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The Power of Language: In Politics, Genocide, and Politicide

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The Power of Language: In Politics, Genocide, and Politicide

by

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Introduction

The 20th century has been marked by the systematic termination of human life. This has taken on various forms, such as WWI and WWII, Russian purges, the Cultural Revolution in China, Bosnia, and now Darfur. The forms that are particularly troubling are the widespread occurrence of genocide and politicide. Genocide signifies any “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”¹ Politicide is defined in the same manner as genocide. However, politicide differs from genocide in that the groups targeted are identified by their political affiliation or opposition to the regime in power.²

Another way to define mass killing that coalesces these two forms is to note that, “in addition to its systematic character, genocide [and politicide] must be conducted with the approval of, if not direct intervention by, the state apparatus . . . that reflects some sort of political support base.”³

A term that encompasses both definitions was developed by R.J. Rummel, who posits that democide is “the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder.”⁴ This is another important term, then, because although there are differences between genocide, politicide, and mass murder, the motivations are always the same. The regime in power feels that it is politically expedient to eliminate a section of their population. In doing so, the government comes “between groups distinguished by ethnicity, in which their ethnicity is a calculated instrument of mobilization”⁵ and is used to pit people against

¹ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948, *entry into force* 12 January 1951.

² Jason A. Cruse. “Genocide and Politicide: Establishing Causal Links” (paper to be given at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, PA, November 1999), 10.
<http://web.missouri.edu/~umcaspolswww/papers/pp000403.pdf>, (accessed November 27, 2007).

³ Irving Louis Horowitz, *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power*, 4th edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 12.

⁴ R.J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 31.

⁵ Bill Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), 23.

one another for political reasons. In this manner democide is a succinct term that covers mass murder and alludes to the fact that genocides are politicides that fall along ethnic lines or are political machinations that exploit or exacerbate group tensions.

Nothing in the 21st century indicates that genocide or politicide will desist. In fact if one observes the crisis in Darfur or the political activities in the Philippines, Myanmar, Pakistan, Egypt, or numerous other countries, it seems clear that very little has changed. Nor is genocide simply a new phenomenon. The word is new, the crime ancient. It is as old as tribalism itself and was perpetrated by the Assyrian empire, when the Greeks razed Troy and during the Crusades and Religious Wars.⁶ Another good historical example would be Athens; the most advanced and enlightened civilization in the world, which attacked the island of Melos. When the island surrendered the Athenians, “killed all the men of military age and made slaves of the women and children.” This example may be categorized as genocide or politicide since the intent was to destroy the polis of the Lacedaemonians.⁷ Moreover, the Melians were attacked not for their ethnicity but for political reasons; because they refused to ally with Athens. This example merely serves to highlight the fact that mass killings perpetrated by governments are not a modern creation. However, the phenomena of genocide and politicide took on a particular intensity in the 20th century, in large part due to the power of the nation-state.

Max Weber argues that the modern state claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.⁸ Richard L. Rubenstein complements this argument, however, by suggesting that politicide/genocide is possible because of the power of the modern state. One of the most important powers a state possesses is the power to categorize or classify people. When a state

⁶ Alexander Hinton, ed., *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2002), 48-73.

⁷ Paul Woodruff, ed. and trans., *Thucydides: On Justice, Power and Human Nature* (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), 109.

⁸ H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77-128 .

categorizes a group as undesirable, that group may cease to have any political rights, as was true for Jews in Nazi Germany. In fact, they are no longer members of the polis, or regime in power, and therefore are stateless. “Stateless people have no rights unless they have a community who can defend them.” By categorizing people, the state can create an expendable population that is then ready for destruction and ‘unworthy’ of human rights. “By exterminating stateless men and women, they [the government] violated no law because such people were covered by no law.”⁹ In this manner, modern regimes increase the importance of the sovereignty of the state through exercise of its power. Moreover, with technology and the modern creation of bureaucracy, the state has all the instruments necessary to implement any plan it devises. For example, the Holocaust was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society.¹⁰ In fact, Rubenstein argues that “too little attention has been given to the advances in social organization that allowed for the effectiveness,” of bureaucracy. A bureaucratic society is a modern creation and connotes efficiency and rationality. The problem with bureaucracy is that while being modern it is also coldly rational and this aspect allows governments to dehumanize human affairs through compartmentalization. “An element of even greater importance was the fact that the secularized culture which substituted calculating rationality for the older traditional norms in personal and group relations did not mature fully until the 20th century.”¹¹ This indicates that the extreme end regarding a worship of rationality is potentially dangerous. Further, the fact that the modern state is, in fact, a nation-state is problematic. A nation-state may be dangerous because at heart it is a combination of “tribalism and individuate species-being.” Additionally, this “semiracist

⁹ Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History* (USA: Harper and Row, 1975), 33.

¹⁰ Hinton, *Genocide*, 48-73.

¹¹ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 22.

[nationalist] holding together of a people requires an exterior [or interior] potential enemy.”¹² Often times, the enemy may reside within the state and therein lies the danger for “out-group” citizens who are labeled as such. Yet another interesting point to raise would be that there exists a strong relationship between the state and language. The state controls power, arms, and violence, so they should be able to act in whatever manner they wish. However, the state uses and abuses language to justify democide. If the states already possess full power, then whom are they attempting to persuade? This issue will also be explored in the study, because states not only manipulate the general populace and the victims. A leader will also manipulate their government and military officials, as well as themselves.

This leads into a discussion about the reasons and causes of democide. There are numerous reasons for the increase in violent activity in the modern world. Many eminent scholars have conducted exhaustive study on this phenomenon such as Hannah Arendt, Richard L. Rubenstein, Ervin Staub, Irving L. Horowitz, Barbara Harff and others.¹³ There are numerous and variable factors that these researchers have asserted assist in inducing mass extermination. They include: a history of group persecution, tribalism, a society conditioned to obey authority, a strong state apparatus/authoritarian government, bureaucracy/organization, efficient use of language, a society with weak respect for the individual, bystanders, hard life conditions, economic or political instability or a perceived threat. These are conditions that may all be present in some form or another and when democide occurs, specifically the existence a strong state and the implementation of a linguistic processes that creates victims and perpetrators. The

¹² John Milbank, “Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 2 (2002): 305-323.

¹³ This is in reference to works, by Hannah Arendt, like Eichmann in Jerusalem and The Origins of Totalitarianism, by Richard Rubenstein, The Cunning of History, by Ervin Staub, The Roots of Evil, Irving Horowitz, Taking Lives, and Barbara Harff, Ethnic Conflict in World Politics, with Ted Robert Gurr.

point is that all of these factors are crucial, have to be kept in mind, and will be present in a country that will implement mass murder, but all of them will not be the focus of study as they may not be the overriding factors determining whether or not democide will occur. The use of language, and the fact that it is used by a strong state, are the overriding factors.

The aspect of genocide/politicide that interests me and is the subject of this study is the power and role of language in this process. Of particular interest is language that engages in classification, symbolization and dehumanization.¹⁴ While governments engage in such activities, language, in turn, is the vehicle through which regimes justify mass extrajudicial killings and also encourages the population to participate in and or be passive with respect to the genocide/politicide. Language is a fascinating facet in the study of genocide because of its power to teach and convince people to accept and commit the atrocities of genocide or politicide. Language is also used to obscure the truth. As Thucydides asserts, “the truest reason behind war is the one least talked of.” Government “actions may provide a better indication of what they want than the publicly stated declarations of their leaders,”¹⁵ such as warfare against their citizens. Genocide is the worst type of warfare. It is unrestricted warfare against the helpless and powerless perpetrated by those in power, who will use a specific arrangement of language to obscure their true activities. Regardless of the overwhelming amount of historical documentation and condemnation of genocide, it is still prevalent throughout the world. Case studies provide examples and evidence that suggest that language plays a considerable role in affecting whether or not genocide will occur. Here the idea of the power of the modern nation-

¹⁴ Gregory H. Stanton, “The 8 Stages of Genocide,” (briefing paper presented to US State Department, 1996). Also, may be found at Genocide Watch, <http://genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/8stages.htm> (accessed November 27, 2007).

¹⁵ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 10.

state intrudes again, because the characteristics of modern politics are dictated by the nation-state. So too is the language dictated as regards privileges and dominance.

A voice of the twentieth century that alerts us to the power and dominance of language in politics is George Orwell. He highlights the important role language plays in politics and the influence it exerts over the majority of people with such astute assertions as, “in our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible.”¹⁶ This is an important idea to correlate with the power the modern state possesses over their citizenry. In fact, language is an extremely effective tool for regimes that are engaging in both genocidal and politicidal activities. I will study the use of language in the cases of Germany under Nazi rule, Rwanda under the Habayarimana regime and Argentina under the military Junta. The use of language in these cases is important to understand and study. For each case, the respective governments engaged in a particular linguistic process, made up of specific and identifiable linguistic steps. If these specific language steps taken by governments can be recognized, then it will be easier to act, intervene, and possibly prevent the atrocities associated with genocide/politicide.

One important type of language employed by governments intent on eliminating portions of the population is a language of necessity or justification; language used to justify actions. First, actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits, but according to who does them.¹⁷ This type of language then defends atrocities by allowing perpetrators to justify the actions of themselves and their government. In this manner, “language is used to render certain things connected or relevant . . . to build connections or relevance.”¹⁸ It may build relevance, for instance, between the necessity to defend the country with killing “unreliable elements” of the

¹⁶ John Carey, ed., *George Orwell: Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 954-967. (“Politics and the English Language”)

¹⁷ Carey, “Notes on Nationalism.”

¹⁸ J. P. Gee, *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 12.

population in order to achieve stability and safety. This type of language may also be used to conjure a future, better world that is only achievable by certain actions that may be immoral, but are labeled as ‘necessary.’ This imagined ‘better world’ does even more than simply convince people that it is acceptable to engage in these activities, though. It evinces the idea that committing these activities is righteous and self-sacrificing. The problem with this type of language is that it is a lie; a dangerous lie that motivates the actions of people. This lie also plays into feelings of revenge and desire for power that also justify actions on a deeper psychological level. Additionally, this type of language easily leads to scapegoating, or people that will need to be sacrificed for ‘necessity,’ ‘justifiable’ reasons, or in order to achieve some goal for the state.

Following this line of reasoning, language is an instrument, which we shape for our own purposes.¹⁹ One purpose may be to create scapegoats, which people need to create because it diminishes responsibility²⁰ for people’s actions. The state needs to create scapegoats that function as the root of problems a country may be facing as well as to maintain their regime. In this manner, the use of language can be strongly connected to feelings of nationalism again, as described by Orwell in his essay “Notes on Nationalism,” whereby he defines it as two habits. Nationalism “encapsulates the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labeled ‘good’ or ‘bad.’” It also involves the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests.²¹ To engage in these types of habits, a particular set of language must be employed. Classifying or categorizing sets of humans as ‘bad’ is an important part for following through

¹⁹ Carey, *George Orwell*, “Politics and the English Language.”

²⁰ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 17.

²¹ Carey, *George Orwell*, “Notes on Nationalism.”

with genocidal plans because it dehumanizes people and creates an identity for these ‘bad’ people as enemies, i.e. they will be victims. Moreover, after an out-group is labeled as ‘bad’ they have been devalued. This leads to “just-world thinking, which is the tendency to believe that people who suffer, especially those already devalued, must deserve their suffering as a result of their deeds or their characters.”²²

This creation of bad and good is tribal in character and is also known as the division of people into in-group and out- group. The in-group is in power and usually constitutes members of the state, regime in power, or dominant group in society. The out-group is demonized through language in order to be victimized. In fact the language of euphemisms may also be used to dehumanize victims. Euphemisms are used to obscure and mask the truth behind atrocities because the reasons are too brutal for most people to face.²³ So euphemisms may be used to comfort or assuage the consciences of the perpetrators; for instance calling murder, ‘national defense,’ depersonalizes the act and makes it an act of the state, which denotes justification and marginalizes the value of the human life taken. The use of euphemisms and creation of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ is vital for creating a reduced state of consciousness. This means that a state views or creates a simplistic worldview, where everyone is good/bad, in group/out group. In addition, this euphemistic language, which is usually bureaucratic in nature, is intent on dehumanizing and compartmentalizing people. One way to correlate these languages of justification, of scapegoating, creating of groups and euphemism together, is to say that retribution may play a role in all genocide, but it does so mainly as a rationalization; it is a way of blaming the victim. Though it draws from the vocabulary of justice and of judicially administered punishment, genocide “destroys persons most often for what they are rather than for anything they have

²² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 17.

²³ Carey, *George Orwell*, “Politics and the English Language.”

done.” In this sense, retribution flows from the dehumanization that has been fastened to the victims before they are attacked.²⁴

However, that is a general way of observing the language used by governments. There is another method that may also be used to systematize the processes employed by a government intent on engaging in genocide. Within this method there are three crucial linguistic phases that exist within the eight stages of genocide outlined by Gregory Stanton. Other stages are important and incorporate linguistic properties, but ‘classification,’ ‘symbolization’ and ‘dehumanization’ are the most important linguistic indicators and tools. These three stages are particularly important because they condense the larger ideas about language. “All cultures have categories to distinguish people into ‘us’ and ‘them’ by ethnicity, race, or nationality.”²⁵ This is classification or simple tribalism. However, I would include ideology/political affiliations in order to expand the taxonomy to define conditions for politicide as well as genocide. This in-group/out-group classification of people is the simplest, initial and most tribalistic manner in which to describe and view others. This psychological stage is the first step in what Ervin Staub describes as a ‘spectrum’ or progression of devaluation.²⁶

The next stage along the ‘spectrum’ of violence that leads to genocide/politicide is symbolization. During this stage a government will, “give names or other symbols to the classifications . . . distinguish them [victims] by colors or dress; and apply symbols to members of groups.” In Germany, the groups were ‘Gypsies’ and ‘Jews,’ among others, and the Jewish population was forced to wear the yellow star. In Rwanda, the label was ‘Batutsi’ and all citizens were required to carry identification cards that would list ethnic affiliation. For

²⁴ Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian, eds., *Studies in Comparative Genocide* (Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 3-14.

