

# Genocidal Language Games<sup>1</sup>

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*The road to genocide in Rwanda was paved with hate speech.*

—William Schabas<sup>2</sup>

*Words have killed my country.*

—Naasson Munyandamutsa<sup>3</sup>

*What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.*

—Michel Foucault<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The power of language to shape social being is clearly displayed in the workings of derogatory terms for human beings. The normative power of derogatory terms is most obvious in their negative force, but they also exert positive power, giving social and material strength to those who wield them. Using such terms helps to construct a strengthened 'us' for the

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Catherine Z. Elgin, Ishani Maitra, and Mary Kate McGowan for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. I am deeply indebted to Robert Gakwaya for his invaluable research assistance, and strength of heart.

<sup>2</sup> Schabas, William 2000, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Naasson Munyandamutsa, speaking at "The Language of Genocide" symposium, Harvard University, March 27, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault 1980, p. 119.

speakers and a weakened 'them' for the targets, thus reinforcing or even realigning social relations.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, such speech acts establish and reinforce a system of permissions and prohibitions that fuel social hierarchy. The changing linguistic landscape of Rwanda in the early 1990s illustrates how linguistic practices eroded protective norms, and thus opened the door to previously prohibited actions. In this and other twentieth-century genocides, the majority population was made ready to kill their minority neighbors, first by getting them talking amongst themselves as if these neighbors were not really people at all, using derogatory terms for these others that spread fear and disgust. Then the derogatory terms were used openly and publicly, increasingly targeting individuals. As people get used to this new disregard, non-linguistic disregarding actions become more widely accepted. It is not a short route from derogating speech acts to murder, but it is crucial to understand the power of speech to facilitate the growth of both linguistic and broader social norms that make murder and mayhem come to be accepted.

The use of derogatory terms played a significant role in laying the social groundwork for the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. Linguistic practices and the norms that govern them do not operate alone; they shape and are shaped by collateral social practices and norms. These norms and practices produce social possibilities, granting power to some participants while denying it to others. In Rwanda, the genocide was preceded by an increase in the use of anti-Tutsi derogatory terms, at first primarily amongst Hutu, who used these terms not as epithets hurled directly at Tutsi, but as in-group ways of referring to Tutsi. Use of these derogatory terms marked the Hutu as 'us' and the Tutsi as 'them,' during "animation sessions" which drummed up anti-Tutsi fervor.<sup>6</sup> As these linguistic practices took hold amongst the Hutu, the terms became more openly and directly aimed at Tutsi. Then, during the 100 days of the genocide, derogatory terms and coded euphemisms were used to direct killers to their victims, urging them to "finish the work," "clear the tall trees," that is, to kill. Understanding these speech acts helps to illuminate important ways that power is enacted through discourse, how speech acts can prepare the way for physical and material acts, and how speech generates permissions for actions hitherto uncountenanced. Studying the role of speech acts and linguistic practices in laying the groundwork of the genocide illuminates how patterns of speech acts become linguistic practices that constitute permissibility conditions for non-linguistic behaviors. Understanding

<sup>5</sup> See Jacques Semelin (2003), "Toward a Vocabulary of Massacre and Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2003), 5(2): pp. 193–210, especially p. 201.

<sup>6</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 39, 45.

this action-engendering force can make sense of thinking that words can destroy a people and a nation.

Linguistic violence is violence enacted or delivered through discursive behaviors, that is, through speech acts that would ordinarily constitute social or psychological damage to the targeted person, as well as through speech acts that generate permissions for physical damage, including assault and death. Like physical violence, linguistic violence uses its force to injure or abuse, and the varieties of harms it can cause are as multiplicitous as the functions of speech. Just as violations come in degrees, so too do the damages of linguistic violence. In Rwanda, as in any society marked by civic struggle, people often disregarded the power of linguistic violence; avoiding physical violence, torture, and death were higher priorities. Nevertheless, linguistic violence, itself constituting psychosocial and cultural harm to its targets, also created permissions for the very acts of physical violence they sought to avoid. If we take seriously Wittgenstein's view that a language is a way of life, then we must examine the broader Rwandan social context in understanding how linguistic practices contributed to the genocide.

This paper offers a philosophical analysis of genocidal language games, with a focus on the role that language played in setting the social conditions for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. By analyzing the role that derogatory terms played in Rwanda, we can see that these derogatory terms are action-engendering—that is, they license non-linguistic behaviors. The most commonly used derogatory terms included '*inyenzi*' (Kinyarwanda for 'cockroach'), and '*inzoka*' (Kinyarwanda for 'snake'). In addition to altering beliefs and licensing inferences about those against whom the terms are used, the use of such terms can also make actions like assault and even murder seem legitimate. Few cultures like snakes, but in Rwanda, boys are proud when they are trusted to cut the heads off snakes. There are significant actions associated with '*inzoka*', so it is not trivial to use this term for the Tutsi. I shall argue that the widespread use of such terms played a significant role in bringing about the Rwandan genocide. Because of the action-engendering force of derogatory terms, actions hitherto unthinkable (i.e. the extermination of a people) came to be regarded as socially appropriate and even required. In short, I will be supporting Schabas's claim that "the road to genocide in Rwanda was paved by hate speech."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Schabas 2000. Neither Schabas nor I maintain the absurd view that speech alone *caused* the genocide. Speech acts were a key mechanism for reshaping social norms, and it was the confluence of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors that promulgated genocide.

The paper proceeds as follows. In § 2, I offer some historical background about Rwanda, to aid unfamiliar readers in sorting out the key events and processes at work, focusing on the late twentieth-century changes leading up to the genocide. The distinction between horizontal and vertical ethnic systems is used here to help frame questions about the changing social landscape in Rwanda. Then, in § 3, I introduce key elements of my analysis of derogatory terms, focusing on deeply derogatory terms like *'inyenzi'* and *'inzoka'*. I set out five features of deeply derogatory terms, and offer an apparently derogatory case that is in fact an illustrative near-miss. In § 4, I further develop this theoretical framework, showing how *'inyenzi'* meets the criteria set out in § 3, and argue that the widespread linguistic practice of using *'inyenzi'* and similar derogatory terms to refer to Tutsi individuals played a crucial role in licensing the 1994 genocide. This section includes a brief exposition of the inferential role of *'inyenzi'* (cockroach) and a sketch of relevant aspects of the inferential role of *'inzoka'* (snake). Then, in § 5, I return to the concept of genocidal language games, arguing for the important action-engendering aspect of the inferential roles of deeply derogatory terms as used in Rwanda. In closing, I consider some reflections, offered after the genocide, about the role that language played in laying the genocidal groundwork.

## 2. Rwanda Before the Genocide: Some Basic Background

Imagine a society of multiple ethnicities all living in peace and relative equality. Ethnic groups are fluid, members intermarry, and children are not shunned. Ethnic identities, while often recognized, are not a determining force in one's life prospects. Pascasie, a Tutsi woman born in 1959, who suffered many horrors of the genocide, says that growing up in Nyanza, "Ethnicity didn't seem to matter to the ordinary Rwandan; it seemed to matter only to the people who wielded power."<sup>8</sup> Within Rwanda, there is one language, one cuisine, shared songs and dances, common marriage rituals, shared customs of all sorts. Thus, ethnic boundaries are vague and do not fit anthropological categories.<sup>9</sup> In fact, for a long

<sup>8</sup> Pascasie Mukasakindi, in deBrouwer and Hon Chu, 2009, p. 74. See also Gourevitch 1998, pp. 54–5 for early Belgian observations of Rwandan unity.

<sup>9</sup> See Mamdani 2004, chapters 2 and 3, for a thoughtful critique of assimilating 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' to ethnicities at all. Instead, Mamdani urges us to think of these as state-enforced "bipolar" political identities (p. 73). Rwanda also includes a people called the 'Twa,' whose presence in Rwanda is said to pre-date the arrival of both the Hutu and the Tutsi. The Twa are a tiny minority, left out of this bipolar power play.

time, people could move from one ethnicity to another, simply by having more or fewer cows. Applying Charles Mills' distinction between horizontal and vertical racial systems, we might call this a *horizontal ethnic system*.<sup>10</sup> There are many who would describe pre-genocide Rwanda this way, more or less.<sup>11</sup> A *vertical ethnic system*, in contrast, makes identity features relevant to one's life prospects, marking amongst ethnic groups a clear hierarchy determining access to power, resources, and opportunities.

