutsi everywhere were guilty. Thus, by punishing Tutsi who remained living in Rwanda—people who, in reality, had no connection to the personalities or politics behind the raids—the state could propagate and sustain a monolithic image of Tutsi as the constant and categorical enemy of Hutu.

While this monolithic image of Tutsi may have receded in the calm of the 1970s–1980s, when Habyarimana enjoyed widespread popularity amongst Tutsi throughout the country, it never completely died. The image of Tutsi as enemy, foreigner, and “overlord” was officially sanctioned; it was what was taught in schools and broadcast over the radio (Kakwenzire and Kamukama, 1999, p 72).

Thus, when the Habyarimana regime began facing political opposition from the inside and military threat from the outside, it was a simple task to revive this image in full force as way to deflect criticism and unite people against the common, historical enemy. As a result, when the regime resorted to massacres of Tutsi civilians in the 1990s, the logic of the 1960s prevailed: since Tutsi were the enemy, any Tutsi was fair game. Those committed to genocide had only to inflate this image further, making the agreed upon enemy not only dangerous (which the RPF's invasion had made clear), but so invidiously threatening as to make extermination not just a logical choice, but *the only choice*. Thus did revolution in the 1960s act as cognitive preparation for genocide in the 1990s.

## Invasion

The linking of the RPF invasion of October 1, 1990 to the *Inyenzi* raids of the 1960s was made easier by the fact that no other party, the RPF included, offered any evidence or arguments to the contrary. As Mamdani (2001) relates, the leaders of the RPF were writing and acting out their own story, which had more to do with exclusionary politics in their country of exile (Uganda) than in their country of origin (Rwanda). This is not to suggest that the RPF invasion was a proximate cause of the genocide to follow. It is to suggest, however, that a crucial collision was occurring that would expand the political space and opportunity for promoting a genocidal norm.

The invasion came at a critical time for the Habyarimana regime, which was struggling, however disingenuously, to accommodate a host of internal and external demands while trying to keep itself in power. In this precarious setting, the effects of the invasion were far-reaching. In the first place, the invasion justified a host of defensive measures—particularly the arming and training of militia—that would have serious repercussions after April 6, 1994 when the president's plane was shot down. Second, as discussed earlier, the invasion also provided fodder for extremist rhetoric and noise.

The critical difference between the RPF invasion of October 1990 and the earlier *Inyenzi* raids of 1963 was that the latter produced short-term crises, while the former provoked a four-year civil war, which pitted the well-trained army of Tutsi exiles against the much less seasoned Rwandan armed forces. Over time, however, the war presented the Habyarimana regime with options that it would not have otherwise had. As Reyntjens (1996, p 246) points out:

The war provided a pretext for manipulation, violence, destabilization and political stalemate. It contributed to the fragmentation of the political landscape and to the introduction of weapons and warriors difficult to control. And finally, it progressively generated a culture of violence in which political solutions became increasingly discredited.

What the war provided, in short, was cover for genocide. In war time (as both the Armenian and Nazi cases so clearly show), domestic populations become

preoccupied with their own immediate survival (for example, Ian Kershaw's 1987 analysis of "ordinary" Germans during the Holocaust), while outside actors often choose to turn a blind eye. The role of war in the Rwanda case, however, differs from the Armenian and Nazi cases in that the Rwandan government truly was at war with the "enemy." This state of war provided a legitimate basis for fear within the population, which would help explain why popular support failed to materialize when the rebel army crossed the border from Uganda. While a few Tutsi (and even some Hutu<sup>3</sup>) did join the RPF, most did not. Moreover, in the wake of RPF advances, most people chose to flee—Tutsi included. As Prunier (1995, pp 135–136) notes: "Contrary to the expectations of the RPF, local Hutu peasants showed no enthusiasm for being 'liberated' by them." Thus, far from being an army of liberation, the RPF ended up looking very much like an army of occupation, "rul[ing] over an eerily empty landscape" (Prunier, 1998, p 131).

To be fair, many of those who fled did so at the behest of the RPF (Mamdani, 2001), which was utilizing the war to exert greater and greater pressure on the Habyarimana regime. By forcing people to flee, the RPF created a massive internal refugee crisis which the government was ill-equipped to handle, and effectively halted food production in the country, exacerbating an already precarious situation (Reed, 1995, p 50). By 1993, RPF advances had resulted in a million or so internally displaced people who were forced into refugee camps that provided neither comfort nor cover from the RPF, which continued to target them in the camps in an effort to force the refugees further south into government-controlled territory. It was at these camps that the *Interahamwe* was able to recruit many new members. What motivated these "willing executioners," as Lemarchand (2000, p 10) calls them, was not just some demonized image of Tutsi heard on the radio, but rather the reality of the RPF war which they had experienced firsthand and which underscored the truth of the *génocidaires'* claims about the real motive behind the RPF's invasion.