²⁵ Stanton, “The 8 Stages of Genocide.”

²⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 5.

Argentina, the government symbolized anyone they chose to kidnap as ‘subversive’ or ‘enemy of the state.’ In general, there will always be labels for people in society, like ‘conservative,’ ‘liberal,’ or ‘Irish-American.’ This does not guarantee that genocide/politicide will occur, “unless they [symbols] lead to the next stage, dehumanization.”²⁷

Dehumanization occurs whenever “one group denies the humanity of the other group. Members of it are equated with animals, vermin, insects or diseases.” A significant example of this kind of language was used in Rwanda, where Batutsis were referred to as ‘cockroaches.’ This is a critical step and dangerous use of language because, “dehumanization overcomes the normal human revulsion against murder.” Groups are no longer human, they can be transported in trains like cattle, as the Jews, Gypsies, Poles, and others were in Germany. Moreover, at this stage, genocidal/politicial intentions become more evident because, “hate propaganda in print and on hate radios is used to vilify the victim group.”²⁸

For this reason, another important element in the study of language is transmission. Specifically, transmission of language that coerces and convinces people to commit genocide/politicide is what is important to understand. Newspapers, leaflets, speeches, television and radio are all important in the transmission of this language, whether dispersed informally or systematically. Transmission is important because it is customarily executed en masse and under the control of a powerful state. In fact it will become apparent that the strength of the modern state and nationalism has in fact aided the transmission and implementation of genocide. This was true in the cases of Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina. “Violence in Latin America is significant in part because so much of it is political: planned, deliberate, carried out by organized

²⁷ Stanton, “The 8 Stages of Genocide.”

²⁸ Ibid.

groups of society against members of other groups.”²⁹ This alludes to state-sponsored terrorism or genocide against segments of the population. State-sponsorship is vitally important to the success of genocide because a powerful state controls the modes of transmission, and so wields the powerful tool of language for their own advantage against their populace.

Moreover, governments wield language in a specific way. Genocide Watch supports these assertions with their 8 stages of genocide. They list classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination and denial.³⁰ Keeping these elements in mind, they aid in the development of a taxonomy or framework that I will apply to Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina in this study. Before proceeding to the cases of Argentina and Rwanda, attention must be given to the nature of language, how it was communicated and the effect in the German case. Germany was chosen because the Holocaust is considered the quintessential case of genocide in the twentieth century. Numerous experts have studied Germany and it will provide an illustrative example of the use of language, which can then be applied to Rwanda and Argentina.

Rwanda was chosen to create a diverse pool of case studies. This country is the least developed of the three cases, yet possessed elements of modernity such as a strong state with complete control of its population and highly effective use of propaganda through vehicles such as radio and newspaper that was spread from the cities to the countryside. In addition, “a conspicuous feature of Africa’s seemingly primitive conflicts is the central role played by intellectuals fomenting them.”³¹ So it is important to keep in mind the fact that, although, most of the country is underdeveloped, those in charge are not, and are usually Western educated. The

²⁹ Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1992), 8.

³⁰ Stanton, “The 8 Stages of Genocide.”

³¹ Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full*, 10.

leaders in Rwanda were also coldly rational in their planning of the genocide in a sophisticated manner. I intend to argue that although the killings in Rwanda are considered ‘genocide,’ they are, in reality, politicide that was engineered along ethnic lines by the government.

In addition, this study will examine Argentina because it is a very interesting case that is little known. Its proximity to and mimicking of Germany, France and the U.S. correlate directly with Western civilization and modernity. It also presents a clear case of politicide, which is less well known than genocide. The fact that it is politicide, though, will make it difficult to define and recognize the in-groups and out-groups. By scrutinizing these cases this study aims to suggest that the modern nation-state and its use of language is a blend of modernity and ancient tribalism that is present in all three countries and thereby could be representative of a larger spectrum of countries. What is important to keep in mind is that perspective is critical. Language shapes perspectives and “the most kind or the most brutal can appear reasonable and justified to people, depending on their perspective.”³²

³² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 127.

I. Germany Introduction

The Holocaust operated as a blend of tribalism and modernity at their worst possible conclusions. Racism, tribalism or in-group/out-group mentality merged with bureaucracy, efficient organization, and modern tools to murder at least six million people. Although genocide had occurred numerous times throughout history, the Holocaust was a new occurrence. It was new, “partly because of the magnitude of the killings and partly because of the impersonal, technological methods used: the factories of death, which were new in world history.” It is the definitive case of government sponsored, sophisticated language of genocide with a propaganda machine to develop it due to extreme consolidation of state power. Furthermore, there is also an influential ideology behind it. Ideology and language are important in this particular case because language is formulated into ideas, an ideology, “which often provide impetus to action.”¹ There are numerous facets to the language engaged in by the Nazi party. There was a language that set the Jews as an out-group, and legal language that separated them, made them vulnerable, devoid of the same rights as others, and stateless. They used a language that severely devalued and dehumanized the Jews where they became a ‘final solution,’ as well as allowed the members of the Third Reich to distance themselves from the victims. The Nazis used particular language, of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization that allowed them to perpetrate the transportation and murder of Jews, allowed the populace to ignore, accept or support these policies, and convinced the world to ignore the plight of the Jews.

How does such an enterprise in mass murder begin? In Germany and Europe as a whole, there was already a history of classification, symbolization, dehumanization and murder of Jews. To better understand the power of the language utilized by the Third Reich, we must first

¹ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 91, 121.

examine the evolution and history of language used in the country regarding classification, symbolization, and dehumanization. These particular modes of language generated an out-group based on being a Jew, and later by being non-Aryan. Language of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization were already present in Germany before the Third Reich came to power. It was not difficult for Hitler to turn the German people against the Jews because a “history of negativity towards Jews did not need to be created,” just perpetuated and fostered.² The history of classification began by labeling Jews as murderers of Christ, non-believers, and eternally damned. In fact, the refusal of Jews to convert was viewed as an attack on Christianity. This trend of anti-Semitism was aided in the twentieth century by the study of eugenics and by quasi-scientific racial dogmas that categorized inferior and superior social groups.³

II. History

Following this history of classification of the Jews, World War I only fueled the anti-Semitism and symbolization of Jews as the enemy in Germany. Germany was defeated in WWI and the German people viewed the loss as a, “‘stab in the back’ by internal enemies . . . Jews. This suited the Germans’ collective view of themselves as strong, superior, and militarily powerful.” The Germans’ perspective served to classify Jews as an enemy out-group and the language of “anti-Semitism did cement the in-group and helped it to gain followers . . . because scapegoating Jews helped Germans deflect feelings of betrayal by their leaders and feelings of personal and collective responsibility for their troubles.” Germany was intensely disorganized, dissatisfied, unemployed and ripe for a radical leader to emerge. Hitler promised order, jobs, and a purpose in life. People were disposed to accept any convenient ideas or situations that would

² Rubenstein, Richard L., *The Cunning of History* (USA: Harper and Row, 1975), 6.

³ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 101, 100.

ensure that Hitler could provide what he promised. Moreover, WWI played another important role for Germany because of the vast and modern change in warfare, whereby hundreds of thousands of people were slaughtered in a single battle. This change in the idea of warfare also changed the perspective on the expendability of people in the 20th century. In addition, “the greater the differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ the less likely it is that others’ fate is observed empathetically.”⁴ These three ideas about the Jews as an inferior enemy, the expendability of people, and a lack of empathy would combine and create the conditions conducive to genocide.

Subsequent to WWI, the German people needed a strong government to create stability where the Weimar Republic failed. When the Nazi party strove for power in the 1920’s, they were an openly anti-Semitic group. Hitler and the party emphasized the ‘internal enemies’ theory and the ‘Jewish world conspiracy.’ The language they engaged in was influential because, “in humans, feeling threatened is a psychological experience that results from the way events are construed.” While perpetuating the Jews as an out-group, Hitler also created an in-group of the Nazi party and the German people or *volk*. Being a part of this community required obedience to the strong leader and compliance with his directives regardless of personal feelings. This was also crucial because following a leader and joining a group allowed the German people to absolve themselves of responsibility for hard conditions and gave them hope for the future. Furthermore, “when threatened or frustrated people want to harm others . . . they want to harm the cause of their problems . . . but can’t identify the cause . . . this leads to displaced hostility,”⁵ that the Nazi party easily placed on the Jewish people. They displaced this hostility by continuing the cycle of classification, symbolization and dehumanization.

⁴ Ibid., 92, 95, 93, 120.

⁵ Ibid., 35, 99, 16.

III. Classification

Classification was a simple process for Hitler. He used ‘science’ and racism to create a genetic in-group and out-group mentality. He began with a concise language about race. “According to Hitler, racial principles are fundamental to all life: race is the foundation of all culture.” Nazi propaganda aimed at Jews emphasized profound devaluation, threat to racial purity and threat to German survival. In Hitler’s worldview, the German *volk* were a completely different and superior race to the Jewish people. This was critical in classifying the German people as ‘us’ and the Jewish people as ‘them.’ This was also not difficult because Jewish people already had different habits, cultural views and clothing. This was somewhat due to their way of life and somewhat due to obligations by authorities to live in particular areas, work in particular fields and wear particular symbols. People are already aware of what is different, but more so when it is highlighted. The Jews were not the only group that was classified as the ‘other,’ however. “Gypsies and eastern Europeans were also considered inferior and a threat to racial purity. This was convenient because Hitler intended to provide the German people with *Lebensraum* (living space) through conquest in the East.” In addition, Hitler created an idealized group, the ‘Aryans’ that he asserted were morally, culturally and racially superior, “whose prime representatives were the Germans.” This entire perception was an essential initiation because it spurred the process that led to genocide. The language used to classify was extremely effective because, in general, people “often accept the definition of events offered to them and act accordingly.” A good example of how perceptions affect views would be to consider that,

The very same behavior undergoes a complete change of evaluation in its transition from the in-group . . . Abe Lincoln to the out-group Abe Cohen or Abe Kurakawa . . . Did Lincoln work far into the night? This testifies that he was industrious, resolute, perseverant, and eager to realize his capabilities to the full. Do the out-group Jews or

Japanese keep these same hours? This only bears witness to their sweatshop mentality, their ruthless undercutting of American standards, their unfair competitive practices. Is the in-group hero frugal, thrifty, and sparing? Then the out-group victim is stingy, miserly, and penny-pinching.⁶

This view may be held by numerous people unconsciously, because people perceive other people in terms of groups and have prejudged views about that group. Those views had to be provided to people at some time. The language was the critical factor in determining views and perceptions about other groups and consequently how people treat others in those groups.

After extensive classification of out-groups and in-groups, or Jews and Aryans/Germans, the Third Reich utilized the language of symbolization, which marked the beginning of the process of genocide in Germany. Rubenstein notes that the Holocaust was “a thoroughly modern exercise in total domination that could only have been carried out by an advanced political community with a highly trained, tightly disciplined police and civil service bureaucracy.” Having such organization and planning aided the Nazis in efficiently carrying out steps that would allow them to dispose of large numbers of human beings. Rubenstein further outlines that the basic process of organizing the Holocaust included defining who was a Jew, depriving them of property and citizenship, and elimination.⁷

IV. Symbolization

During symbolization, a government will apply names and symbols to the victims and distinguish them from the rest of society. In the German case,

Steps were taken to separate Jews from the rest of the population. An elaborate definition of Jewishness based on the number of Jewish ancestors was created. The Nuremberg laws prohibited marriage and sexual relations with Jews. Breaking these laws could result in persecution and severe public humiliation for Aryan Germans. Germans who did not follow these laws and developing mores were labeled – for example, as friend of Jews (*Judenfreunde*) or as desecrators of the race (*Rassenschänder*), the name for people

⁶ Ibid., 94-124.

⁷ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 4.

who had sexual relations with Jews. Jews were forced to wear a yellow Star of David in public and eventually were collected into restricted living areas.⁸

The language of symbolization and legality were far-reaching during this period before actual mass murder. One of the principle purposes of the Nuremberg laws was to create set categories for Jews. This was immediately accepted by the German people. Moreover, “the categories [of Jews] had been accepted without protest by German Jewry from the very beginning.” The other purpose of the Nuremberg Laws was to create a system of legality. Legality was important because it created a large, stateless population with virtually no rights. Creating the stateless status of Jews was critical because, “it made it impossible for any country to inquire into their fate, and it enabled the state in which they were resident to confiscate their property.” This also labeled Jews and made them vulnerable. Additionally, this period highlighted the power of the state and language. “During the Third Reich ‘the Führer’s words had the force of law.’”⁹ Mere words, carried with them legality, legitimacy and the fate of a whole group of people.

The language of legality was one of the most significant aspects of the Holocaust. Even the word ‘legality’ itself obscures sordid actions the state may perpetrate. In fact, “the resulting legal paraphernalia . . . served most effectively to give the whole business its outward appearance of legality,”¹⁰ which in this case may also be called ‘respectability’ or ‘rightness,’ for most of the German populace. Furthermore, this language of legality affected the behavior of bystanders because, “the Nazi state of ‘legal’ persecution . . . contributed to the passivity of Germans (and maybe outsiders). Germans value law and order; the new laws helped create new standards of

⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 118.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (USA: Penguin Books, 1994), 131, 115, 148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

acceptable conduct. They must have helped Germans to distance themselves from the Jews.”¹¹ Due to the power of the state, the power of the legal language, the German people and Nazis did not feel that they were committing any wrong by restricting the rights of Jews and stealing their property. In fact, Eichmann, himself guilty of organizing most of the transportation of Jews to concentration and death camps, only felt, “guilty before God, not before the law.”¹² For him, and clearly many others, this belief insinuates that the state and its laws are above moral and religious constraints on actions. This is precisely how the language of symbolization works and consequently, how the language of legalese assists.