The *Horizontalist* view describes Hutu and Tutsi living in harmony, playing soccer, sharing a drink of banana wine or Primus at the end of the day, intermarrying, and generally looking after each other.<sup>12</sup> Neighbors might bring neighbors soup, but not lend each other money. Some Tutsi survivors, and Hutu *génocidaires* as well, suggest a relatively horizontal society that erupted into violence to create hierarchy. Even before colonization in the late nineteenth century, Joseph Sebarenzi says, "Rwandans spoke one language—Kinyarwanda—worshipped one God, and answered to one King."<sup>13</sup> Sebarenzi argues that although Tutsi had more "power, social status, and influence" than Hutu, for centuries under Tutsi monarchies, and then under colonial rule after the 1880s, nevertheless, the people lived peacefully together following an ancient Rwandan saying, "*Turi bene mugabo umwe*," meaning "we are all sons and daughters of the same father."<sup>14</sup> This Horizontalist view emphasizes a general social unity and fluid social categories. Evidence of shared social customs is strong, as is evidence of intermarriage, and ethnic boundary crossing, which supports the Horizontalist thesis, but is not conclusive.

There is also, however, ongoing evidence of ethnicity shaping life prospects, which supports the Verticalist thesis. The *Verticalist* view holds that there was always hierarchy between the groups, with Tutsi ruling

<sup>10</sup> Mills 1998, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Hatzfeld describes it thus: "Black Africa is a formidable medley of willingly assumed ethnic identities of a diversity equaled only by the spirit of tolerance that keeps them in equilibrium. And when a seemingly ethnic disturbance breaks out, the conflict is usually in fact chiefly regional (north versus south; interior plateau versus the coast), religious (Christians against Muslims), economic (about the appropriation of mines), or social (residential neighborhoods against the business district); *the ethnic group is not the true source of violence and misunderstanding but only a mode of defensive assembly*. So we must emphasize both the normality in Rwanda of identifying oneself as Hutu or Tutsi and the anomaly, the deviation represented by the anti-Tutsi propaganda during the regime of president Habyarimana." Hatzfeld 2005, pp. 209–10, italics added. See also Sebarenzi 2009, pp. 6–9; Sebarenzi carefully illustrates the mixture of what I am calling horizontal and vertical dimensions of life in Rwanda before 1994. See Gourevitch 1998, pp. 232–6 who argues that Hutu power created a bipolar 'us'/'them' world, but that great complexity of identities lay just below the surface.

<sup>12</sup> Prunier 1995, pp. 5–9; Gourevitch 1998, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Sebarenzi 2009, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Sebarenzi 2009, p. 11. But see Prunier (1995), pp. 1–40, for more detailed analysis.

harshly over Hutu for millennia, and then being favored by European colonizers, who saw in the Tutsi more European physical features.<sup>15</sup> Hutu still had some opportunities under Tutsi rule, the Verticalist says, but they were never really equal. Then, when Hutu came to power, the situation flipped. Still vertical.

Whether one supports the Horizontalist or Verticalist view, everyone agrees that once Belgian colonizers instituted mandatory ethnic identity cards in 1933, ethnic categories became rigid. This rigidity made entrenched hierarchy possible. Sebarenzi echoes a common Rwandan view that with these ethnic identity cards “the seeds of discrimination and resentment were sown, and Rwanda’s strong national identity began to erode.”<sup>16</sup> When the last King of Rwanda died in 1959, power struggles between Hutu and Tutsi under Belgian colonialism culminated in a Hutu uprising, forcing 150,000 Tutsi to flee to neighboring countries. This “1959 Revolution” marks the start of the most serious rupture between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwandan history. Gourevitch reports that before 1959 “there had never been systematic political violence recorded between Hutus and Tutsis—anywhere.”<sup>17</sup> Berry and Berry share this Horizontalist overview of Rwandan history; their analysis of Hutu extremist propaganda during the 1959 Revolution suggests that a new Verticalism was called forth as a politically useful myth.

Hutu extremists propagated a revisionist history of relations between the Hutus and the Tutsis that were not based on cohabitation and exchange but rather on segregation and violence. This myth was so successful that on the eve of independence [from Belgium, 1962], Hutu politicians rallied the people to throw out the “feudal colonists,” referring not to the Belgians who had ruled Rwanda for 40 years, but to the Tutsis with whom the Hutus had lived side by side for 400 years.<sup>18</sup>

Colonialism may not have caused the differences between Hutu and Tutsi, but it changed their significances. The Verticalist interpretation of history

<sup>15</sup> Prunier 1995, quotes from Belgian colonial reports, which say things like this: “The Mutusi of good race has nothing of the negro, apart from his color. . . . His features are very fine: a high brow, thin nose and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth . . . Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feelings which is rare among primitive people. He is a natural-born leader, capable of extreme self-control and of calculated good will.” (Prunier, p.6, from *Ministère des Colonies, Rapport sur l’administration belge du Ruanda-Urundi* (1925), p.34. Quoted in Jean-Paul Harroy, *Le Rwanda, de la féodalité à la démocratie* (1955–1962) Brussels: Hayez, 1984, p. 28.) This is not an isolated comment, as Prunier shows in Chapter 1, with sources dating not only from the early colonial period, but also as late as 1970.

<sup>16</sup> Sebarenzi 2009, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Gourevitch 1998, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Berry and Berry 1999, p. 3.

became a springboard for the violence that would erupt across the next several decades.

Once Hutu took power after the 1959 Revolution, Tutsi had fewer educational opportunities and more limited means of employment. One genocide survivor, Françoise, born in 1962, explains her childhood as socially horizontal but institutionally vertical. She says,

I lived in a community where Tutsi were a minority, but this situation didn't seem to influence our relationships. We had friends among Hutu as well as Tutsi, though the discrimination was more visible in our schools. Tutsi students did not have the right to perform better than Hutu students did. For example, our teachers would switch the names of Tutsi who received better marks with the names of Hutu who had not performed as well.<sup>19</sup>

Educational discrimination could be more extreme. Odette Nyiramilimo tells a harrowing tale of being chased from school for being Tutsi in 1973. Fleeing to relatives in Kibuye, Odette expected to be welcomed there, but instead, her Hutu brother-in-law said, "I don't give shelter to cock-roaches."<sup>20</sup> Stories like this are not rare.

Upon gaining independence from Belgium in 1962, Rwanda elected a Hutu president, Gregoire Kayibanda. By the middle of the 1960s, almost half of the Tutsi population lived outside Rwanda. The Tutsi were (and still are) a numerical minority, approximately 10 percent of the population.<sup>21</sup> The children born to "the Fifty-niners" were growing up in refugee camps in Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire (Congo), caught between nations, neither allowed to assimilate to their 'adoptive' land nor allowed to return to their homeland. Rwanda's Hutu government perceived the potential return of these exiled Tutsi as a threat, despite its own grip on power and despite a Hutu-majority population. Significantly, many who had fled had been leaders, and would likely seek leadership again. Also, others had taken the property of the exiles, and would not

<sup>19</sup> Françoise Kayitesi, in deBrouwer and Hon Chu, p.113. See also Gourevitch 1998, pp. 63–9.

<sup>20</sup> Gourevitch 1998, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> The Rwandan government kept close count of its citizens, with nationwide bi-annual census-taking. Des Forges reports that Tutsi were reported as 17.5 percent of the population in 1952, but declined to only 8.4 percent in 1991. Des Forges 1999, p. 40. See also Chrétien, 2003. Chrétien says that for the colonists "an equation was established between Tutsi and 'chief' (in its general meaning) to the point where the ordinary Batutsi who lived on the hills (who constituted at least 90 percent of all Batutsi) were invisible." Into the early 1950s, Belgian authorities thought the Tutsi comprised only about 5 percent of the population, when in fact, in 1956, they were "13 to 18 percent" depending on the region. Chrétien 2003, p. 285.

yield it without a fight.<sup>22</sup> Rwandan official resistance to accepting the 1959 returnees, decade after decade, ultimately led to the development of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), in the late 1980s, a militia trained as soldiers within the Ugandan resistance and later in the Ugandan army.<sup>23</sup> The RPF focused on gaining the right to return to Rwanda. One of the RPF leaders was Paul Kagame, the current president of Rwanda, now serving his second term.