The RPF's conduct of the war also tapped into opposition leaders' long-held suspicions that the RPF did not really intend to *share* power. These suspicions were rooted in the belief, shared by many, that the goal of the RPF invasion of 1990 was the same as the *Inyenzi* raids of the 1960s—to re-instate the Tutsi monarchy by any means necessary. And with neither popular support nor political allies, the RPF appeared to be exactly what it tried not to be: a Tutsi army seeking a Tutsi victory. With the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye in Burundi, the first democratically elected Hutu president in the country's history, the RPF would lose all opportunity to broaden its base of support by reassuring potential allies and supporters that its program and goals were democratic, not revanchist, and ethnically inclusive, not Tutsi-specific. And by failing to convince others of the sincerity of its stated program, the RPF was unable to generate a counter-discourse that could refute or drown out the extremist message. Instead, RPF tactics and policies made the genocidal story more, not less, believable to larger and larger numbers of people.

## Assassination

What finally confirmed beyond all doubt the veracity of extremist claims as to the real intentions of the RPF was the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected president of neighboring Burundi, on October 21, 1993, barely two months after the signing of an internationally brokered peace agreement between Habyarimana and the RPF. Ndadaye's murder convinced the extremists that it was time to act. They calculated rightly that the shock of the murder, along with ensuing acts of violence and the large flow of refugees from Burundi into Rwanda, would convince once moderate or hesitant people to go along with their genocidal plans. For here was undeniable proof that Tutsi could not be trusted, that Tutsi would never share power or abide by democratic principles, that Tutsi would never allow themselves to be ruled by a Hutu leader, even a popularly elected one. As Prunier (1995, p 200) so well explains: "They [the extremists and their allies] presented the situation in terms of almost biblical urgency. To the fear of losing one's privileges (rational level) they added the fear of losing one's life (visceral level) and the fear of losing control of one's world (mythical level)." By exploiting the situation to its fullest, the *génocidaires* were able to use fear as the mechanism for making genocide appear not only normal and legitimate but indeed imperative given the circumstances.

Ndadaye's murder, coming at such a critical time, lent proof beyond all doubt that the RPF—and by extension all Tutsi—were bent not only on re-conquering the country but on annihilating Hutu altogether. If the Tutsi army could so easily decapitate the Hutu body politic in Burundi, what would the RPF do once it (re)ascended the throne of power in Rwanda and took control of the army? Would it too find a way to kill off the Hutu body once and for all? That these were no longer the questions posed by a small group of extremist radicals but were the genuine concerns of leaders across the political spectrum and peasants across the countryside suggests that the normative landscape was being transformed in a profound way. The next steps toward genocide included the foot-dragging of the president in implementing the terms of the peace agreement, increased arming of the militia, further testing of the international community's will to enforce the agreement, and a cue to get things started. These steps were completed in less than six months time.

## Conclusion

The process by which genocide became normalized as a legitimate response to fear and crisis was not inevitable. It involved multiple points of cohesion and opportunity which the *génocidaires* exploited to their fullest. The *génocidaires* were able to establish a genocidal rationale by framing their genocidal message in historic terms, by spreading the story through media, pop culture, and official pronouncements at every level of the administrative chain; by making their story appear "real" through staged attacks, directed massacres, and calculated rumour; and finally, by making the consequences appear immediate through incitement of

the fears raised by the Tutsi army from Uganda and the Tutsi assassins from Burundi. That the actions and policies of the RPF only served to lend credence to the extremists' genocidal message meant that no counter-discourse ever emerged that could challenge or subdue the explosive rhetoric of the *génocidaires*. Thus were the *génocidaires* able to transform the normative landscape of Rwanda, paving the way for genocide through mass participation.

## Notes

1. Kinyarwanda term that means "cockroach." (Kinyarwanda is the indigenous language of all Rwandans.)
2. In the 1960s, a group of Tutsi exiles who remained committed to restoring the Tutsi monarchy began staging cross-border raids from neighboring states. These incursions did not result in large numbers of Hutu deaths but did result in retaliatory massacres of Tutsi who remained living in Rwanda.
3. As Prunier (1995, p 153, note 42) points out, there were a few Hutu (from the Banyarwanda population in Uganda) who joined the RPF; most were the grown children of Hutu who had migrated to Uganda in the 1920s–1930s to escape Belgian rule and who were later targeted by the Obote government alongside their Tutsi co-nationals.

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