Not only did the Jews possess legally separate identities from the citizens of Germany, they were also presented to the German people as symbols of a continual threat. This symbolization process of the Jews as a threat was aided in two ways. First, the history of symbolization of Jews as a threat to society was well-established. Also, the classification by the Third Reich solidified the Jews as an out-group, which meant that it would then be easier to symbolize this group. The Nazi government built upon these foundations and then used further symbolization to ease into the dehumanization process needed to prod people to murder or accept murder. “The moral principles that prohibit killing or harming other human beings are replaced by the principle of ‘social good,’ defined as protection of the German nation from internal subversion and genetic contamination by Jews.”¹³ ‘Social good’ is defined by the state. The state has the power, in this case, to define what is good for society, how to obtain this good, and conversely, what is bad for society. When the state-defined good or bad appears extreme, it also appears necessary by definition of the state defining it. The state can make any measure needed

¹¹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 151.

¹² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 21.

¹³ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 147.

to be taken, appear legitimate and necessary through the use of language. “Underlining the absence or the corruption of legality is the idea that the state demands a higher legality than may be called forth in the name of nature, divinity, or history.”¹⁴ The Third Reich, at this stage, legally identifies Jews as stateless beings with no rights and then symbolizes them as internal threats to German society. One manner the Nazi regime eased into the dehumanization process was to create a “fantasy of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy. First Jews were symbolized as the internal enemy, but after the German attack on Russia, Jews were linked to the external enemy; the Bolsheviks. The Jews within Germany had to be eliminated before the external enemy could be defeated.”¹⁵ This was a grand mission to fight for the ‘fatherland.’ Jews became segregated, demonized, and their extermination became a divine mission for the German people and the fatherland; all because of an effective leader and effective language.

V. Dehumanization

Dehumanization is the last crucial step before murder or extermination of people. This stage in the process of genocide may be divided into two parts. The victims are devalued and dehumanized in order that they may be more easily killed. The perpetrators are desensitized, and in that manner are dehumanized themselves to commit atrocities. In addition, the perpetrators will engage in specific language that allows them to distance themselves from the victims. Language is the vital ingredient that both devalues the victim and desensitizes the executor. This process is also “made more likely by passivity of bystanders . . . including other nations.”¹⁶ This would define a ‘language of silence’ that, although not acting overtly, still acts. As omission is

¹⁴ Irving Louis Horowitz, *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power*, 4th ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 229.

¹⁵ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 104.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

considered a sin, and therefore an action, inaction in the face of dehumanization of Jews, is an action that silently approves, and consequently aids in perpetration of dehumanization.

Dehumanization was vital step in the process that led to the Holocaust. “Past anti-Semitism, learning by participation, and propaganda led Germans to see Jews as unworthy of moral considerations or empathy.” Loss of empathy for the Jews and other groups was essential for carrying out mass murder. This loss of feeling for fellow humans is induced by the language propagated by the regime in power; the Third Reich. “The German people were exposed to extensive propaganda – ‘evidence’ of the Jews’ evil nature and the danger they represented to Germany.”¹⁷ The legal language that defined Jewishness was a preliminary form of dehumanization. Due to the passage of the Nuremburg laws, all Jewish residents were forbidden the same human rights that other German citizens enjoyed. Through these laws “the Nazis emphasized this [dehumanization] by using language that indicated that their victims had been expelled from the human world of politics.”¹⁸ In effect, they were no longer members of the polis and therefore had no place in it. To an even more extreme end, they had to be banished. This expulsion from the polis signified dehumanization because it indicated that Jews were not true citizens, not Germans, and therefore not human or worthy of any dignity or considerations. In fact, they became ‘vermin’ that required extermination for the betterment of the German state or merely an obstacle to be overcome in that sense, not a group of people.

“Ideological indoctrination made killing Jews the fulfillment of a ‘higher’ ideal.”¹⁹ In fact, the Nazis also believed the Jews to be genetically inferior. It was convenient to them, then,

¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

¹⁸ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 90.

¹⁹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 134.

to justify their actions by arguing “that in nature it is the fate of the weak to perish.”²⁰ When described in this manner to the German populace at large, the actions carried out by the Third Reich must have been appealing somehow because “the genocidal society managed to garner adherents, even massive followings; not in the name of genocide . . . but through ideas held to be highly ethical: usually the virtues of both Christians and the middle class.”²¹

In the dehumanization process language serves a key function in creating a mindset for people, whereby they no longer view a whole group of people as human. “Devaluing Jews even more, regarding them as blameworthy, would make it easier to watch and passively accept their persecution and suffering and one’s own involvement.”²² In addition, certain images created, via language, for Jews, “ascribe to an adversary or a potential victim a paranthropoid identity. Once a human has been stripped of his humanity and given the paranthropoid identity, the normal impediments [to violence] cease to operate.”²³ The Nazis recognized that this was important and accompanied this language with a whole process designed to complete the dehumanization. The Jews were rounded up, stuffed in cattle cars, stripped of all valuables or personal items, listed with numbers, tattooed with those numbers, shaved, starved, and made to live in sty-like conditions. All of these conditions helped fulfill the view the Nazis had of Jews. Staub supports this contention with the argument that the Nazis “recognized the importance of making victims seem less than human. Inmates were kept hungry and helpless; they were forced to live in filth and urinate and defecate on themselves . . . another purpose was to diminish the victims and

²⁰ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 90.

²¹ Horowitz, *Taking Lives*, 20.

²² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 119.

²³ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 6.

‘help’ the SS distance themselves from them.”²⁴ As regards the victims in the Holocaust, the process of dehumanization served two functions. Dehumanization made the victims the subject of blame and therefore deserving of their treatment. It also made Jews sub-human, akin to animals or less and therefore the perpetrators could distance themselves enough from the victims to feel either ambivalent or righteous while committing murder.

The consequent distance perpetrators feel from their victims is due in large part to the language used in the dehumanization and genocidal processes. It is crucial to examine, as I shall, below, the language used in the final stages of dehumanization that blends and turns into the stage of genocide. Evidence suggests that specific language is used to mask events and actions. In this manner the language is a vital component because it allows actual murder to begin and to continue at a feverish pitch, in the case of the Holocaust.

There are numerous language techniques perpetrators will engage in while committing murder. Language becomes important for perpetrators because it allows them to “deny reality and distance the self from violent actions and their victims. Denial of obvious reality, though it consumes much psychological energy, allows perpetrators to avoid feeling responsible and guilty.” Moreover, “limited mistreatment of the victims changes the perpetrators and prepares them for extreme destructiveness [desensitizes them];”²⁵ people learn by doing. The Nazis exploited and expanded upon the long history of relations between German gentiles and Jews. All parts of society were conditioned to view the Jews as a sub-human threat and to either abuse that group or to ignore the abuse. The poor treatment of the Jews had become a social good and a social norm in Germany.

²⁴ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 137.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 28, xi.

VI. State Power, Organization, and Other Linguistic Tools

Efficient organization by the government also aided in distancing the Nazis from their actions. All parts of the genocide became compartmentalized into smaller functions. In many ways the planning, bureaucratization, and benefits garnered by Germans from exploiting the Jews correlates to state power and personal gain by the Nazis. “The Holocaust, from a Nazi standpoint, was an entirely rational process.” Through a language of justification and rationalization, the Jews also became a means and an end to power in Germany. “The liquidation of the Jewish population . . . permitted the Nazis to consolidate state power.”²⁶ This consolidation of power was aided by loyalty from the people of Germany. Group loyalty allows people to accept any language dispersed because “people are powerfully influence by groups, even in their physical perception of reality.”²⁷ The group in power in Germany, the Nazis, can develop any framework they choose to apply to the world and followers will believe it. The language used at a rally, march, speech, or any other type of gathering will be grandiose and uplifting for people’s self-concept and they will pledge their support in accomplishing whatever goals are stated. However, they will view the means to the end goal as irrelevant sacrifices that need to be made, especially if the state is the entity asking for participation.

Once power was consolidated, the Nazis began to implement their ‘Final Solution.’ However, they also used the outbreak of war to further their propaganda program and execute their ‘solution’ on a grander scale. Goebbels himself admitted that “the war made possible for us the solution of a whole series of problems that could never have been solved in normal times.”²⁸ Once war broke out, the Nazis exploited the heightened German nationalism, a lessening respect

²⁶ Horowitz, “Taking Lives,” 253.

²⁷ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 124.

²⁸ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 11.

for human life, and a higher threat level to kill as many Jews as possible. Killing Jews became a badge of honor during war time, and many Nazis, including “Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz . . . believed that killing millions of Jews was a service to his country.”²⁹ World War II changed the setting for the Holocaust and acted as a catalyst for further murder of Jews. Germany was at war with numerous countries and so therefore was not bound to act by dictates those countries may have proscribed.

Once the WWII broke out, the Holocaust was fully implemented on a larger scale than before. However, language was still important because specific types of language use had to be adhered to for perpetrators to fully commit themselves in mass murder. Language can be absorbed by people and used in order that they do not have to think in general or about their actions. Speaking of Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt asserts that “officialese” became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché.” Moreover, “the longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think.”³⁰ ‘Officialese’ is an interesting concept to consider because it alludes to the type of bureaucratic language that dehumanizes people to a job or factors involved with accomplishing a job. Bureaucracy prevents people from seeing their actions for what they are, murderous. Instead, a person worries about accomplishing a job, impressing superiors or getting a promotion. Dehumanization is complete with this bureaucratic language because a group, the Jews, gypsies, Poles, Russians, or others are no longer sub-human. There is no animosity or hatred anymore, they are considered like pests; unwanted and easily terminated without thought. This is what language accomplishes once human life is reduced to bureaucratic consequences.

²⁹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 132.

³⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 48, 49.

There are numerous examples of this dehumanizing, bureaucratic language throughout the history of the Holocaust and the actions of the members of the Third Reich. “None of the various ‘language rules,’ carefully contrived to deceive and to camouflage, had a more decisive effect on mentality of the killers than this first war decree of Hitler, in which the word for ‘murder’ was replaced by the phrase ‘to grant a mercy death.’” In this manner, the Jews are considered by the perpetrators as a dog that needs to be ‘put down.’ Some of the most revealing language used by the Nazis can be found in government documentation of the actions surrounding the Final Solution. In fact,

All correspondence referring to the matter was subject to rigid ‘language rules,’ and, except in the reports from the *Einsatzgruppen*, it is rare to find documents in which such bald words as ‘extermination,’ ‘liquidation,’ or ‘killing’ occur. The prescribed code names for killing were ‘final solution,’ ‘evacuation’ (*Aussiedlung*), and ‘special treatment’ (*Sonderbehandlung*); deportation – unless it involved Jews directed to Theresienstadt, the ‘old people’s ghetto’ for privileged Jews, in which case it was called ‘change of residence’ – received the names of ‘resettlement’ (*Umsiedlung*) and ‘labor in the East.’

Furthermore, “the very term ‘language rule’ (*Sprachregelung*) was itself a code name; it meant what in ordinary language would be called a lie.”³¹ This example of language is a clear use of deceptive language that is meant to obscure, linguistically, for the perpetrators, the true nature of the endeavor in which they have chosen to engage.

Language that obscures hideous acts serves to fuel further acts, because there are always other groups that the Nazis can target and do target. Devaluation and murder was not limited to those ethnically ‘inferior’ to Aryans. The mentally ill, mentally disabled and physically disabled were executed via Germany’s ‘Euthanasia’ program. “Individuals with impaired functioning of varied kinds were devalued and their humanity denied.” This type of behavior was also applied to ‘inferior races’ of people and through these actions, Germans became more comfortable with

³¹ *Ibid.*, 108, 85.

extermination. In fact, the doctors administering various ‘euthanasia’ techniques were, “establishing the many of the procedures later used in killing Jews,”³² both biologically and bureaucratically. The use of language was also used here to classify killings as ‘mercy killing’ and ‘euthanasia,’ which hide and obscure sinister intent.

Strict language rules were important for the Nazis. This illustrates the power Hitler and his closest advisors understood language to possess. That is the reason they had to persist in utilizing language that would obfuscate and impersonalize actions; further dehumanizing the victim through euphemistic, mechanized language. “The ultimate destination of each shipment of Jews . . . was calculated according to the ‘absorptive capacity’ of the various killing installations and also according to the requests for slave workers.” The policies of the Holocaust were also regarded as “‘emigration, evacuation’ . . . negative demographic policy.”³³ Another illuminating example would be that “instead of extermination squads there were special groups (*Einsatzgruppen*).”³⁴ Orwell highlights this exact type of speech in his essay regarding language and politics. He maintains that people use language to ‘defend the indefensible’ and euphemistic language succeeds by concealing the true intent of the perpetrators.

However, there were other various ways the Nazis justified their behavior in order to kill. In fact, Irving Horowitz argues that “the enemy [Nazis] succeeded in pushing his crimes to the outer limits of language.”³⁵ Moreover, “for whatever other reasons the language rules may have been devised, they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity.”³⁶ Some

³² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 122.

³³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 85, 217.

³⁴ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 28.

³⁵ Horowitz, *Taking Lives*, 255.

³⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 85.

people would tell themselves that “starvation is the ideal instrument of ‘clean’ violence.”³⁷ Doctors “sought justification and rationalizations. New doctors were told that gassing saved inmates from suffering . . . they made absurd comparisons, pointing out, for example, that doctors working at the front had to make choices about whom to save and whom to let die.” Soldiers coped by, “‘dealing’ with the Jews, ‘hardness’ (dismissal of human feelings for the sake of the cause), and being a good member of the group.”³⁸ They would also later use the state as a defense when many of their lawyers would claim “‘acts of state . . . which . . . rest on ‘an exercise of sovereign power.’” Some people, like Eichmann even convinced themselves they were helping the Jews. He argued that it was in the best interest of Jews to get out of the country and he helped them do this. Not only did he help Jews out of the country, he did so efficiently and with full respect to them. Or, many perpetrators would completely distort language and justify their actions, so that “instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!”³⁹ These numerous examples clearly describe to what extent the perpetrators of the Holocaust went to, linguistically, to expiate their guilt and to psychologically carry out genocide.

VII. Transmission

Dissemination of language and the power of the state in Germany were critical components that aided the Nazis in their execution of the Holocaust. Transmission of language that classifies, symbolizes and dehumanizes has to travel from the engineer of genocide to the

³⁷ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 25.

³⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 143, 145.

³⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 93, 57, 106.

populace that will engage, aide, or ignore the genocide. In this manner it plays a large role in the ‘success’ of genocide. Language demonizing the Jews “was presented to the German people on radio, in speeches, newspapers, and plays; it became part of standard school education; and it was expressed in laws. The dehumanization of Jews became part of many aspects of group life.” Propaganda and laws were the two main methods of transmission of language in Germany. As highlighted previously, as soon as Hitler came to power in 1933 he took actions against the Jews. They were dismissed from government, civil, and military jobs. However, overall, the Nazis started slowly. This is an important factor to consider regarding language because, “the Nazis had to move from words to the psychologically more demanding realm of actions.” The language had to start slowly classifying to dehumanizing because, “a process of habituation was necessary, for the Nazis themselves and for the German people.”⁴⁰

The Nazis, and Goebbels in particular, were masters of transmission of propaganda. This was aided by the strong state Hitler developed in Germany. In fact, “it was the organizational skill of the Nazis rather than their new weapons that made the society of total domination a reality.”⁴¹ The state dominated every aspect of life in Germany, including any form of transmission of ideas. They recognized this and “totalitarian rule and propaganda, once the Nazis were in control, were aimed not only at maintaining power, but also at converting the masses to Nazi ideals.” They controlled everything that could disseminate ideas, as well as the loyalty and trust of the majority of the German people. Furthermore, in general, “people easily accept propaganda or reasoning that helps them explain or justify their own actions.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 104, 119, 118.

⁴¹ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 79.

⁴² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 94, 120.

The German people were not the only people susceptible to Nazi language and propaganda, however. Their complex language rules had a purpose and were successful beyond their borders. “The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people [outsiders] ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, ‘normal’ knowledge of murder and lies.”⁴³ It worked. The outside world was cognizant of the Jewish plight in Europe but did nothing. Language has to be a substantial, influential force in politics. Language convinced the German people to commit genocide and it convinced the world to ignore or applaud it. For example, from 1942 on . . . [Americans and Europeans] knew that the Germans were systematically exterminating specifically the Jews using gas chambers and crematoria.”⁴⁴ The power of language is evident when considering that “the 1930’s and early 1940’s saw a worldwide increase in anti-Semitism. According to public opinion polls, anti-Semitism was at its highest point in the United States between 1938 and 1944.”⁴⁵ Due to the propaganda disseminated by the Nazis, areas across the world were infected; all because of language.

VIII. Conclusion

Language was clearly a driving force throughout the whole process that led to the Holocaust. There are several linguistic factors that affected and created the Germans’ perspective. A history of classification, symbolization and dehumanization of Jews was a critical foundation. Nazi ideology and propaganda affected the German world view. The language of silence embodied in passive participation by bystanders and lack of dissent affected the fate of those executed. Moreover, “the system was tremendously significant. Being part of a system

⁴³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 86.

⁴⁴ Robert Moses Shapiro, ed., *Why Didn’t The Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust* (Jersey City, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 41.

⁴⁵ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 157.

shapes views, rewards adherence to dominant views, and makes deviation psychologically demanding and difficult.”⁴⁶ The language used to shape views and create the Nazi ideology must have been powerful because the Holocaust “required and received the participation of every major social, political and religious institution of the German Reich.”⁴⁷ Language, extreme language, was clearly one of the most influential factors in the politics practiced by the Nazis.

“Serge Moscovici’s research suggests that extremely negative statements about groups are not discredited; they can affect basic, general attitudes and beliefs more than moderate statements. His findings imply that people would not immediately accept the content of such statements – for example, that Jews are murderers and seducers of children – but would devalue Jews in a general way in response to them.”

The Nazis proved to the world the susceptibility of people to manipulation, particularly linguistic manipulation. This susceptibility combined with a “strong respect for authority and strong inclination to obedience are other predisposing characteristics for mass killing and genocide . . . responsibility is relinquished”⁴⁸

In general, the Holocaust perpetrated by Hitler’s Nazi regime was a complex blend of powerful language, state power, bureaucracy and primitive racism. The Third Reich was a blend of modern and primitive characteristics. Hitler’s Germany was considered one of the most technologically advanced countries for that time period. However, they used these technologies, not to further human existence, but to kill people, based on primitive rationalities about race. “The tendency to pull together as an in-group and turn against an out-group is probably more basic or primitive.” The Germans utilized modern weaponry, organization, and language transmission to fulfill tribalistic desires. “Germans were split between rationality . . . and irrationality.” The Holocaust highlights several faults with modernity, however; the most

⁴⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁷ Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*, 5.

⁴⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 157, 19.

singular fault it highlights is the failure of people to be individuals. If people could think for themselves, language would cease to be as powerful as it is. Unfortunately, people do not think for themselves and this is evident everywhere, just more so in the case of the Holocaust. “Moral constraints are less powerful in groups than in individuals.”⁴⁹ And groups are controlled by a strong state. The language they choose to transmit creates a collective reality for their citizens and can induce actions against others.

Language, its transmission, and control by a powerful bureaucracy and state are influential weapons that can be turned against their citizenry as the Jews and other out-groups discovered first-hand in Germany. However, there have been numerous genocides/politicides since the Holocaust and they share many of the same characteristics in language. Two cases in particular that display these characteristics are Argentina under the military Junta and Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Evidence from the following case studies shall illustrate that these particular linguistic characteristics played significant roles in Argentina and Rwanda as they did in Germany.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 26, 113, 28.

I. Rwanda Introduction

The Rwandan genocide that took place in 1994 provides an interesting example of the use of language by a government. Rwanda possesses a long history of classification between ethnic/class groups, which was exacerbated by the Belgians during colonialism and continued in the post-Independence period by the Hutu-led government. It is important to note that Rwanda's genocide was perceived by many in the outside world as 'civil strife' or 'spontaneous ethnic fighting.' This is what the government projected to the outside world. However, "neither the RPF invasion in 1990, nor the onset of severe economic crisis in the early 1990s, had provoked spontaneous inter-communal violence between Bahutu and Batutsi in Rwanda. This does suggest that ethnic conflict was quite deliberately engineered."¹

Moreover, the genocide may be correctly defined as such because the government was intent on eradicating all ethnic Tutsis. However, the government also targeted Hutu political opposition leaders and Hutu moderates, which indicates and supports my previous contention that all genocides are essentially politicides. They are politicides that fall along ethnic lines alluding to the cold rationality of the government. This includes the case of the obvious genocide in Rwanda, because the classification, symbolization, dehumanization and killing were all engineered in order to maintain the power of the government. This organization of the genocide against the Tutsis was not ethnically motivated, but politically motivated.

In addition, there are other factors to consider surrounding the Rwandan genocide. First, it is important to consider the development of Rwanda. In comparison to Germany and Argentina, Rwanda is by far less developed, yet I have contended that genocide in the 20th century has been a modern phenomenon, albeit with tribal characteristics. I intend to illustrate,

¹ Helen H. Hintjens, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37 (June 1999): 248.

with the case of Rwanda, that modern technology is not the most important element in modern genocide/politicide. Language is a crucial element and the minimal technology Rwanda possessed like newspapers and radio were sufficient for Rwanda to organize an efficient genocide/politicide. Another modern element present in Rwanda was a highly organized, centralized bureaucracy and state, which further aided the government that managed “one of the highest casualty rates of any population in history from non-natural causes.”²

Moreover, concerning the issue of development, there is a stigma associated with African development and ethnic warfare. Africa is regarded as primitive with its numerous civil wars and tribal customs. But, as far as development was concerned in Rwanda, while not ‘industrialized,’ it “was usually seen as a model of development in Africa.”³ It is critical to keep in mind the perceptions of the continent and the country in order to realize that regardless of the fact that Rwanda was ‘developing,’ a government can still rationally organize a highly efficient and modern enterprise like genocide/politicide. In lieu of other developments, language becomes the predominant tool of governments. In fact, between Germany and Rwanda, “the similarities lie mainly in the extent of ideological and military preparation . . . and in the systematic use of conspiracy theories and myths to justify covert plans for slaughter.”⁴

Rwanda was on its way to becoming, and for many already was, a success story in Africa. “Rwanda in the mid-1980s was the ‘Switzerland of Africa.’ In terms of electricity supplies, clean drinking water, clinics, schools and good roads, Rwandans were relatively well provided for.” Then, suddenly there were “as many as 1 million people dead in 100 days”⁵ in 1994. So what happened? How did the government prepare its people to execute mass murder and what

² Ibid., 242.

³ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Africa* (Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1998), 2.

⁴ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 242.

⁵ Ibid., 244, 276.

kind of image, through language, did they create to keep the victims and outsiders unaware of the actual threat? There is an “old paradigm: Reality is what I say it is. Because I say so.”⁶ This is an important concept to consider in light of the fact that the Rwandan government created a reality that led many to murder and a reality of development that left many in the outside world ignorant. “Almost none of the foreign experts living and working in Rwanda expected the genocide to occur.”⁷

When the genocide did begin, the government called it ‘fighting,’ ‘spontaneous,’ or an onset of ‘civil war,’ due to the fact that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had attacked Rwanda. However, the killings were planned and systematic. They had nothing to do with ‘ancient tribal warfare.’” They had everything to do with the fact that the economy was in decline, the standard of living had fallen, there was growing dissatisfaction and opposition to President Habyarimana’s regime, the RPF was attacking, and the outside world was forcing a more democratic government. All of these pressures on the populace and the government led the government to act in a shrewd, calculated manner. To gain support and suppress opposition, Habyarimana’s regime wielded their monopoly on power, organization, and the dissemination of language to scapegoat the country’s problems and divert attention onto the Tutsi minority. The conditions in Rwanda “gave rise to a restless, deadly social layer of desperately poor, easily-to-manipulate young thugs.”⁸ It is also clear that there was a vast amount of preparation for this genocide/politicide.

Under the terms of the Arusha Accords, a transitional government was due to have been installed in Rwanda on 8 April, the day after the genocide started. The UN mission installed

⁶ Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6.

⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 2.

⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 32, 10.

in the country was due to leave on 5 April, the day before President Habyarimana's assassination. It does seem that the genocide was very carefully timed.⁹

There was clear evidence of extensive planning. There was also an extensive propaganda program, which I will discuss later.

Another issue that is important regarding classification in Rwanda is ethnicity/class. Briefly, there are numerous historians and experts that have discussed the issue of ethnicity in Rwanda. Some people, usually Tutsi, contend that the terms 'Hutu/Bahutu,' 'Tutsi/Batutsi,' Bahima (usually regarded as or with Tutsis), and 'Twa' were class differences and that ethnicity was solely created by the Belgians when they colonized. Others, usually Hutu, contend that the Tutsi were foreigners, from Ethiopia, that conquered the Hutu and enslaved them before and during colonization. There are also historians and experts that hold a synthesis of these views, with which I agree. I believe that the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle, so I will refer to the groups as ethnic/class groups. However, this is an extremely important idea to consider as it lies at the root of the assertions made by the Hutu government to persecute the Tutsis and was supported by numerous intellectuals and historians within the country. Regardless of whether or not one believes Hutu and Tutsi are different ethnically, they believe so, and that will affect perceptions and actions. "As Kangura [a newspaper] assured the Hutu, 'You are an important ethnic group of the Bantu . . . The nation is artificial but the ethnic group is natural.'"¹⁰ This is how the government operated, protecting supporters and those that were 'ethnically pure' to create their own nation; not the one they had to work with that included a diverse population. In this manner, Rwanda displays the more tribal characteristics inherent in genocide/politicide although classifying groups is always tribal in character.

⁹ Hintjens, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," 262.

¹⁰ Alison Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch, June 1999), 61. Note that the version I used was from Human Rights Watch's website HRW.org, so the page numberings will be different from the book.

For the case study of Rwanda I will examine the classification, symbolization, dehumanization, and actions that occurred. In addition, I will study the transmission of language and the political machinations and motivations, which will support my assertion that the genocide was, in reality, a politicide that happened to fall along ethnic lines. It will become clear that language played an essential role in fostering the genocide/politicide and in facilitating in the organization of the country, and execution of the killings.

II. History and Classification in Rwanda

In Rwanda, learning the history of the country is essential to understanding the development of classification, or development of in-groups and out-groups there. Some experts contend that there was a feudal system in place in pre-colonial Rwanda that included a Tutsi aristocracy and Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa all making up the rest of the poorer population.¹¹ This is important to understand in order to realize that the idea of ethnicity was not solely a Western or Hutu creation. Ethnicity, that was class related, was a part of Rwanda. While the Hutu-led government did not create this ethnicity, they certainly exploited the history of it.

Furthermore, “Tutsi and Hutu speak the same language, have the same religion, inhabit the same geographical space and belong to the same clans.”¹² For all intensive purposes, there are ‘technically’ no ethnic differences. This is what makes it so difficult to understand the genocide in Rwanda. The idea of ethnicity is shaped by history, perceptions, and language. Most experts within and outside of Rwanda cannot agree on a shared perception of the history of the country. This history is again important because perceptions, beliefs, and consequently actions, are based upon this history. “Profound disagreement exists on the nature of the distinction among Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. Some contend that they are distinct ethnic groups, even races. Others believe

¹¹ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 110.