In 1990 the RPF began a military campaign to force the Rwandan government to let the diaspora return. The campaign became a war, which resulted in the signing of the Arusha Accords (July 1992), winning the right to return and also power-sharing for the RPF.<sup>24</sup> While the RPF put pressure on the Hutu extremist government by attacking the country's borders, and moving inward, Hutu extremists within the government developed the 'Zero-Network', a death squad comprising both civilians and members of the Rwandan army.<sup>25</sup> They began to distribute machetes and train civilian Hutu in how to use those machetes to kill Tutsi. At the same time, they also began to invoke a mythology pre-dating colonialism to protect their own interests and to whip up anti-Tutsi fervor. This was particularly explicit in Léon Mugesera's 1992 speech, which was so virulently anti-Tutsi that the minister of justice issued an arrest warrant and Mugesera fled to Canada.<sup>26</sup>

This brief and selective overview of a complex period of Rwandan history might leave one thinking that neither Horizontalism nor Verticalism can possibly be true. We find a view combining aspects of each articulated by the late André Sibomana, a moderate Hutu journalist and Catholic priest, who spoke out against the genocide. Sibomana argued that, "The differences had always been there. The whites conceptualized and froze them. The extremists turned them into a political program. This was the fatal mechanism in which our country had embarked."<sup>27</sup> Sibomana thus suggests that horizontality lost out to verticality when Belgians instituted identity cards, rigidifying categories. At least from thence onward, verticality ruled, and extremists used ethnic divisions to promote their own power.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sibomana 1999, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> Kinzer 2008, pp. 42–69. See also Prunier 1995, pp. 67–74, 90–96.

<sup>24</sup> See Prunier 1995, pp. 159–212 for a detailed account of the complex negotiations that became the Arusha Accords.

<sup>25</sup> Malvern 2004, pp. 29–33; Prunier 1995, pp. 168–70.

<sup>26</sup> See Des Forges 1999, pp. 76–86 for an analysis of the Mugesera speech.

<sup>27</sup> Sibomana 1999, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Gourevitch reports that in early 1991, the US Ambassador pressured the Rwandan government to eliminate identity cards, to stop official recognition of ethnic divisions. The French Ambassador "quashed" this. Gourevitch 1998, pp. 89–90.



The 1994 genocide emerged within the context of a war waged from the outside by the RPF, the now-grown children of Tutsi who fled for their lives in 1959. While the RPF fought for the right to return from 1990 to 1993, the Hutu extremist government engaged in mass killings in villages known to be predominantly Tutsi. Human Rights Watch reported that, all through 1992 and 1993, small-scale massacres were launched by the Habyarimana government to test the waters, saying that these “small scale sporadic killings of Tutsi” in predominantly Hutu areas “established patterns for the genocide of 1994.”<sup>29</sup>

Rwanda has always been a highly organized society. Under Habyirimana's presidency, going back at least to 1975, each village held mandatory weekly civic animation sessions to promote patriotism. It was only in the early 1990s, as the RPF grew stronger, that the messages of these turned to fear-mongering and ethnic division. Hyacintha Nirere, a survivor from near Butare who was 13 in 1994, reports that despite general congeniality amongst her neighbors, trust was declining after 1990. “For example, Hutu stopped their conversations whenever a Tutsi passed by.”<sup>30</sup> These sudden silences may have been due to the topics of conversation. During this same period, the weekly animation meetings were cultivating ordinary Hutu men for the ‘*Interahamwe*’, seasoning them to participate in civilian militia that carried out the genocide, killing neighbors and hunting down any Tutsi who fled.<sup>31</sup> ‘*Interahamwe*’ literally means ‘we who work together’ or ‘the united.’

RPF fighters called themselves the ‘*Inkotanyi*’, which is Kinyarwanda for ‘the Invincibles.’ The Hutu government called them ‘*inyenzi*’, because they were fighting a guerilla war; like cockroaches they appeared primarily at night and were hard to find during the day. This language was commonly applied to the RPF from 1990 to 1993; the big change came when the vocabulary that had previously been reserved for the militia was extended to all Tutsi. This was a major step in the broad and explicit polarization of the society.<sup>32</sup>

An ideological war was also being waged. Through their control of the media, President Habyirimana's inner circle, called the ‘*akuza*’ (little house), was busy preparing the general Hutu population (beyond the *Interahamwe*) to participate in the genocide.<sup>33</sup> In December 1990 the

<sup>29</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Hyacintha Nirere, in deBrouwer and Hon Chu 2009, p. 118.

<sup>31</sup> Chrétien 2003, pp. 323–4.

<sup>32</sup> See Mushikiwabo and Kramer 2006, especially pp. 41–3.

<sup>33</sup> See Schabas 2000, 145–9; Des Forges 1999, pp. 9, 40, 176–207. For a comparison of *Kangura* to the Nazi propaganda vehicle *Der Stürmer*, see Charity Kagwi-Ndungu, in Thompson 2005, esp. pp. 332–5.

extremist newspaper *Kangura* (*Wake Them Up!*) published the notorious "Hutu Ten Commandments," which set out rules for being a proper Hutu, declaring any Hutu who disagreed with these rules to be a traitor.<sup>34</sup> These ten rules demanded separating from Tutsi in relationships (family, sexual, business), denying the Tutsi educational access and work opportunities, expelling Tutsi from the military, and more. Perhaps most ominous is rule number 8: "The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi."<sup>35</sup> In 1993 *Kangura* presented its infamous article denouncing all Tutsi, coining the phrase 'a cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly.' *Kangura* was also noted for its vile political cartoons, which especially vilified Tutsi women, recasting their oft-touted beauty as a mark of their dangerousness. The cartoons were an important way to influence illiterate and semi-literate Rwandans, who would not need to read the text to get the message. Also, *Kangura* increased its accessibility by publishing in Kinyarwanda. *Kangura* published up until April 1994, with a circulation that maxed at about 10,000, but with a much broader readership than that, since people tended to pass each issue from friend to friend.<sup>36</sup>

Even broader reach was to be found through the radio. In July 1992 the *akuzas* founded RTLM, *Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (or "Free Radio and Television of the Thousand Hills") to bring the Hutu-power message to the airwaves of Rwanda. The only widely available radio station at the time was the government's Radio Rwanda, playing European classical music and reporting government-approved news.<sup>37</sup> As part of a propaganda strategy, RTLM "combined entertaining music, notably Zairian, with 'hot news' delivered with virulent commentary: an 'interactive' style, happy, even humorous, that conditioned the Hutu public to the most venomous kind of extremist thinking."<sup>38</sup> It quickly gained a wide audience. As time went on, its broadcasts became more and more explicitly racist and political, directly calling for attacks against the Tutsi. There is clearly evidence of incitement to genocide, but the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in fact convicted Ferdinand Nahimana,

<sup>34</sup> For the content and an analysis of this issue, see ICTR 2003, pp. 45–53.

<sup>35</sup> Berry and Berry 1999, pp. 113–15. The back cover of this issue featured a photograph of French President Francois Mitterand, with the caption "It is in hard times that you know your real friends." Des Forges 1999, p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> Chrétien 2003, p. 326.

<sup>37</sup> Starting in 1991, the RPF broadcast Radio Muhabera from Uganda, but this propaganda station (advocating the right of return for exiled Rwandans as well as armed protest against the Hutu extremist government) never gained a wide audience. It was broadcast in English, not in Kinyarwanda, the primary language of the people, so despite its broad geographical reach, it gained little traction. <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/rwanda-broadcasting-genocide.pdf>. See also Des Forges 1999, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Chrétien 2003, p. 327.

who founded RTLM, of *genocide, not only incitement*, for his work with RTLM. At the same trial, Hassan Ngeze was convicted of genocide for his work as the founder, owner, and Editor-in-Chief of *Kangura*. This gets us ahead of the analysis, but sets the stage for our study of specific speech acts.

Responding to the pressure brought on by the RPF offensives, the Habyarimana government began to negotiate peace talks that resulted in a temporary cease-fire agreement in August 1992. This agreement, which eventually worked out shared power between Hutu and Tutsi, came to be known as the 'Arusha Accords.' The prospect of increased Tutsi inclusion in matters of state was more than Hutu extremists could accept. While President Habyirimana publicly signed the Arusha Accords, the *akuza* were secretly executing plans for Rwanda's own 'final solution.' The context of economic distress, war, and political corruption and competition all contributed to the urgency with which the *akuza* developed their strategy to mobilize ordinary citizens to remove a minority of the population. Hutu extremists saw exterminating this minority as promising to relieve these stresses, and allow a unified Rwanda to emerge. As Andre Sibomana says, "The risk of a genocide gradually increased as the [Hutu] elite in power strengthened its domination by brandishing the ethnic threat, against a backdrop of economic crisis."<sup>39</sup>

Testimony from Rwandan genocide survivors raises questions about how the cultural climate changed for Tutsis from 1989 to 1994. In the US, the concept of 'chilly climate,' first introduced in sexual harassment research, brought attention to the ways that the behavior of others creates a social climate which makes personal identity factors into a liability, undermining a person's ability to function at school or work.<sup>40</sup> One part of creating a chilly climate is to increase the salience of identity differences, making them function in new ways. At first, the targeted person becomes aware of difference, chilling the development not only of relations but also slowing her own participation and skill development. Eventually, the chill may become more, and turn into a real threat. Applying this concept, we ask how Rwanda became, first, a chilly climate for Tutsi, and then a hot and dangerous one. Thinking of the question this way enables us to see that although the standard accounts of Rwandan colonial history may explain how the people came to be marked as 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi', this alone does not explain how these categories became toxic. In particular, how did the rigidity of the ethnic categories start to engender violent actions, in word and deed?

<sup>39</sup> Sibomana 1999, p. 92. The economic crisis began with the collapse of the coffee markets in 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Introduced by Bernice Sandler in 1982.

The toxic element was a widespread anti-Tutsi propaganda campaign, not only by leaders of the media but also orally transmitted, from person to person, in prefecture meetings and social gatherings. Broadcast speech acts are easy to trace, because they are part of the public record, so histories and analyses of the use of hate media to develop a climate of fear and distrust are already emerging.<sup>41</sup> These tend to emphasize the actions of RTLM, *Kangura*, *Umurava*, and other print media.<sup>42</sup> The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) trial of media leaders, Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, and Hassan Ngeze, raised serious concerns about both the freedom and the responsibility of the press.<sup>43</sup> As Jacques Semelin warns, however, "it is possible to overemphasize the role of hate propaganda because there is nothing to prove that this, on its own, leads to the unleashing of massacre."<sup>44</sup> The causal question worried the ICTR as well, but ultimately they decided that the speech of these three men *constituted* genocidal acts, not only serving as incitements to genocide. Semelin holds that hate propaganda, "certainly contributes to the creation of a sort of *semantic matrix* that gives meaning to the increased force of a dynamic of violence that then works as a 'launching pad' for massacre."<sup>45</sup> A semantic matrix might seem like a stationary background graph upon which action is plotted, but I see this semantic matrix as multi-dimensional, organic, and interactive, allowing for little differentiation between background and foreground because of this organic interaction. So construed, I would argue, linguistic violence, of which hate speech and propaganda are major forms, becomes part of the broader dynamic of violence. Understanding the power of public speech acts by the media requires understanding this "semantic matrix," a dynamic arena of meaning, which should disclose what it took for such speech acts to get uptake, to be heard and acted upon, for their vision to be enacted. As Africa Rights concluded in 1995, "For the most part these journalists did not wield machetes or fire guns. Some of them did not even directly incite people to kill. But they all assisted in creating a climate of extremism and hysteria in

<sup>41</sup> Mary Kimani's analysis of RTLM programming shows that most of the invective came from the regular announcers and not from on-air guests, news, or government officials. See Kimani, in Thompson 2007.

<sup>42</sup> See Chrétien 1995, Chalk 1999, and Thompson 2007.

<sup>43</sup> See *Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza and Hassan Ngeze*, Case No. ICTR-99-52-T. All three were found guilty of genocide. All three were sentenced to life in prison, although Barayagwiza's lawyers appealed, arguing that his rights had been violated, and the court reduced his sentence to 35 years with time served further reducing it to 27 years. See also MacKinnon 2004, Temple-Raston 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Semelin 2007, p. 199.

<sup>45</sup> Semelin 2007, p. 199.

which ordinary people could be influenced to become killers.”<sup>46</sup> Getting ordinary people to participate in practices of linguistic violence seasoned them to the structures of power that rendered collateral forms of non-linguistic violence conceivable and doable within the context.

Verticalism was gaining ground through this ideological campaign. RTL and *Kangura* were key agencies in generating permissibility for genocidal behaviors through speech acts that further rigidified social acceptance of a sense of essential separation and justified hierarchy between Hutu and Tutsi. Power was the issue. Further, these official speech acts granted linguistic licenses to other speakers to use derogatory terms for Tutsi, making the status of being Tutsi more dangerous than most Tutsi knew.<sup>47</sup> The ICTR “Media Trial” emphasized the use of the radio to direct the genocide, focusing on directions given on-air to kill specific individuals, disclosing locations of hiding Tutsis, etc.<sup>48</sup> The radio also played a role in giving non-elite Hutu permission to kill, giving them a sense that patriotism demanded it and that Rwanda would be better when the Tutsi are gone, never to return.

The semantic matrix within which genocide can be conceived and engendered cannot arise simply from basic repetitions of hollow speech acts. Something more must generate the normative force that engenders non-linguistic action. To understand one dimension of meaning change, consider how ordinary slang tends to gain or lose its force from frequency of use. Before Bart Simpson, for example, “That sucks!” was rarely uttered on American broadcast television, but it has since become more common. The conventions governing its use changed, and the inferences one could draw from it changed. When more taboo, it was also more vulgar, making a clear but elliptical sexual reference; today many people tend to reject that inference. Meanings change as practices governing the conditions of use change. Inferences gain and lose sanction. Frequency of use and patterns of use at least partially constitute the inferential role of the expression, giving it whatever meaning and power it has. Through overuse, “That sucks” has become almost as empty as “Have a nice day”; in each we see the frequency of use draining meaning rather than building it. Hate speech seems to take a different trajectory. Initial accommodation to the linguistic

<sup>46</sup> African Rights 1995, 60. Also Carver 2000, p. 189.

<sup>47</sup> Francoise Mukeshimana reports that “Between 1990 and 1992, the *Interahamwe* killed Tutsi boys from Bugesera after the boys were accused of hiding suspected RPF spies. Many of the boys didn’t even know that the term cockroach referred to people.” DeBrouwer and Hon Chu 2009, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> See MacKinnon 2004, pp. 325–30. See also Temple-Raston 2005.

violence takes it as 'just talk', ignoring the action-engendering features of such discourse. As these violent linguistic practices become more socially embedded, intertwined with discriminatory and exclusionary practices, a synergy takes hold, giving greater meaning to each. '*Inyenzi*' began as an epithet for the RPF militia raiding the borders from neighboring countries, but by 1992 and 1993 grew to include all Tutsis; this transition from a narrow to a wider scope of application was key to generating the semantic matrix within which genocide was engendered.

### 3.3. *Key Features of Deeply Derogatory Terms*

My focus here is on deeply derogatory terms, rather than mere slurs or casual derogations, for deep derogations are tied to systems of oppression. “Jerk” might be a slur, and it might hurt or insult, but it does not have the power that deeply derogatory terms do. Deeply derogatory terms serve many functions. First, they express *the insider/outsider function*, which is multi-directional: the terms serve to mark members of an out-group (*as out*), and in so doing, they also mark the in-group as un-marked by the

<sup>52</sup> Tirrell 1999.

Third, derogatory terms are most effective when they are connected to networks of oppression and discrimination, with the weight of history and social censure behind it. This is what most clearly marks deeply derogatory terms from other sorts of slurs. Let's call this *the social embeddedness condition*. Social context, with embedded practices and conventions, is the major source of the power of derogatory terms that are used to dominate, demean, or dehumanize people. Certainly the worst harms of derogatory terms come from those that are embedded in socially, economically, and politically oppressive practices, and not from isolated, idiosyncratic, and apparently negative expressions, like 'sausage-face.' The mere word is not the issue; at work is the derogatory term, as used in a speech act (within a hurled epithet, a report of whereabouts, an order to kill, etc.) combined with both social embeddedness and essentialism. Within a speech act, and then within a broader social context, the derogatory term takes on a force that transcends the word alone.