¹² *Ibid.*, 116.

that they are socioeconomic divisions, akin to castes perhaps, or even classes—whoever acquired a sizable herd of cattle was called Tutsi and was highly considered, farmers were Hutu.”

Moreover, “the ‘official’ Hutu position, held by the previous genocidal government and backed up by substantial scientific work, contends that the history of Rwanda is one of conquest by ‘foreign’ Tutsi cattle rearers who gradually, through economic and military means, imposed centuries of oppression and exploitation on the Hutu.” The revolution in 1959 changed all of that, with the Parmehutu government coming to power after overthrowing the Tutsi king. The Parmehutu government was aided and supported by the Belgians, who changed sides during the Independence period in Africa. On the other hand,

The ‘official’ Tutsi position . . . asserts that the Banyarwanda are a single ethnic group, with the differences between Hutu and Tutsi originally reflecting no more than socioeconomic conditions. To them, it is the colonizer who is responsible for the Hutu-Tutsi divide having created the racist categories that still exist today and having fixed rigid socioeconomic inequalities.

These are two radically different perceptions of history. The Tutsi interpretation names Hutu/Tutsi labels class labels, while the Hutu interpretation declares that not only are Hutu and Tutsi different ethnicities, they are also different races altogether. “Radically divergent interpretations of history provide the basis on which collective identities are built and act as powerful justifications for current behavior.” So regardless of the differing perspectives, it is clear that there was some type of divide. The in-group included aristocratic Tutsis, and the out-group was everyone else. However, the perceived out-group was Hutu. This perception and language of Hutu/Tutsi is all that matters because ethnicity is not a matter of ‘objective’ cultural or physical distinctions but rather is a social construct, an ‘imagined community,’ preoccupied with the creation of boundaries between in-groups and out-groups.”¹³

¹³ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 13-15.

Following the pre-colonial period in Rwanda, Germany invaded, conquered Rwanda, and then lost it to Belgium. Belgium chose indirect rule as their form of colonial governance. Indirect rule was a popular choice during the period of colonialism. It includes setting up or supporting a minority group as the faux leaders of the country. This minority group is given all of the privileges of power and in return maintains order and is loyal to the colonial masters. The Belgians delegated an “important, albeit subservient, role to the king and the Tutsi rulers surrounding him in return for cooperation.”¹⁴ Obviously, this type of arrangement will lead to dissatisfaction and resentment.

Thus began the period in Rwandan history that established the foundations for later problems in Rwanda and a language of classification. “During most of the colonial period, the Bazungu [whites] were convinced that the Tutsi were more intelligent, reliable, and hardworking . . . than the Hutu.” This belief was taught in schools and disseminated through the opportunities for Tutsi, and lack thereof for Hutu (and poor Tutsi). Also, in a manner reminiscent of the Nazis, “the Bazungu instituted a system of rigid ethnic classification, involving such ‘modern scientific’ methods as measuring nose and skull sizes.”¹⁵ These policies implemented by the Belgians created the classification of Tutsi as a distinct, superior race or ethnic group. They took the differences that were already present in Rwanda and completed the classification process of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Later, these identities were further rigidified by the introduction of identity cards in 1933 that listed ethnicity as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa (who make up around 1% of the population). “The very recording of the ethnic groups in written form enhanced their importance and changed their character. No longer flexible and amorphous, the categories became so rigid and

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16-17.

permanent.”¹⁶ The written language completed the classification process and opened the door to symbolization of the two groups.

Independence came to Rwanda, following colonialism. Both groups agitated for independence, and finally elections were arranged with Parmehutu winning with an obvious majority. Full independence was gained in 1962. “By the time Rwanda gained independence, a century of myths and associated practice had created the ideology that was to underlie the post-independence instability.” There was instability due to agitation against the Belgians and Tutsi uncertainty and dissatisfaction with loss of power. Tensions rose and conflicts arose between Hutus and Tutsis. “Under these conditions, it is no wonder that the struggle for independence also became an ethnic struggle.” The Parmehutu party that came to power was a radical group that was decidedly anti-Tutsi. Later, between the years of 1961 to 1964, many Tutsis fled the country and returned to attack into Rwanda. This heightened tensions, aided classification, and caused the slaughter of many Tutsis. In fact, “these assaults [from Tutsis] were easily stopped but led to mass killings of innocent Tutsi civilians within the country, eerily resembling events 30 years later.”¹⁷ This clearly establishes a history of violence and a language of classification that was further used by the Habyarimana regime to perpetrate the 1994 genocide.

Later, when President Habyarimana found it useful, his government resuscitated this classification, aggravated it, symbolized, dehumanized, organized and murdered Tutsis and moderate Hutus. In-group/out-group was still present in Rwanda following the violent independence, even though the situation had settled. The classification had reversed itself, however. Tutsi in Rwanda intermarried, the elite lost privileges, and the non-aristocratic Tutsi continued their lives. The majority Hutu now constituted the in-group and the minority Tutsi

¹⁶ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 35.

¹⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 33, 17, 20.

were the out-group. It was not as simple as that, however. “Being a Hutu was not enough, you had to be a Hutu from the president’s northwestern region” in order to garner privilege, power, and wealth. Moreover, “northern Hutu have viewed southern Hutu as ‘Other,’ as Tutsi.” This was due to their perceived collaboration with the Tutsi aristocracy in the past.¹⁸ The northwestern region was the last region to be conquered by the Belgians and the Tutsi aristocracy. This region also resisted and considered themselves to be ‘pure’ Hutu and the true natives of Rwanda. This other distinction and classification between groups alludes to their complex nature. Furthermore, “the key to identifying communal groups is not the presence of a particular trait or combination of traits, but rather the shared perception”¹⁹ of in-group and out-group that classification provides.

Subsequent to the economic crisis that occurred in the 1980’s and the pressures on the government, Habyarimana’s regime began to intensify classification. This beginning ultimately led to a genocide/politicide that lasted from April to July in 1994. Initially “the propagandists built upon the lessons Rwandans had learned in school. It was hardly necessary even to repeat the basic assumption that Hutu and Tutsi were different peoples.”²⁰ Classification had begun and festered throughout the history of Rwanda. In fact,

In Rwanda, this perception of the country’s ‘problem’ was part of a collective (Hutu) memory easily resuscitated during crisis. It was inadequate, though, as an evocation of class differentials in Rwanda in the 1990’s, because it did not reflect the realities on the ground: the privileged class was Hutu, mainly northern Hutu, not Tutsi. Not being challenged, the perception became an effective weapon to mobilise the downtrodden youth against an enemy who was, in more ways than one, imagined.

The language of classification, in and of itself, was sufficient to resuscitate, recreate and perpetuate an imagined reality that had deadly consequences. The government “urged that ‘the

¹⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 67, 35.

¹⁹ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 15.

²⁰ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 61.

unity of Hutu, long “subjugated,” must reassert itself,”²¹ which strengthens the idea of the group and solidarity for Hutu. In addition, “old myths of Tutsi being not only ‘foreigners’ but also of a genetically different, so-called Hamitic race, and ‘scientific evidence’ related to height, blood factors, lactose digestion, and food habits, were being used until 1994”²² to aid in classification of the Tutsi group in a manner reminiscent of the Nazis.

Evidently, history played a crucial role in the development and classification of groups in Rwanda. Ethnicity or class was always present in Rwanda, but during the colonization and consequent favoritism of the Tutsi minority, these groups were rigidified. These groups then switched places following independence, whereby the Tutsis became the out-group and the Hutus became the in-group. It is important to remember, though, that only the Tutsi aristocracy had been favoured; other Tutsis lived alongside their Hutu neighbors. Also, following independence, the northwestern Hutu elite were the only ones privileged. There was a far more complex power system in place than the simple conflict between Hutu and Tutsi ethnicities. The total populations of the two ethnic groups were not naturally in conflict. The great bulk of Hutus were poor and manipulated beginning with the classification of groups, which made them view any Tutsi as the ‘other.’ The language and discourse of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ created a reality whereby actual information garnered about Tutsi neighbors working alongside Hutus became disregarded as the Hutu populace succumbed to ethnic politics and discourse.

III. Symbolization

Symbolization was the next important step in the process to implement genocide/politicide in Rwanda. This began directly after independence and according to the “1957 Hutu Manifesto . . . [which] was to be the founding document of ‘Hutu consciousness’ . . . there could never be

²¹ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 34, 31.

²² Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 30-31.

fraternity between Hutu and Tutsi.”²³ This stage of organized symbolization was then continued by the Habyarimana²⁴ regime. It took the classification of Tutsi and Hutu moderate and equated them, through language, to the enemy in Rwanda. In other words, the government symbolized Tutsi and moderate Hutu as the enemy and a threat. They created a base of fear for this out-group, and this was extremely dangerous for those targeted. This manner of symbolization was a defensive strategy for Habyarimana and his entourage. In this highly political manner, the government deflected the problems of class, privilege, and economic and political troubles, and transformed them into a problem of ethnicity and nationalism (a nationalism that only includes loyal Hutu). In fact,

Politicians faithful to Habyarimana began to organize in an informal structure called ‘Hutu Power,’ itself something of a club . . . they reacted to the selling of Rwanda [due to international pressures] by redefining the enemy within: the class antagonism and the threat of militancy which they themselves faced were converted into ‘ethnic hatred’ and a readiness to kill the ‘real’ – and now ethnicised – enemy.²⁵

This symbolization carried over to the in-group as well. The Hutu in power and the ‘Hutu Power’ movement symbolized themselves as the heroes, the protectors, the saviors of Rwanda and the Rwandan people: Hutus. “A particular lethal combination of obfuscation, terror and victim blaming is identified as having facilitated genocide.” Once again, there is evidence that this process had already begun as well, before and after independence. During this time period, “the image of the Batutsi had thus been transformed from a proud and noble aristocracy to a lazy, parasitic and cruel pastoral ‘race,’ alien conquerors to boot.”²⁶

Moreover, regarding the Tutsi, there was an extensive campaign to foster fear and hatred by the government via economic resentment. Since the 1980’s, the country had been in decline in

²³ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 31.

²⁴ The Habyarimana regime was not responsible for the Hutu manifesto document as they came to power after it had been written.

²⁵ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 22.

²⁶ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 244, 254-255.

the areas of economics and standards of living. Somebody had to be at fault, and so the Tutsi were scapegoated via symbolization. “Reading between the lines of such political rhetoric, the economic crisis was being blamed on a conspiracy of traders, merchants and intellectuals, professions in which Batutsi tended to specialise.”²⁷ This strategy was akin to the Nazi strategy of symbolization of Jews. Further, the only group that was taking advantage of their position and reaping any economic benefits were the Hutu from the northwestern part of the country. However, “a crisis rooted in class and regional interests was turned into a conflict for which an ethnic minority, ‘the Tutsi,’ was held responsible.”²⁸ The Tutsi were held responsible because they were symbolized as greedy opportunists that were used to being in power. Once the Hutu were in power, they were still thought to be plotting and prospering. Additionally, “in a clear effort to divert the resentment otherwise directed towards Hutu from Habyarimana’s region, propagandists argued that it was Tutsi, not other Hutu,” who had taken the good jobs and secured most of the wealth.²⁹ Just one of the various unfavourable symbols applied to the Tutsi was exploiter. They had been historicized as exploiters of the Hutu in the past and in the 1980s and 1990s it was no stretch for the government under Habyarimana to resurrect this symbolization of the Tutsi.

In spite of this economic/exploitation symbolization, the Tutsi were primarily symbolized as an internal enemy/threat or in alliance with the RPF. This was partly accomplished by “propagandists [who] added the myth of Tutsi unity . . . [and] linked Tutsi living inside Rwanda today both with those who had exploited Hutu in the past and with the RPF.”³⁰ There was also extensive planning and purposeful symbolization instigated by the government along these lines.

²⁷ Ibid., 256-257.

²⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 30.

²⁹ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 62.

³⁰ Ibid.

“Preparations for genocide, invariably dressed up as self-defence against the Rwandese Patriotic Front, and organization ethnicised as ‘the Tutsi invader,’ had started some two years before the actual slaughter.³¹ This occurred in spite of the fact that both Hutu and Tutsi populated the RPF. In addition, “the president and his close colleagues decided . . . to exaggerate the RPF threat as a way to pull dissident Hutu back to his side and they began portraying Tutsi inside Rwanda as RPF collaborators.” This continued further when eventually, “propagandists often used the terms Tutsi and RPF together or interchangeably.” Those in power clearly, and mindfully, symbolized the Tutsi as armed rebels and in that manner could instill fear and impel ‘defensive’ actions. This symbolization was also complemented by elites in the country. “For three and a half years, this elite worked to redefine the population of Rwanda into ‘Rwandans,’ meaning those who backed the president, and the ‘*ibyitso*’ or ‘accomplices of the enemy,’ meaning the Tutsi minority and Hutu opposed to him.” Overall, this symbolization of the Tutsis in Rwanda was extremely successful and crucial in creating an atmosphere that could foster dehumanization and then genocide. The most important element of this linguistic campaign directed at the Tutsi pertains to the fact that the propagandists persuaded “the public that the adversary stands for war, death, slavery, repression, injustice, and sadistic cruelty.”³² This is true of many genocidal/politicial regimes, and especially true in Rwanda. The Tutsi became the biggest threat in Rwanda and one that had to be eliminated.

Concurrent with the linguistic symbolization, the Hutu government also practiced policies of discrimination and a continuation of the ID cards. The ID cards were concrete symbols of group separateness. This was helpful for the government and dangerous for the Tutsi minority because

³¹ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 30-31.

³² Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 8, 62, 57.

it facilitated the genocide and maintained significant demarcations between groups.

Furthermore,

These quota systems and ethnic IDs, then, served to keep the distinctions alive and allow for social control by the state rather than for actual direct discrimination. These policies were part of the institutional structure of Hutu power, administrative ‘proofs,’ or reminders, of the fact that the Tutsi were different from everyone else, and the state was watching out for the interests of the majority Hutu.

Thus ID cards perpetuated the classification of the Tutsi as the ‘other’ and when added to the political rhetoric, fully symbolized the Tutsi as different. The fact that these ID cards were still required left many to believe that it was for the safety of the Hutu and thus led to sustained fear of the Tutsi. In addition, “ethnic ID’s allowed the perpetrators of the genocide to compile lists of Tutsi locality by locality or to check people’s ‘Tutsiness’ at checkpoints and slaughter them.”³³ So they were practical for symbolization and for murder.

Another method of symbolization that occurred in Rwanda was discrimination. It is evident that this was institutionalized because “the new Hutu elite developed a policy of systematic discrimination against Tutsi.” Also, “the army . . . and its members were prohibited by regulations from marrying Tutsi women.” This discrimination aided the symbolization and maintained the distance between the two groups. However, the Tutsi, as mentioned before, were not the only group to be discriminated against. “During the last two decades, most Hutu from the south were as discriminated against in access to schools and universities, for example, as were most Tutsi.”³⁴ This symbolized the Hutu in the south as underprivileged and thus less worthy of consideration. They were considered less pure because of possible mixing with Tutsis. This also suggests that politically, the north wanted to remain in power and privileged those

³³ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 35, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

associated with it, which were not southern Hutu. The ethnicized element was probably created to justify these actions.

Additionally, there was a massive propaganda and linguistic campaign of symbolization carried out against the Hutu by Habyarimana's government. The negative government campaign aimed at symbolizing the Hutu was focused on Hutu opposition and 'moderate Hutu.' "After the death of the General-President, all these 'moderate' Hutu, whom the almost exclusively northern military considered 'traitors of the race,' were subjected to the murderous wrath of the arm and the militias of the old regime."³⁵ This was due to the symbolization of moderate Hutu as possibly ethnically mixed and as traitors because they did not accept the propaganda produced by the government. Furthermore, the symbolization of moderate Hutu as in alliance with the Tutsi was sometimes cleverly blended with the Tutsi propaganda. This was achieved by "propagandists [who] also warned of 'infiltration' by Tutsis that had changed their identity papers to Hutu. In fact, 'real' and patriotic Hutu "were cautioned to be on the lookout for such people, recognizable usually by their too great tolerance for Tutsi and their lack of commitment to Hutu solidarity." In this manner, political opposition in the form of Hutu moderation was quelled by insinuating that those people were not really Hutu at all. They were Tutsis passing for Hutu. This caused much suspicion and was an effective tool of symbolization and language. In addition, there existed a campaign, simultaneously, to instill unity with fellow Hutu. Propagandists stressed Hutu solidarity and majority because they said, "when the majority of people are divided, the minority becomes the majority."³⁶ Overall, the symbolization of the moderate Hutu was complex and diverse in its objectives and strategies.

³⁵ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 37.

³⁶ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 63, 67.

There were other various forms of symbolization executed by the government in addition to those already discussed. For instance, “Habyarimana’s regime had ‘fostered the belief that it was the minority’s fault they were killed.’”³⁷ This victim blaming is a form of symbolization that creates the idea that the victims are the culprits and the reason that they are treated as they are, meaning poorly. The government makes this form of symbolization ‘credible’ by attributing particular actions to the Tutsi, like collusion with the RPF and plotting genocide of the Hutu. The latter plot was a clever symbolization device that was also somewhat instituted by the Nazis. This accusation of plotting of genocide by the government against the Tutsi is a strategy “called ‘accusation in a mirror’ which entailed accusing the opposition of acts that the government engages in. In this manner, propagandists “can persuade listeners and ‘honest people’ that they are being attacked and are justified in taking whatever measures are necessary ‘for legitimate self-defense.’”³⁸ This is another strategy to symbolize the Tutsi and moderate Hutu as a threat and as the enemy. The general population of Hutu are then motivated to kill Tutsi and moderate Hutu before they, themselves, are killed in the supposed plot.

Overall, the symbolization in Rwanda was highly effective in leading to dehumanization and genocide. The government’s campaign to instill fear and hatred in Hutus toward Tutsi and moderate Hutu was accomplished by portraying them as secret allies of the RPF, as plotting the genocide of Hutu, and in being the economic cause of the poor situation in Rwanda. The government was successful in this endeavor due to their extensive propaganda campaign and systematic discrimination. This provides significant evidence that supports the idea that language is a powerful tool.

³⁷ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 37.

³⁸ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 58.

IV. Dehumanization

Subsequent to symbolization and classification, dehumanization was orchestrated in Rwanda. This campaign was carried out with specific language that took the language of the ‘other’ and the ‘enemy’ further. The language must have been effective because the killing was personal in Rwanda. People were physically chopping up and mutilating to death, old friends, neighbors, acquaintances, church members, and soccer teammates. In other words, people are killing people they know. In addition, there was less ‘sterility’ if one could call it that. Killing was not as impersonal as gassing, or shooting (though that did occur frequently in Rwanda), or starvation. Killing with a machete involves extremely close contact, physical exertion, and is more graphic. This is not to say that this type of killing is better or worse. The point is that it is different. These are not natural actions (though murder rarely is); they must be cultivated through a constant barrage of language and discrimination that prepares people to commit such atrocities. Along these lines, dehumanization is the final linguistic preparation step employed by those in power to motivate the killers before and during the genocide.

Following the symbolization of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda as allies of the RPF, those in power began to dehumanize and demonize all of these groups. For example, “after 1990, opponents of the RPF called its troops *Inyenzi*, cockroaches.” Mugesera, an important government official, takes this further and “calls them [the enemy] ‘vermin’ that must be ‘liquidated.’”³⁹ This was an important hate speech given in Rwanda and clearly, linguistically, leads the way for violence to occur. Moreover, “parallels have been drawn, too, regarding the way ‘Hutu Power’ extremists demonized Rwandans of Tutsi origin, which happened ‘in a

³⁹ Liebhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 62, 69.

manner strikingly reminiscent of Nazi images of Jewish people.”⁴⁰ Also, the dehumanization feeds into violence and continues throughout the terror perpetrated by the government. In this manner, “violence solidifies ethnic prejudice . . . this can well be achieved through further dehumanization and increased emotional distance from the target of the violence.”⁴¹ In other words, the more the language is used and the more actions are taken, the less human the victims become. Furthermore, the RPF and by extension the Tutsi and moderate Hutu “were reputed to behave in ways that placed them outside the norm of humanity; they were depicted as depraved beasts, capable of atrocities of all kinds including cannibalism, rape, and other forms of deviance.”⁴² Direct language that named the out-groups as vermin and sub-human encapsulates just one manner of using language to dehumanize.

Another manner to dehumanize victims is through the use of euphemistic language. This aids the perpetrators in viewing the victims as a mission or work and disguises the nature of the act they are committing; murder. For example, “ambiguity was deliberately cultivated during preparation for the genocide, and even during its implementation. Thus the genocide was referred to as a big job, *akazi gakomeye*, or special work, *umuganda*; killing was also repeatedly referred to as tree felling.”⁴³ Massacres were also “known as ‘work’ and machetes and firearms were described as ‘tools,’”⁴⁴ while “chopping up men was ‘bush clearing’ and slaughtering women and children was ‘pulling out the roots of the bad weeds.” This type of language is powerful because it helps the perpetrators cope with their actions and not see the horror and wrong in the acts. Because this language helps the perpetrators handle their horrific actions, it enables those actions to continue; therein lies the power of language. It is also important to keep

⁴⁰ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 33.

⁴¹ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 34.

⁴² Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 267.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁴⁴ Liebhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 11.

in mind that, “on the other hand, those addressed were reminded of their duty to obediently take part in this ‘special shared work.’”⁴⁵ Rwandans were used to ‘shared’ work for the state and so the euphemistic language relates murder to murder for the state and fulfilling one’s duties to the state. This makes the unnatural actions of murder somehow feel more natural and more connected with normal duties they may have had to carry out.

An additional use of calculated dehumanizing language was engaged in by the state during the genocide. “Beginning in the week of April 11, government officials exploited the Tutsi impulse to seek refuge and promised them protection if they would assemble in designated sites” where they would slaughter them en masse more easily.⁴⁶ This campaign to use language to trick the Tutsi into entering upon their own murder was dehumanizing because it treated the Tutsi as animals to be flushed out of hiding. It is by no means humane to devise strategies, linguistically, to trick the victims into making their mass murder easier on the perpetrators. Further,

Toward the end of April, authorities declared a campaign of ‘pacification,’ which meant not an end to killing, but greater control over killing. . . . They ordered militia and other citizens to bring suspects to officials for investigation and then murder instead of simply killing them where they found them. Authorities used ‘pacification’ also as a tactic to lure Tutsi out of hiding to be killed.

This language used to control the situation and allow the state to ‘investigate’ and then murder creates an illusion of legitimacy for the actions and prettifies murder. Lastly, actions taken by the government and those in power further illustrate the level of dehumanization that took place against the out-groups. “These extremists killed . . . and sent their [victims] bodies ‘back to Ethiopia’ . . . The imagined origin of ‘the Tutsi,’ along with their (poorly understood) migrations and conquest of Rwanda, were evoked by power-crazed Hutu politicians to instill ‘ethnic

⁴⁵ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 268-269, 269.

⁴⁶ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 161.

hatred.”⁴⁷ This means they literally sent bodies down the river, out of the country. These actions are revealing. Not even dead bodies were sufficient for extremists. They believed fervently that the Tutsi and moderate Hutu were completely different from them and even their bodies could not remain in Rwanda.

On the whole, the process of dehumanization was successful in Rwanda. The evidence for the power of this process and language can be found in the resulting actions that were affected by this language. This type of language that motivates behavior and euphemizes in order to disguise the true nature of the actions is critical in ensuring that genocide will occur. For this reason, though there are others, transmission of this type of language is extremely dangerous and aids in the process of dehumanization.

V. Transmission

Transmission of language served a critical purpose in the genocidal/politicial process in Rwanda. Press that criticized the government was dealt with harshly and there was a proliferation of ‘hate press’ that promoted violence against Tutsi and moderate Hutu. This transmission was accomplished mainly through radio, but also through political meetings, speeches, pamphlets, cartoons, music, and newspapers. It is imperative to keep in mind that whatever developmental deficit Rwanda possessed in comparison to Argentina and Germany, the government still managed a sophisticated propaganda campaign, which attests to the power of language. General Romeo Dallaire, who warned the U.N. of “public incitations to murder in the press and on the radio, highlighted this power and danger.”⁴⁸

The radio, was without a doubt, the most effective tool of transmission in Rwanda before and during the genocide. Before the genocide took place, “under the cover of the newly-established

⁴⁷ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 9.

⁴⁸ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 20.

freedom of the press, they [propagandists] blared forth messages disseminated more discreetly by officials.” The radio disseminated the language that symbolized and dehumanized the Tutsi and moderate Hutu through the use of sophisticated propaganda. This is apparent when considering that among other evidence there was a note circulated among propagandists in Rwanda and the

Author of the note claims to convey lessons learned from the book [*Psychologie de la publicité et de la propaganda*] and drawn from Lenin and Goebbels. He advocates using lies, exaggeration, ridicule, and innuendo to attack the opponent, in both his public and private life. He suggests that moral considerations are irrelevant, except when they happen to offer another weapon against the other side. He adds that it is important not to underestimate the strength of the adversary nor to overestimate the intelligence of the general public targeted by the campaign. Propagandists must aim both to win over the uncommitted and to cause divisions among supporters of the other point of view.

Obviously, there is strong evidence, then, to suggest that the propaganda campaign, classification, symbolization, and dehumanization were all extensively planned and coordinated by the government and other powerful and influential groups within Rwanda. This contention is also supported in light of the consideration of “similarities in technique [which] suggest deliberate coordination among propagandists and between them and government officials.”⁴⁹ This organization also attests to the strength of the state in coordination as well as the high level of organization of the genocide.

Once the genocide began, the radio became one of the most powerful weapons and tools of the perpetrators. To ensure cooperation, the extremists used force and “they used the radio to ridicule and threaten administrators and local political leaders who had been preaching calm.”⁵⁰ In addition, over “*Radio Libre Mille Collines*, Hutu extremists then openly called for the destruction of the Tutsis—“The graves are only half full, who will help us fill them up?”⁵¹ The

⁴⁹ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ Wayne Edge, *Global Studies Africa: Updated Eleventh Edition* (McGraw-Hill, 2008), 81.

radio also began to operate more specifically. “Radio RTLM . . . communicated the orders for implementing the killings . . . it instructed people to erect barriers and carry out searches; it named persons to be targeted and pointed out areas which should be attacked.”⁵² The radio was extremely implemental to the genocide. In fact, “the killing squads (*interhamwe*) were thus often able to discover people who were hidden with relatives or neighbors through reports on the radio.”⁵³ Radio motivated people to continue killing, it instructed, identified victims, organized and “became for most people the sole source of news.” This ‘news’ was also propaganda used to motivate killings. For example,

Both on the radio and through public meetings, authorities worked to make the long-decried threat of RPF concrete and immediate. Throughout the country they disseminated detailed false information, such as reports that Tutsi had hidden firearms in the bushes behind the Kibungo cathedral, or that they had prepared maps showing fields to be taken from Hutu in Butare, or that they had killed local administrative officials in Nyakizu. Authorities counted on such news to convince Hutu that their Tutsi neighbors were dangerous agents of the RPF who had to be eliminated. Community leaders and even clergy assured Hutu that they were justified in attacking Tutsi as a measure of ‘self-defense.’⁵⁴

Constant false news reports continually fostered the frenzy of killing and the fear of the enemy that spurred on killing for reasons of self-defense.