Fourth is *the functional variation feature*. The insider/outsider function is certainly one of the main functions that using derogatory terms can serve, but it is important to see that it can serve other functions as well. Sometimes, for example, a third-person derogation is used by a member of the dominant group to a hearer who is a member of the subordinate group as a way of labeling the third person with a label that boomerangs from the target back to the hearer. For example, Fred and Ethel see Lucy do something silly, and while Ethel laughs, Fred scornfully says, "Lucy is such a bimbo." 'Bimbo' is a gendered term, and its use here sets boundaries on acceptable and unacceptable female behavior. Whatever Lucy was doing, Ethel now knows not to do that in front of Fred. His use of the derogatory term sets gender boundaries for Ethel even though he was hurling the term at Lucy. There are many things we can see the derogatory term doing, and what it does varies with the particulars of the context of use. We can also see that communicating intentions is at best only one of the things it may do. Fred may not be intending to set behavioral boundaries (enforcing norms) on Ethel, but he does this whether or not he intends it. Used in speech acts, derogatory terms also serve many other functions: for example, they regularly enact power, incite crimes, and rationalize cruelty. The functional variation feature is a way of capturing Wittgenstein's tool box metaphor, which suggests that understanding language requires us to see the multitude of uses to which we put our words and to resist reducing these functions to one (or even a few).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Wittgenstein 1958. Especially § 7, 11, 14, 23, but see also § 6, 304.



Fifth, derogatory terms used in speech acts are action-engendering within a context. To see how this works, we again return to the inferential role of such terms to see that subsequent inferences often delineate what kinds of treatments are permissible with respect to those who are so classified. Sometimes the action engendered is to assign a status-function.<sup>56</sup> Calling a grown woman 'girl' assigns a status-function that denies her adulthood and rationalizes male paternalistic behaviors. 'Girl' by itself is not an epithet, when applied to female children, but its inappropriate use for an adult woman serves a purpose, to rationalize paying her less for her work, treating her as incapable of making serious decisions, and similar sorts of behaviors that undercut the full expression of her autonomy. Similarly, in the long-time practice of calling African-American men 'boy' we see clearly the denial of adult status as a foundation for autonomy-undercutting behaviors. Boys don't have the same rights as men. Neither do girls. Assign the status, and the treatments follow.

Careful analysis of this set of philosophical concepts, together with an exploration of the key features of language games, will help us to understand how speech acts contribute to the preparation for and execution of a genocide, and more generally, why words are not *only* words.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Searle 1995, pp. 28, 40, and following.

Derogatory terms, in use, engender actions creating and enforcing hierarchy. Thinking of real-life language uses as occurring within games emphasizes the action-engendering aspect of speech. Language games are not fully distinct from their purposes, the practices they support, and those by which they are supported. Action is built into the idea that meaning is a function of both intra- and extra-linguistic use.

In sum, we have seen that the use of derogatory terms involves an expressive commitment to the value and viability of that use. With respect to derogatory terms, in particular, we have learned that (1) the insider/outsider function is a key function of speech acts containing such terms; (2) they tend to make a negative essentialist claim about their targets; (3) they must be embedded in a social context, particularly within networks of

<sup>59</sup> Wittgenstein 1958. § 2: "Let us imagine a language . . . The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones; there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab', 'beam'. A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language."

oppression and discrimination, to gain their derogatory force, and they gain this social embeddedness through use; (4) speech acts involving derogatory terms exhibit functional variation, particularly with respect to the different parties involved in the speech act itself; and, (5) like other speech acts, those involving derogatory terms are action-engendering. These five features work together.

While we are clearing the ground, before turning to some deadly cases of derogatory terms, there is one more caveat. It is important not to think of derogations as mere insults, although there are some common features. Insults are about hurting the other person, inflicting a sudden (and perhaps lasting) sting. Derogations, in contrast, inflict long-lasting *harm*, which may or may not inflict immediate hurt. Derogations may be received without much notice, and still do the job of realigning the target's place in the world. Again we see that intention alone cannot carry all this weight.

The derogations with which we are concerned in Rwanda are not mere insults; they harm their targets through their functions within the speech acts in which they occur and the actions they engender. Calling someone '*inyenzi*' in Rwanda in 1994 was a reductive classification that licensed differential treatment. Its functions might include identifying a person who is a threat, stripping that person of his or her humanity, depriving the person of basic human rights, and even identifying someone to kill. Such a speech act is socially embedded in a history of using '*inyenzi*' to refer to RPF soldiers who made nightly incursions into Rwanda from Uganda and neighboring countries. From 1990 to 1994, the term was extended to all Tutsi, spreading fear across their future. We will see that such deeply derogatory terms matter, for they engender actions that others may take against the person, which in 1994 included brutal murder.

#### 4. The Use of '*Inyenzi*' in Rwanda: Genocidal Language Games

In this section, I argue that the widespread use of the term '*inyenzi*' to refer to the Tutsi people played a crucial role in licensing the genocide that took place there. I begin by arguing that '*inyenzi*,' as used in that context, satisfied the five conditions of derogatory terms outlined above. Next, I explore the inferential role of this term in order to identify the particular actions licensed by it. Since precisely these actions took place, I conclude that there is good reason to believe that the action-engendering force of

the term '*inyenzi*' played a significant role in bringing about the Rwandan genocide.

#### 4.1. *An Actual Derogatory Use of 'Inyenzi'*

The following ten sentences, broadcast on the Hutu extremist RTLM radio on June 28, 1994, during the genocide, illustrate this use of '*inyenzi*' to damn all Tutsi, extending it beyond the initial guerilla groups, which were called the '*Inkotanyi*', the invincibles. The passage also illustrates several of the core features of derogatory speech acts. As we shall see, this passage is a complex set of speech acts with one major function: to justify all harm and destruction done to Tutsi. On RTLM, Valérie Bemeriki rapidly exclaimed:

I have always told you. All the people who joined the part controlled by the *Inyenzi Inkotanyi* are *Inyenzi* themselves. They approve the killings perpetrated by *Inyenzi*. They are criminals like the *Inyenzi Inkotanyi*. They are all *Inyenzi*. When our armed forces will get there, they will get what they deserve. They will not spare anyone since everybody turned *Inyenzi*. All those who stayed there are all *Inyenzi* since those who were against *Inyenzi* have been killed by *Inyenzi*. Those who succeeded to escape ran away to Ngara, Burundi and to the western part of our country. Those who stayed are accomplices and acolytes of the *Inyenzi*.

In ten sentences, there are ten instances of '*inyenzi*', some further emphasized through the use of '*Inkotanyi*'. The insider/outsider function that characterizes the use of derogatory terms is accomplished by the emphatic demarcation of the Tutsi as '*inyenzi*' combined with an almost incantatory repetition of 'they.' The use of 'they' exclusively for the Tutsi is so emphatic that it is a shock when the seventh sentence switches the antecedent of 'they' to 'the army'. Roger Bromley's analysis of this short speech emphasizes what we have been calling the insider/outsider function, noting its

use of polarization and dichotomization based upon pronominal distribution [I, you, our, but predominantly they], speed of delivery, and repetition of a term of abuse to produce a mesmeric, hypnotic effect. 'We' are articulated as human, the '*Inyenzi*' as sub-human, committed to 'social death,' beyond the universe of moral obligation.<sup>60</sup>

Polarization is an emphatic means to achieve the insider/outsider function, suggesting that you are either *inyenzi* or not, and there is no middle ground. (It may presuppose essentialism.) Bemeriki's speed of delivery stops the audience from critical distancing; there is no time to question

<sup>60</sup> Bromley, p. 5.

the implicit assumptions. The 'argument' presupposes an audience familiar with a history of Tutsi flight to neighboring countries, and government propaganda (aired frequently on this same radio station) claiming that RPF killers are 'out to get all Hutu.' The use of fear to grow anger is clear.

This insider/outsider function also constructs social power, and often combines forces with the essentialism condition. Foucault develops a distinction between juridical or negative exercises of power, on the one hand, and technical or positive exercises of power, on the other. Looking at derogatory terms from a juridical perspective brings into focus cases of hurling epithets, face to face uses designed to demean; these are hierarchical enactments of power by members of one group over members of another. Through this (limited) lens, hate speech emerges as enforcing a negative repressive power of a dominating class over those dominated, but this view obscures the fact that such uses *positively construct* both dominator and dominated. In short, we see the insider/outsider function in play here, and at the same time, we see that multiple functions are achieved. Dominating speech acts construct those dominated as lesser beings, limiting their aspirations, capabilities, potentialities, powers; such uses systematically create an underclass. Speech acts using derogatory terms also help to create the power of those who use them, those who are not targets of the terms, uniting them into a self-identifying group.<sup>61</sup> In Rwanda, the use of derogatory terms for Tutsi had this double effect, for at the same time that the uses of these terms were undermining the power and the humanity of the Tutsi, they were building the confidence and power of the Hutu extremists. The power of discourse, the aggregate patterns of what we may and may not say, what we do and do not say, the language games we play and the productive capacities of those games, "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (as Foucault says) because it produces the very contours of that body.

Next, missing from Bemeriki's rant, but present elsewhere, is the essentialism condition. It is absent because Bemeriki makes *inyenzi* status a *choice* for Tutsi, dependent upon their politics. Of course as soon as the passage presents the status as a political choice—a choice shown by supporting the *Inkotanyi*—it takes it away in practice, for all Tutsi left in Rwanda were deemed *ipso facto* collaborators and therefore worthy of destruction. Perhaps he smuggles essentialism back in. (This rant was

<sup>61</sup> Of course the terms can be used by those who generally are their targets; sometimes such uses may be a way to reclaim the term, making it an in-group term of affection, for example, but sometimes the use is unreclaimed and reveals the speaker's accommodation to the injustice carried by the term as generally used. For more on reclamation, see Tirrell 1999.

delivered a year after *Kangura's* 'a cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly' became a catch-phrase amongst Hutu.)

Elsewhere, the use of '*inyenzi*' clearly satisfies the essentialism condition. In fact, part of the point in calling non-military and non-militant Tutsi '*inyenzi*' was to imply that they shared a dangerous essence with the RPF soldiers. Derogatory terms used in propaganda generally convey that there is an essential difference between the groups in question; essentialism fuels fear, and purports to justify differential treatment. Justification of differential treatment is built into the inferential role, but essentialism closes off other actions too. There is no rehabilitation of a cockroach. A snake is a snake and must be destroyed on sight.

Third, this use of '*inyenzi*' also satisfies the social embeddedness condition. The passage quoted above relies on the social embeddedness of both '*inyenzi*' and '*Inkotanyi*' as terms of threat, posing no danger to those who are not so classified and justifying death to those who are. Calling an apolitical Tutsi '*inyenzi*' was invoking a connection to the RPF militia, and thus making the person so labeled into an object of fear. On the micro-level, when a speaker, S, hurls '*inyenzi*' as an epithet at a hearer, H, S's speech act gains force from the social and political context of exiled Tutsis trying to fight their way back into Rwanda. On the macro-level, S's epithet-hurling speech act is part of a network of similar speech acts that served the political and economic ends of Hutu extremists. As DesForges points out, "Both on the radio and through public meetings, authorities worked to make the long-decried threat of RPF infiltration concrete and immediate."<sup>62</sup> Authorities disseminated false information, offered tangible economic incentives for participation in fighting the RPF and eliminating all Tutsi, and gave destitute young men hope for a future with more security and prosperity. They seasoned reluctant participants by drawing them into action, "first by encouraging them to pillage, then to destroy homes, then to kill the occupants of the homes."<sup>63</sup> Propaganda was a key element of the implementation of the genocide, but propaganda did not act alone outside of other social forces. As Claudine Kayitesi has said, "A genocide is a poisonous bush that grows not from two or three roots, but from a whole tangle that has moldered underground without anyone noticing."<sup>64</sup> In Rwanda, the planners were noticing, and to achieve their own social and political goals, they were cultivating that poisonous bush with language, music, rewards, and punishments. Ordinary Rwandans noticed some changes, but did not see the big picture.

<sup>62</sup> DesForges 1999, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> DesForges 1999, p. 11

<sup>64</sup> Hatzfeld 2007, p. 206.

Language did not do the whole job, but the infusion of linguistic violence into the social body engendered a breadth and depth of physical violence that went beyond war and into genocide.

Fifth and finally, as we shall see in detail in the following section, this use of '*inyenzi*' is also action-engendering. Calling someone '*inyenzi*' was signaling that they were to be killed. Calling them '*inzoka*' (snake) often brought about a dismemberment of the person's limbs, and death by exsanguination. This is tied to long-standing norms of how to treat snakes, as we shall see next.

To understand how speech acts involving deeply derogatory terms can do more than license other discursive actions and instead move into broader social and physical actions, we need a more detailed understanding of the framework we have developed so far. In the next section, I will develop a richer account of the structural components of certain sorts of language games, with an emphasis on testimony from Rwandans—survivors and perpetrators alike—about the role of speech in the preparation for and execution of the genocide.

#### 4.2. *The Inferential Role of 'Inyenzi'*

Imagine that in January 1994, during the preparatory phase, prior to the genocide, speaker S says to hearer H: "A is an *inyenzi*." Unlike a hurled epithet, this involves three parties, and the target need not even know about the speech act. At the very least, S has undertaken an expressive commitment to the viability and value of using insect terms to speak about A. S undertakes a commitment to showing that cockroach-talk is viable (can be extended, further inferences can be drawn) and valuable (serves the purposes of the speech act and broader language game). What are some of the inferences we can make about calling A "cockroach"? Common inferences include that cockroaches are pests, dirty, ubiquitous, multiply rapidly, are hard to kill, *ought* to be killed, show emergent tendencies when in groups, are resilient, carry diseases, can go long periods without food or water, tend to only emerge at night when they are hard to see. Each of these inferences might be justified by S's claim that A is a cockroach, although of course we can see that the use is metaphorical. If H says, "But I have seen A during the day," this would not undermine S's assertion. One can imagine S replying something like, "Yes, but it is at night that A does the work of the *Inkotanyi*", thus solidifying the reference. Further, with this utterance, S has accepted and endorsed this particular language game, which I call *reductive classification*, here applied to the Tutsi.

During the preparatory phase, what S was doing was as much about S and H as it was about A. S was cultivating a shared understanding with H that A was a kind of being that should be eliminated, and that S and H

were on the same side, the side to do that job. The expressive commitment in this kind of case is a political litmus test; if H takes up the expressive commitment by using the same vocabulary, then S is reassured, at least mildly, that they are part of a united group. If H challenges S, perhaps saying, "I don't like it when you talk about my neighbor that way," then H is now marked as *ibiyitso*, a traitor or "accomplice of the enemy," and soon will be at risk.<sup>65</sup> Expressive commitments thus play a significant role in enacting the insider/outsider function.

In addition to undertaking expressive commitments, when S asserts "A is an *inyenzi*," S also licenses H to make specific assertions about A. Think of '*inyenzi*' as having a network of possible inferential next-steps; these are inferences one is licensed to draw. H is now allowed to assert other elements of the inferential role of 'cockroach' in speaking about A, based on S's having issued those licenses in asserting the initial claim.<sup>66</sup> Such employment of the inferential role of '*inyenzi*/'cockroach' would allow H to go on to say that (in some sense) A is nocturnal, a domestic pest, likely to multiply rapidly, hard to completely eliminate, spreads disease, shows emergent tendencies when in groups, and so on. These would each be asserted 'in some sense,' because the epithet is actually metaphorical, so the extensions are best interpreted with some flexibility. When '*inyenzi*' only applied to RPF soldiers, then 'nocturnal' as an inferential consequence may well have been best interpreted both literally and metaphorically, but when '*inyenzi*' was later spread to all Tutsi, 'nocturnal' was better interpreted metaphorically, indicating covert activities. Attention to the metaphors used on RTLM and in *Kangura* shows that the metaphor within this epithet was indeed extended in applying it to Tutsi. Notice also that S does not say that A is a Tutsi. In the context of early 1990s Rwanda, however, both S and H would know that in practice, in their local language games, this term was restricted to Tutsi. Practice rules the scope of the term. By the time of the genocide, the extension 'should be eliminated' came to be a rather immediate extension. This increased immediacy of the extermination-inference helped prepare the perpetrators for genocidal actions. This epithet, and its many uses in many kinds of speech acts, was only one way that changing discursive practices were used to change behavioral norms and expectations.

"She's a Tutsi" is an only apparently more benign case; within the perpetration phase of the genocide, it could engender diverse actions ranging from protection to murder depending upon who is speaking to

<sup>65</sup> Des Forges 1999, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Brandom 1998. *Making it Explicit*, Harvard University Press.



whom, when, and where. As André Sibomana said, “Woe betide those whose identity cards bore the word ‘Tutsi’: those five letters amounted to a death sentence, with immediate execution.”<sup>67</sup> What seemed at first to be a mere classification, part of a name-game, became socially embedded in a variety of aspects of Rwandan life, and the action-engendering aspects of the mere classification became unmistakable.