There is also evidence that suggests that the government was well aware of the importance of radio; that in fact, they recognized its integral position in the implementation of the genocide. Case in point, “so important was this means of communication that officials admonished citizens to keep listening to the radio for instructions from the interim government.” Furthermore, “one foreign religious sister who traveled from Kibuye to Butare during the height of the genocide reported that she had seen new radios at every one of dozens of barriers where

⁵² Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 25.

⁵³ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 268.

⁵⁴ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 60, 13.

she had been stopped en route.”⁵⁵ Popular music even became a tool for the government via the radio and was used “for ridiculing Bahutus who did not fall in line with Hutu power extremists, or did not sufficiently hate Batutsis.”⁵⁶ Clearly the radio was vital to the success of the genocide/politicide. This signifies a power that language possesses, especially when particular language is broadcast massively and at all times to a general public.

In addition to radio, newspapers, speeches, and meetings also played a key role in the transmission of language. It is important to note that there were some opponents to the regime that were able to transmit their ideas. However, “any critical press was at the risk of one’s life or freedom, and intellectual and academic speech was closely regulated.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, “a vibrant press emerged in Rwanda almost immediately after state controls were relaxed in 1991.” This meant “criticism of clannish northern dominance in political life and the army was expressed publicly for the first time.” However, “the ‘Gisenyi boys’ responded by banning papers, taking them over, and distributing counter-information.”⁵⁸ In this manner, the government closely monitored, controlled, and repressed any ideas or perspectives that countered their own.

Moreover, the government excelled in the distribution of counter-information and incitations of violence towards their enemies: Tutsi and moderate Hutu. “One of the most virulent voices of hate, the newspaper *Kangura* . . . [was] published and sold in the capital, but urban workers . . . carried copies of the better-known newspapers out to the hills.” In this manner, the whole country was ‘informed’ and ‘educated’ about matters in Rwanda, and specifically about Tutsi and moderate Hutu. The major newspaper *Kangura* would create articles like the one published in December of 1993 that begged the question, “What if someone brought

⁵⁵ Ibid., 25, 58.

⁵⁶ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 267.

⁵⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 23.

⁵⁸ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 261.

back the Hutu Revolution of 1959 to finish off these Tutsi cockroaches?” This was the cover story of a respected national newspaper. Transmission of hate was easily accomplished in Rwanda. Further, there was no way to be ignorant of these sources of transmission. Most people had a radio, or there was a way to listen to one. Newspapers were carried out to every part of the country and could be read to the illiterate. Also, “in many cases, the written word was underscored by cartoons, most of which were so graphic that they could not be misinterpreted.”⁵⁹

As mentioned previously, in addition to newspapers and radio, pamphlets and meetings were also used to transmit propaganda. For example,

In his pamphlet, Mugesera weighed in with the same idea, asserting that the Tutsi intended to: ‘Establish in the Bantu region of the great Lakes (Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania, Uganda) a caste kingdom for the Hima-Tutsi, an ethnic group that considers itself superior, on the model of the Aryan race, and which uses Hitler’s Swastika as its emblem’⁶⁰

Here is a great example of transmission and accusation in the mirror that was previously discussed. The media in Rwanda was shrewd and constantly bombarding the general public with language that would allow for the murder of out-groups. Additionally, there were numerous party meetings, rallies, and speeches that disseminated language of ideology of the government.

Overall, “the Rwandan regime and its supporters made use of some sophisticated techniques of disinformation, which seem to have been learned from a close examination of wartime propaganda elsewhere.”⁶¹ They used these techniques to their full advantage and transmitted them using numerous and effective methods. The scope of the government’s campaign was impressive for the level of development in the country. This scope could be correlated with the power of the state in Rwanda.

⁵⁹ Liebhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 58, 62.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶¹ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 266.

VI. Power of the State and Organization

The state had a great amount of power in Rwanda and “the nature of the Rwandan state must be seen as absolutely central.” This aided it in the enterprise of genocide/politicide. The amount of power and organization made the implementation of the genocide/politicide operate efficiently and ensured that the state had power and reach everywhere in Rwanda. I will examine the development of the state in Rwanda, particularly the Habyarimana regime. I will also briefly examine the Rwandan state before Habyarimana came to power. During the genocide Habyarimana was dead; however the interim government took power efficiently and headed a state that Habyarimana had created. The government is particularly culpable and complicit regarding genocide/politicide because “it can be that for most people 'government authority overrides the usual prohibitions about killing one's fellow men.'”⁶² Though citizens are in no terms blameless, the state is the deciding factor for whether or not a genocide/politicide will occur because the state possesses power, control, will, organization, and the language that will direct their citizenry.

Again, it is important to highlight the fact that the Rwandan state became extremely powerful and controlled most aspects of life in the country. This complete control enabled the state to fully coordinate the genocide/politicide in an efficient manner. In fact, “if Rwanda can be said to be an example of a failed state, it is certainly not because the state was weak or ineffectual; if anything, the state became so powerful and efficient that it crushed and overwhelmed Rwandan society completely.” This facet of the genocide also questions modern ideas about sovereignty and state power because these are normally marks of developed country and positive connotations. It is positive in comparison to failed states or weak states that cannot govern effectively. However, “Rwanda illustrates the danger of an efficient and centralised state that

⁶² Ibid., 244, 271-272.

‘does not embrace the entire *polis*.’⁶³ In fact, the Rwandan state did not embrace members of the polis that were deemed a threat to the state. Furthermore, the regime in power, or the state, wishes to maintain that power by any means. Due to these machinations, the state will wield its power to full advantage and purposefully plot whatever may be found necessary to safeguard power. In the case of Rwanda, the state maintained power by repudiating members of the ‘polis’ that could be scapegoated, like the Tutsis, or who were threats to power, like the moderate Hutus.

There were numerous strategies employed by the government that led to centralized control of power and eventually to the mass killing of people. First, the government of Habyarimana, “killed many power holders of the First Republic [Hutu], and its internal security kept a tight lid on any opposition or dissension for almost two decades.”⁶⁴ These actions alone suggest a disregard for human life or true belief in the Hutu Republic. In addition, these actions attest to the false sincerity on the part of Habyarimana’s regime toward an actual Hutu cause, while continuing to support the contentions that the regime was merely calculated and killed for reasons of political expediency. Following the reconsolidation of power, there existed an “‘almost monstrous degree of social control’ of the Rwandan state over almost every aspect of people’s lives. Prior to the genocide, a form of ‘chillingly purposeful bureaucratic control’ was exercised over the population by governmental authorities.” This meant that “since ‘the state is present everywhere . . . Orders travel fast and well from top to bottom.’ The result was a highly efficient machinery of government that enabled the implementation of a complex genocide plan in a short time span, using highly effective propaganda techniques and with a high degree of military preparedness.”⁶⁵ Moreover in conjunction with this organization, the development ideology contended that Rwanda had a need to develop to improve the lifestyle of the poor Hutu

⁶³ Ibid, 245.

⁶⁴ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 23.

⁶⁵ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 270, 271.

masses. In order to do so, development agencies needed to work closely with the government of Rwanda. “This ideology serves to legitimize the government’s intrusive presence in all aspects of social life.”⁶⁶ In fact, the language of development assisted the government in securing complete power, control, and organization.

This organization and totality of power fostered by the government enabled the genocide/politicide to be implemented quickly. In fact, the organization and transmission of language via radio are truly modern elements that need to be recognized. They are modern in that radio was developed around the beginning of the twentieth century and such tight state organization and bureaucracy is a modern phenomenon as well. In addition, the organization included extensive planning. For example, “businessmen close to Habyarimana imported large numbers of machetes, enough to arm every third adult Hutu male”⁶⁷ in preparation. Additionally, “the national army . . . also trained death squads whose recruits came mainly from among the landless and unemployed youth. These deadly militias were known as *interhamwe*.”⁶⁸ By 1992, “members of ‘Hutu power’ militias were being trained in techniques of hunt and destroy operations, rather than in open armed combat,”⁶⁹ which indicates malice aforethought. Furthermore, the “rapidity of the first killings gave the impression of large numbers of assailants, but in fact their impact resulted more from ruthlessness and organization than from great numbers.”⁷⁰

However, even within the framework of organization, transmission of language is still used as a tool for participation. Some examples can be found when “the military encouraged and, when faced with reluctance to act, compelled both ordinary citizens and local administrators

⁶⁶ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 23.

⁶⁷ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 9.

⁶⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 31.

⁶⁹ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda,” 247.

⁷⁰ Liebbhafsky Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 10.

to participate in attacks, even traveling the back roads and stopping at small marketplaces to deliver the message.” Note the fact that the military was ‘delivering the message’ and ‘impelling’ through coercive language. Another linguistic facet present in the organization of the killings was compartmentalization, whereby

The interim government gave its officials and citizens the cover of ‘legitimate’ orders to hide from themselves and others the evil they were doing. Administrators broke the genocide down into a series of discrete tasks, which they executed without consideration of the ultimate objective of the work. Cultivators turned out for the long-standing practice of communal labor although they knew they were to cut down people as well as the brush in which they found them. Priests announced public meetings without consideration of the message to be delivered there. Businessmen contributed money to the ‘self-defense’ fund established by the government as they had contributed similar collections in the past, even though the money was to buy ‘refreshments’ for the militia and fuel to transport them to their places of ‘work.’

In this manner, the organization and language combined to form a powerful force, through which the government was able to manipulate people by routinizing, compartmentalizing, and legitimizing homicidal actions. Yet another linguistic element inherent to the organization in Rwanda is reminiscent of many authoritarian regimes. This element of mobilization included “glorifying the party and its head. In addition to the work days, people were obliged to participate in weekly sessions of animation, propaganda meetings leavened with poetry, music, and dance created to honor Habyarimana.”⁷¹ These meetings further organized the general populace of Hutu, as well as bolstered the plethora of propaganda, classification, symbolization, and dehumanization. However, these meetings also added the element of nationalism (of the Hutu in-group) and cult of personality regarding Habyarimana.

By and large, within the organization effort in Rwanda there existed several linguistic elements that make it interesting to include in this study. Furthermore, the organization by those in power also reveals a modern element of the genocide/politicide. It is safe to suggest that

⁷¹ Ibid., 12, 15, 39.

organization led to a highly efficient killing apparatus that was enabled through extensive control and state power. All of these elements directly contributed to the ‘success’ of the killings in Rwanda.

VII. Conclusion

The politicide in Rwanda that mainly fell along ethnic lines was aided by intensely modern uses of organization, state power, and language, specifically sophisticated uses of propaganda. It is important to conclude and examine several interesting elements of the killings briefly, though. First of all, the killings in Rwanda illustrated a blend of primitivism, modernity and sophistication, because although the killings were carried out with the military, then machetes, “the *interhamwe* had killed ‘five times as fast as the mechanised gas chambers used by the Nazis.’”⁷² Furthermore, it was carefully timed, where “the genocide began within a half-hour of the April 6, 1994, death of . . . President Juvenal Habyarimana.”⁷³ It is vital to highlight these facts to stress that this ‘genocide’ was callously planned in the extreme with particularly political motivations that make it a politicide. This is especially true when recalling that Hutu were also included as among the victims, and not by accident. In fact, “the wealthy, who, when the crisis deepened, expertly reframed the nature of the crisis – from class struggle to ethnic struggle.” This is evident when examining the planning and calculated strategies employed by the Habyarimana regime. It may be better to contend that

Rwanda in 1994 was an extreme yet familiar case of how politicians threatened by democracy may attempt to retain their privileges through the fierce construction and exploitation of ethnic difference. Ethnic strife, in other words, is a modern phenomenon, not a remnant of ‘ancient’ Africa . . . ‘it is politicised intellectuals who are at the origin of the massacres, and not the peasant masses.’⁷⁴

⁷² Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 32.

⁷³ Edge, *Global Studies Africa*, 80.

⁷⁴ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 10, 33.

These political intellectuals took advantage of the power of the Habyarimana regime and of the means of transmission of language.

Moreover, there is also strong evidence that the language engaged in by the Rwandan government and 'Hutu power' extremists was extremely effective, not only in Rwanda. Along these lines, the propaganda produced in Rwanda was also calculated for exportation to further the ends of the government. "Those who planned the genocide did so meticulously, indeed coldly, and lambasted the outside world with the received image of the killings as 'tribal'."⁷⁵ It then becomes extremely interesting to observe "the extent to which these intelligent foreigners have accepted the ethnic clichés of the Habyarimana regime. It demonstrates the ease with which history can be abused, especially when the available historical knowledge is characterized by contradiction and ambiguity."⁷⁶ The purpose of this exportation of language is to convince the outside world that there is no genocide or politicide at all. The government succeeds, for a time, in portraying the planned killings as spontaneous, ethnic, and relating to civil war and the true feelings of the people of Rwanda. This was not the case, but it was successful in that it kept other countries from intervening sooner. Countries and international organizations like the U.N. and the former OAU refused to intervene, then, because "sovereignty, and the violence was explained as a civil war, due to the RPF invasion of the country."⁷⁷ However, these actions on the part of the international community give undue power, recognition, and legitimacy to the concept of sovereignty. This is dangerous because any actions the state wishes to carry out are then legitimized and encouraged, because of a lack of consequences or censure from the international community.

⁷⁵ Hintjens, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," 274.

⁷⁶ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 27.

⁷⁷ Hintjens, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," 273.

Additionally, there is numerous evidence attesting to the efficacy of international propaganda put forth by those in power in Rwanda.