In understanding the inferential roles of particular derogatory terms, we must also pay attention to the changing social and political contexts within which the terms are used, because these contexts shape the inferential roles. This is why we needed to think about Rwandan history in § 2. It is also why intentions just do not get us far enough in understanding the power of these terms and the speech acts that deliver them. As Léopold Twagirayezu, a convicted *génocidaire* from the Bugasera region, says, “It is awkward to talk about hatred between Hutus and Tutsis, because *words changed meaning after the killings*.”<sup>68</sup> He adds,

Before, we could fool around among ourselves and say we were going to kill them all, and the next moment we would join them to share some work or a bottle. Jokes and threats were mixed together. We no longer paid heed to what we said. We could toss around awful words without awful thoughts. The Tutsis did not even get very upset. I mean, they didn’t draw apart because of those unfortunate discussions. Since then we have seen: *those words brought on grave consequences*.<sup>69</sup>

If Léopold is right, then even without a specific intention to harm, these initially thoughtless anti-Tutsi speech acts did cause harm. At the time, the words raised no red flags, generating little attention to the broader implications of their speech acts. Further, speakers using the terms might not have been particularly authoritative (compared to the speeches on the radio, for example), and the contexts of utterance might have diffused any sense of danger. Nevertheless, we can see that the casualness of bantering about murder and the increasing use of derogations created openings for speech acts that enacted licenses for these very actions. A radio announcer saying, “Clean the Nyamata church of its cockroaches” would have institutional authority, but as social organization fell apart, authority became diffused. Anyone could utter that sentence and get results.

These speech acts occurred within dynamic language games, which changed from the preparatory phase, through the perpetration, and yet again in the aftermath. Speech acts that, during the preparatory phase, seemed like mere words to the ordinary Rwandans later became

<sup>67</sup> Sibomana 1999, p. 87.

<sup>68</sup> Hatzfeld 2005, p. 218, Léopold speaking, emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> Hatzfeld 2005, p. 218, emphasis added.

incitements to action, even when not in imperatives. By June 1994 the pragmatic force of both *inyenzi* (cockroach) and *ibiyitso* (collaborator/ traitor) made them death sentences.

Any epithet carries with it an expressive commitment to the viability and value of that term and its use in particular sorts of context. Those who introduce derogatory terms as propaganda know what they are doing: it is no accident that such terms tend to depict the target as insects, snakes, any creature humans would be quick to kill. The value of the terms lies in this combination of vilification and its inferential and material connection to extermination. Americans were taught to view the Japanese as insects in WWII, Germans were taught to view Jews as vermin, and ordinary Rwandan Hutu were taught, through the influx of hate speech from media sources and civil authorities, to speak about, think of, and treat Tutsi as cockroaches. The viability of '*inyenzi*' may be established without speakers having a thorough grasp of the political value of the term. The value can grow on them, and in doing so, will reshape the social body, preparing it for greater violence.

In a rationalization that is typical of derogation-users across many contexts, Léopold offers Tutsi non-response as proof of the apparent innocuousness of the anti-Tutsi speech at the time.<sup>70</sup> Instead, we should see the apparent thoughtlessness of Hutu usage and the non-response of Tutsi as signs of practices in transition. Neither speakers nor audiences were fully in command of these speech acts, and so reactions were spotty, conclusions not drawn, actions not forthcoming. If indeed some Tutsi did see the linguistic violence for what it was, and still they did not respond, this non-response may be a measure of their own insecurity in the situation. A Tutsi aware of the threat posed by linguistic violence might feel caught in a double bind: speak up now and be punished now, or stay silent now and risk greater harm later.<sup>71</sup> Challenging such speech would neither feel nor be safe. Angélique Mukamanzi, a Tutsi survivor, recalls that as a schoolgirl she had both Tutsi and Hutu friends, and that the Hutu "never said bad things." She says: "I felt the first fears when people began leaving the Bugasera after the clashes in 1992. Our paths then grew loud with more and more evil words."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Surely this is not the only interpretation, but non-response from targeted groups is often cited as acceptance.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Altman considers a similar situation regarding speaking out against anti-semitic speech in his, "Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Law: The Case of Holocaust Denial," this volume.

<sup>72</sup> Hatzfeld 2007, p. 81.

During the preparatory phase, social embeddedness is incomplete. We see this in Léopold's statement, which presents linguistic practices as dissociated from social behavior: nasty comments and friendly behavior could coexist peacefully (working together, sharing a beer). Such peaceful coexistence was perhaps made possible by not yet realizing the power of the language games they were playing and the role of these language games in the broader political struggle for power. The conventions associated with the anti-Tutsi speech acts were not yet fixed and so did not yet attach to anti-Tutsi behavior. In hindsight, however, he attributes causal power to these speech acts: "*those words brought on grave consequences.*" In hindsight, he could see them as action-engendering, engendering actions that were not obvious in advance.

The testimony of both survivors and perpetrators shows marked concern for the power of discourse to shape social and material reality, giving people permission to behave in ways that previously were untenable. Some of the speech acts cited include an increased use of derogatory terms for Tutsi, increasingly frequent associations of all Tutsi as RPF '*inyenzi*,' calling Hutu who were friendly with Tutsi '*ibytso*,' as well as increasing propaganda inciting fear of Tutsis and demanding specific exclusionary behaviors by Hutu.<sup>73</sup> Weakly construed, these linguistic behaviors were generating permission for exclusionary behaviors, thereby licensing entrenchment of a perceived or desired hierarchy. Strongly construed, these speech acts were part of a pattern that ended in genocide. We see this stronger view in the observations of Pio Mitungirehe, a *génocidaire* from Kibungo, who says,

Maybe we did not hate all the Tutsis, especially our neighbors, and maybe we did not see them as wicked enemies. But among ourselves we said we no longer wanted to live together. We even said we did not want them anywhere around us anymore, and that we had to clear them from our land. It's serious, saying that—it's already sharpening the machete.<sup>74</sup>

Pio's denying initial attitudes of hate suggests that the speech acts were stronger than and did not arise from speakers' intentions, suggesting instead that the speech acts conditioned attitudes over time. Even ordinary Hutu were talking about "clearing" the Tutsi from the land, a euphemism for murder that was heard repeatedly in directives issued over RTLM during the genocide. Saying such a thing is "already sharpening the

<sup>73</sup> See Kimani, in Thompson, for an analysis of many speech acts issued on RTLM. Kimani argues that the level of inflammatory content rose dramatically beginning in January 1994. pp. 110–24.

<sup>74</sup> Hatzfeld 2005, p. 218.

machete” because it generates licenses or permissions within the group to say similar things, which may become entrenched practices, which then sanction non-linguistic actions to back up the speech acts.<sup>75</sup>

Sometimes action-engendering permissions are built into an inferential role before the term is applied in a new way, so the power of specific speech acts to license material actions can sometimes be traced through the practices in which the concepts have the most play. In explaining the viciousness of the assaults on Tutsi, and why their bodies were mutilated, even posthumously, André Sibomana explains,

The extremist propaganda described Tutsi as cockroaches or snakes. For many uneducated peasants, if the official authorities state that Tutsi are snakes, it can't be wrong. If the local official of the commune orders people to kill snakes, it makes sense. When you kill a snake, you smash its head, then you cut it up in different places to make sure it's really dead. These very same forms of torture were inflicted on many Tutsi.<sup>76</sup>

The direct and literal application of the whole network of snake-destroying behaviors to the Tutsi is really quite remarkable. The long-standing practice of killing snakes set a model of what is to be done with snakes, and these everyday behaviors in rural Rwanda set a conceptual framework for ‘snake.’ The application of ‘snake’ to Tutsi licensed the application of a host of other terms that are part of the inferential role of ‘snake.’ This cultivated anti-Tutsi attitudes and licensed inferences about what should be done, granting permissions for action. When told to kill the snakes, the question ‘how?’ would not arise. Rwandans already knew how to kill snakes, and knew that it was mandatory. The derogatory terms used in the propaganda were well chosen, meshing everyday linguistic and non-linguistic practices, to engender genocidal actions.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> We see the licenses or permissions more clearly if a speech act is repeated, rearranged, and used in a variety of contexts. The permission exists from the moment of utterance, even without follow-through. It can be undermined, though, by making it explicit, and then challenging it.

<sup>76</sup> Sibomana 1999, p. 71. See also Semelin p. 301 for a discussion of inscription of culture onto particular acts of violence. See also *Kangura* No. 40 (February 1993).

<sup>77</sup> Although ‘inyenzi’ is more commonly discussed in the English-language scholarship on the genocide, ‘inzoka’ was a very powerful and widespread term, reportedly even used by teachers to mock Tutsi children. The snake as a symbol of evil is basic to many cultures, including Rwanda. The extermination imperative is even stronger for snakes than for cockroaches, so of course the question arises about the relative power of the corresponding terms, speech acts, and the language games in which they appear. See Thomas Kamilindi’s discussion of his young daughter’s experience of being called a ‘snake’ during the genocide, at <http://www.rwandainitiative.ca/symposium/transcript/panel2/kamilindi.html>, Fergal Keene’s “The Rwandan Girl who Refused to Die.”

At this point, it is worth addressing a possible concern. Just how much work is being done by the social context? Do the words themselves, within the speech acts, matter much at all? If the words are just signals for action, any old word can be used (and many have been, during wars), without this elaborate apparatus of words carrying inferential roles, used in speech acts, and embedded in social and material practices. Sure, that works for codes. These derogatory terms are richer than code words, however, and their force is enacted across the population. People may use them casually, participating in a practice without being fully aware of the details of the practice. When a ten-year-old boy in the USA calls one of his classmates 'fag,' he is unlikely to fully understand the entire inferential role of that term, nor is he likely to think about, much less have mastery of, the broader social context of homophobia and hate crimes against homosexuals. Just the same, that child uses a term that brings a heavy social history and oppressive apparatus to bear on his classmate. The child probably knows that the term has negative power, and may even sense that it fulfills the insider/outsider function and may take it to meet the essentialism condition. I doubt the child has mastery of the full inferential role and its action outcomes. Although this speaker is a child, many adults speak with similar epistemic limitations, day in and day out. Few of our words lead to genocide, but we must consider our own diction and ask what apparatuses of power we invoke to control or harm others.

Asking how linguistic permissions are generated and then how those permissions grant behavioral licenses seems natural enough, but the question must not presuppose an untenable distinction between language and behavior. Speech acts *are* behavior. Using snake vocabulary to refer to humans in order to undermine their status is *doing* something—it is dehumanizing them. This expressive commitment—that using snake-talk to speak about Tutsi is viable and valuable—needs defense. In 1990s Rwanda, making this expressive commitment to the viability and value of using snake language to refer to Tutsi became one among many membership badges for the *interahamwe* and its supporters. Licensing or granting permission to derogatory speech acts is permitting action. The ultimate issue is the connection between verbal action and more macro-level physical action. To Naassan Munyandamutsa's comment that words killed his country, we can imagine the cynical advertising-soaked American saying, "*words don't kill people, people kill people.*"<sup>78</sup> In light of what has

<sup>78</sup> Drawing on the NRA slogan that guns don't kill people, people kill people. Power reports that such a line was used by a Pentagon official chiding Prudence Bushnell for advocating radio jamming. Power, 2003, p. 372.

been argued here, this is too glib a response. Particular kinds of speech acts made it possible for some Rwandans to consider killing their neighbors and particular kinds of speech acts incited and sanctioned those murders. These were language games of a most serious kind.

<sup>79</sup> The hierarchy of the model is this: linguistic practices are constituted by language games, and language games are constituted by speech acts.

<sup>80</sup> Sellars 1954, pp. 204–28.

## 6. Conclusion

At the outset of this analysis, we considered Foucault's remark that power "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."<sup>97</sup> Particular kinds of linguistic practices conveyed through language games produce a social body capable of enacting genocide. We have been working with a simplified model of genocide, as the complete extermination of a people. Now it is time to note that genocide encompasses more than physical death, it includes the destruction of a culture, extreme psychological damage that allows people to live but feel as if they died, and more. The constant, deep, and widespread derogation of a group should be seen as part and parcel of genocide, not only as an antecedent to it.

The practice of derogation is made up of many kinds of language games, which comprise many kinds of speech acts. These derogatory acts, games, and practices are repressive *prima facie* but even more, they produce a positive set of licenses and permissions which foster behaviors that both construct the positive identities of all parties to the games, and permit destructive actions which undermine the very logic of the game and

<sup>97</sup> Foucault 1980, p. 119.

practice. What's the harm if we give someone a new label, like 'sausage-face'? Perhaps none, if the term stays isolated, a mere child's identification game, unembedded in social practices and systems of power. In real life, derogatory terms act as status-functions, which shape a person's life prospects in significant ways. It is through the language-exit dimension of these status functions that we can see their action-engendering power.

The philosophical analysis of genocidal language games presented here argues that the derogatory terms used against Tutsi during the Rwandan genocide were action-engendering. I argued that the widespread use of such terms played a significant role in bringing about the Rwandan genocide. The first step was the entrance of the derogatory terms to the linguistic practices—the language games—of the people. Naming the Tutsi as '*inyenzi*' was the start of the game. Next, the inferential roles of the terms and the full character of their status-functions developed through use. As these language-language moves developed, the kinds of inferences people became licensed to make expanded and became more entrenched. Finally, and most emphatically, we saw that the power of the terms was brought beyond discourse into material action through the exit moves that were licensed. At first these exit moves were forms of discrimination at school and at work, perhaps extending to the social world of the neighborhood soccer match, but often limited to institutional settings where individuals could beg off their own responsibility. Ultimately, because of the action-engendering force of derogatory terms like '*inyenzi*' and '*inzoka*,' morally prohibited actions like murder, rape, mayhem, and mutilation came to be regarded as socially appropriate and even required.

To understand the full force of these deeply derogatory terms, we must remember how they exemplify the five features set out in this analysis. Functional variability is important, but evidence suggests that the development of the insider/outsider function is key to dividing a society and keeping it divided. If the inferential roles of the derogations map onto divisions that are perceived as essential kinds, the division becomes further entrenched. In Rwanda we saw that the road to genocide included taking Hutu and Tutsi to be essential traits, and '*inyenzi*' to mark the evil of the Tutsi, even when she or he might seem just fine on the surface. Genocidal language games require the essentialism condition, because if a cockroach can give birth to a butterfly, death is not the only solution.

This suggests that the harms of speech acts using derogatory terms are significantly weakened to the degree that the essentialism condition is weakened. If true, this could help explain why in some contexts, some individuals escape the harms of speech acts involving derogatory terms that deeply plague others. The escapees deny the essentialism, seeing the term used as a political action on the part of the user, and so escape the



naturalizing force of that speech act. Understanding the saying to be an action, they take it to represent someone else's view of the world and of them. By resisting taking what is said to depict reality, the escapees demystify it. Alertness to the normative import is key.

The social embeddedness of some derogatory terms gives them their breath and their depth. If derogatory terms are idiosyncratic, like 'sausage-face,' they might reveal something about the speaker or the few people who play the game. Deeply derogatory terms are not idiosyncratic, but become embedded in their own inferential networks, as well as in social practices that include how people are treated. Deeply derogatory terms are nested within practices of injustice. They empower some people, and weaken others. The social embeddedness condition was key to the entrenchment of '*inyenzi*' and its spread in frequency of use. Genocidal language games need broad engagement to do their work.

"She's an *inyenzi*," while grammatically akin to "She's a child," is a speech act of a very different order when appropriately embedded in a climate of fear and a culture of distrust. Social embeddedness and essentialism work together to create a coherent order of social practices, norms, and related concepts. Their partnership is crucial: essentialism naturalizes and reifies the categories, while social embeddedness obscures the political context that these categories construct and maintain. This stops questions before they start. Switching from calling the RPF guerilla fighters '*Inkotanyi*' (invincible), to calling them '*inyenzi*' (cockroach) as a descriptive derogation, is a fairly straightforward speech act typical of wartime propaganda. Spreading this epithet across the entire Tutsi population fostered essentialism, opening the door to genocide.

Once we are aware of the different kinds of moves within language games, we can be more sensitive to entries, internal language-language moves, and language-departure or exit moves. In genocide, the exit moves are so dramatic, the consequences of these actions so overwhelming, that we see the power of the conceptual framework in stark relief. In relatively peaceful political systems, our naming practices, our patterns of deep derogation (tied to systems of oppression), and the inferences that these terms sanction, also do damage to the individuals upon whom they most obviously work. Less obvious, but also important, is the damage this set of practices does to the society as a whole and to the individuals who live and work within these practices.

Gandhi is said to have held that "a language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers." If so, then perhaps an analysis of the derogatory terms and other forms of linguistic violence prevalent in a society is an important diagnostic of the level of material violence already present or potentially developing. We must understand linguistic violence,

and find ways to fix the problems it reveals. Saying is a kind of doing, generalizing out to other kinds of action through the inferential content of what we say and through the permissions and licenses we thereby grant. Linguistic violence is the canary in the mine. We ignore it at our peril.

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