The Rwandan 1994 genocide in particular . . . was for too long and at too great a cost portrayed by the media as rooted in tribalism. Rwanda's bloodbath was not tribal. Rather it was a distinctly modern tragedy, a degenerated class conflict minutely prepared and callously executed. Most of the world failed to see it that way, and continued to think of the conflict – this after all was Africa – in terms of 'centuries-old tribal warfare.'⁷⁸

The type of language alluded to here is crucial to explaining why there was no immediate international intervention in Rwanda that would have halted the killings. This language relegates state actions to 'age-old' hatreds, and therefore inevitable and natural. The politicide in Rwanda was neither. This language suppresses a response, and it is in this manner that the language is a powerful and dangerous tool. This is what occurred with the situation in Rwanda. Another interesting fact to consider would be that "the former director-general of the Swiss Development Cooperation agency, for example, described the Tutsi as an 'arrogant and pitiless' group that considers itself superior to the Hutu." What does this kind of example say about the power of language beyond borders?⁷⁹

Obviously, the language wielded by the Habyarimana regime was extremely effective. They classified the in-groups as Hutu, specifically from Habyarimana's region, and the out-group as moderate Hutu and all Tutsi. The symbolization that took place created an out-group that was associated as dangerous and in collusion with the enemy. Further, the dehumanization demonized all members of the out-groups and heightened the fear on the part of the masses of Hutu. Transmission was numerous, variant, powerful, and far-reaching. This was assisted by the power of the state and the high level of control and organization that existed within the country. Moreover, specific language was engaged in during the genocide that aided the

⁷⁸ Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda*, 9.

⁷⁹ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 27.

efficiency and influenced outside sources from intervening. In general, language played the crucial role in the success of the genocide. This is clear from the vast amount of evidence presented. Lastly, the evidence also suggests that due to the calculated planning and the expediency and inclusion of moderate Hutu, the genocide in Rwanda may safely be defined as politicide mainly falling along ethnic lines.

I. Argentina Introduction: History

In 1976, the Argentine military overthrew President Isabel Perón in a *golpe de estado*, or a military coup. This political change marked the beginning of the ‘Dirty War,’ state-sponsored terrorism, or politicide in Argentina. Around five percent of the disappearances occurred from 1973 until the coup. However, once the military had full control, the number of disappearances increased dramatically.

It is important to note that the mass killing in Argentina was a clear case of politicide, meaning that groups of people were targeted because of political affiliations, actions, thoughts, or words. The government organized and orchestrated their torture, disappearances, and deaths, but not for ethnic or religious reasons.¹ The government’s motivations and consequent language stemmed from an ideological base.

Additionally, it is important to understand the history of instability in Argentina, and have an overview of the events surrounding the Dirty war. An excellent source for the history of the military dictatorship is Marco Novaro and Vicente Palermo’s “Historia Argentina.” From 1976 to 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military dictatorship, or ‘Junta.’ This government was authoritarian in nature and governed by the leaders from the three military branches in Argentina: Jorge Rafael Videla (Army), Emilio Eduardo Massera (Navy), and Orlando Ramón Agosti (Air Force). Videla was the President of Argentina from 1976-1983, in a period that is now known as the ‘Dirty War,’ or *Guerra Sucia*. Argentina had a history of instability with six coups in between 1936 and 1976. There were numerous reasons for the 1976 coup: economic chaos (both in Argentina and worldwide), crisis of authority because Juan Perón died in 1974, and his widow, Isabel took power, but was run by the military, fights between factions, and

¹ Argentina Comision Nacional sobre la Desaparicion de personas, “*Nunca Más* (Never Again),” 1984. Part I, The Repression. http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/neveragain/neveragain_004.htm, (accessed July 17, 2007).

uncontrollable violence from both sides. Because of the violence, the military intervention was welcomed because the people wanted law and order. The new government announced their proposition to reconstruct an authentic republican democracy. However, they assumed total power and instituted immediate repression of the judiciary and rights, such as habeas corpus. Following their elevation to power, the new military-run government began a campaign of propaganda against ‘subversives’ and clandestine terrorism. This included kidnapping, sequestering, torture, detention in clandestine camps (concentration camps), disappearances, and death. First the Argentine military attacked the leftist armed forces, and then moved to attacking the leftist sympathizers, workers (union members), students, professors, intellectuals, lawyers, priests, and writers/journalists. Free speech was thus silenced. Despite this political climate, the Junta had support from businesses and businessmen, ecclesiastics, and politicians. The majority of society of Argentina lived life, interested in sports, television, or vacations. However, the Junta’s initiation of a Process of National Reorganization produced profound damage to society and ultimately ruined the economy, especially the industrial sector, which only worsened the situation in Argentina. Then, the government suspended political activity, prohibited the right to assemble, reinstated the death penalty, and continued clandestine extrajudicial killings. With respect to these extrajudicial killings, the estimated amount of people executed ranges from 9,000 to 30,000.²

Here too, language plays a substantial role in a mass killing coordinated by the state. Again, it is important to highlight the significance of politicide in the case of Argentina. Because there were not already existing in-groups/out-groups due to religion or ethnicity, the government had to create these groups. This, consequently, affects the taxonomy I outlined previously. The

² Marcos Novaro and Vicente Palermo, *Historia Argentina, La Dictadura Militar 1976/1983: Del Golpe de Estado a la Restauración Democrática* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paídos, 2003).

linguistic steps relating to politicide are still present; however, their presence and diffusion will not be as obvious as in the cases of Germany and Rwanda. Regarding Argentina, the state and its supporters may be defined as the in-group. On the contrary, the out-group created by the state would include those defined by the state as the ‘enemies of the state’ and ‘subversives.’ The case of Argentina is important to understand because of its differences and similarities from the cases of Germany and Rwanda. The events that took place in Argentina are especially prescient because politicide or political genocide “has become the primary form of mass killing in our time.”³ Obviously there are unique cultural and political reasons why Argentina/Rwanda engaged in genocide, what interests this study is the language utilized.

As with the case of Germany, Argentina possessed a history of classification of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ with the military and civilians due to a history of military rule. This was accompanied by a national pride in the people of Argentina’s European blood and relative economic success until just after World War II. All of which led to proud, nationalistic feelings that came under attack when the country’s economy declined. Argentina, while having a strong military, did not have an impressive history of democracy and respect for civilian and human rights. In fact, even Juan Perón, the ‘man for the people,’ had dirtied his hands and “also created a police state, using informers and torturers . . . Perón’s (1946-1955) administration prepared the way for the terror described in *Nunca Mas*.”⁴

This history of a strong state, strong feelings of nationalism and strong military combine to explain the dichotomy in Argentine society between military and civilian or right and left. The Argentine military and government did engage in a process of classification between ‘them’ and

³Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

everyone else. This respect for strong government and disdain for dissent were aided by the advent of the Cold War and the ideology of the ‘international fight against communism.’ Furthermore, “strong anticommunism had become a major factor in their [Argentine] thinking on both domestic and international politics since 1930.”⁵ The domination of Cold War politics internationally after 1945 made anti-communism and the fight a more prominent objective than before.

Following along the lines of Cold War politics, the military classified themselves as the strength of the country. “They [the military] often felt contempt for civilians and especially politicians. They had little faith in democracy and regarded political parties as unnecessary.” This meant the military had full confidence in either a strong leader or general and also felt that the military was its own class, its own group or in-group. Everyone else was a member of the out-group and possibly a threat. This potential threat posed by the citizenry was highlighted for the Argentine military by Fidel Castro. Anticommunism in Argentina was strongly affected by Castro’s revolution in Cuba, where he executed most of the officers in the military, and by their close relationship with the United States, who trained officers in anti-insurgency. The rhetoric of anti-communism would later aide the Junta in symbolizing Leftist groups as a threat to the state. Another facet of the government to consider would be the indications that the Argentine military possessed the capacity for mass murder. The brutal actions of the government during Perón’s first reign and the fact that the military, “showed admiration for the German military and strong fascist sentiments during World War II,”⁶ illustrate this capacity.

The sentiments of the military and the new anti-communism ideology adopted were radicalized and helped spur further classification in Argentina like ‘Left’ and ‘Right.’ In fact

⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

“the division between Left and Right became deeper and deeper” following economic decline. There was a desperate need for stability during a time of economic and political crisis in Argentina. “Civilian governments came to rely on the military to govern. For example . . . the first nonmilitary president since 1943 used the military to put down strikes and had military courts pass sentences on workers who refused to return to their jobs.” This was a dangerous path to take in Argentina because these types of authoritarian or militarized actions taken by civilian governments only highlighted the failings of civilian governments, the ‘need’ for and collusion with the military, and the ‘dangers’ posed by an opposition. The situation in Argentina worsened, however, and by the 1970’s

Argentina was in a state of virtual civil war. Leftists kidnapped and publicly executed high-ranking political and military leaders and attacked and bombed broadcasting stations and military posts. Extremists of the Right, including police and military personnel, formed death squads and killed leftists.

These conditions: strong military, weak civilian rule, political and economic instability, national division, and classification of Left and Right, fomented the language that classified in-group/out-group and prompted the military to take act drastically and brutally. This fight for the stability of the country was also given a new dimension because “anticommunism of the Argentine officers was strengthened by their commitment to Roman Catholicism. While not all officers were devout, they saw themselves as defenders of the Church, especially of Christian ideals.” This history and dimension helped aid the fervor of the Argentine military and led to the symbolization of the ‘Left’ or opposition to the government as threats and ‘godless.’ Further violence from both sides contributed to the “evolution of the military’s ideology [classification], its perception of extreme threat [symbolization], and its extreme devaluation [dehumanization] of

all opponents.”⁷ This military was then able to transmit this ideology and implement mass disappearances and killings due to the power of the state.

II. Power of the State

In Argentina, the power of the state played a crucial role in the Junta’s execution of thousands of people. One of the most important actions the government engaged in was a subversion of legal language and rights in Argentina. Thus, legally, the power of the state, the military and government were enhanced. At the same time, this legal language dehumanized citizens via deprivation of rights they deserved. This constituted a form of dehumanization because some citizens were not treated the same as others. These deprived citizens, therefore, were treated as ‘less than’ other citizens or humans. To reiterate, it is vital to understand the power of the state and the military in Argentina because the government apparatus itself became a sort of in-group and citizens became an out-group. The citizens that were then perceived and symbolized as a threat became targets and the classification and symbolization of threats that led to the dehumanization and killings was based upon a particular language or ideology. These are the elements of state power that became dangerous to the citizenry in Argentina.

Within Argentina, there existed an obvious history of strong rule and military connections with the government. What must also be considered is “the military’s long-standing patterns of disregard for constitutional constraints and the legal system,” which led them to disregard the civilians in Argentina and overly esteem their own position and that of the state. Furthermore, torture was common practice for the military and Argentine government; however, it possessed an element of virtue through the belief in the sanctity of the state and sovereignty. In fact, “the use of terror by modern Latin American states in a Weberian, bureaucratized manner . . . is part of a modern political system based on the same rationality that characterizes modern,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 211-218.

bureaucratic societies.” The Argentine military, through a belief in the state and bureaucratic language, rationalized their, and the state’s purposes and actions. It is also significant to note that through this belief in the state, the government of Argentina perpetrated a politicide, whereby the in-groups and out-groups do not differ ethnically, religiously, racially, linguistically or otherwise in a cultural manner. In Argentina, the out-group was whomever the military felt was a threat to the sovereignty of the nation and therefore could be any civilian. Along these lines it is important to keep in mind that “Latin American states have practiced different forms of terror, including torture and physical punishment, not in a primitive or ‘traditional’ manner, but in a politically rational, calculated, modern fashion.”⁸ This is to say that the politicide the Junta engaged in was not primitive in technique; however, politicide is always tribal in character. It is tribal in that it divides people into groups and chooses some for extermination.

One must also be mindful of the fact that “the degree of power held by a regime over its citizens is clearly related to democide [politicide].”⁹ If a politicide, or mass killing, is to be executed, there must be an authoritarian state. And, in an authoritarian state, there is a particular language used both for the benefit of the state and its citizens. For example, the use of the word ‘subversive’ supports this contention and correlates with the issue of the modern state and sovereignty. This usage of the word requires an understanding of the notions of state and sovereignty. Moreover, the language of ‘subversive’ requires the government to act on behalf of the security of the ‘liberty’ or ‘safety’ of its citizens; giving the government security through acquired legitimacy because of these actions. Following this sequence of thoughts, a government that strives for ultimate power arrives at the conclusion that “because one is dealing

⁸ Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez, eds., *When States Kill: Latin America, The U.S., and Technologies of Terror* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005), 3-4, 310.

⁹ Rudolph J. Rummel, “Power, Genocide and Mass Murder,” *Journal of Peace Research* 31, no. 1 (February 1994): 1-10. Remember that ‘democide’ is defined as any mass killing and includes both genocide and politicide.

with a threat to sovereignty as such, law as such no longer applies.”¹⁰ This also means that the law can be mutated to suit whatever purposes support the safety of the state and, in effect, allow the government to act in any manner it pleases. This is the reason Argentina lessened the importance of law or changed the law and further enhanced the power of the military or the sovereignty of the state.

There is one more facet to state power that is important, though, and that is terror. “Every ruler seeks affirmative response to command. As long as a residue of unpredictable freedom of action is possible in his subjects, the ruler’s assured response to command escapes him . . . [and so full command must be] achieved by terror.”¹¹ This would be why, in 1966, the military laid out its plans for complete domination and government documents attest to the “extent to which the military was willing to assume dominance over civilian structures.”¹² The Junta took over militarily thereafter, but the first things they implemented were drastic legal changes, or in the legal language, in order to heighten power of the state and create an atmosphere necessary to terrorize and kill civilians in Argentina. “At its essence, the modern death system is linked to the emergence of genocide as a centerpiece of state power and the display of its monopoly of power.”¹³ This suggests that one of the motivations for the actions of the government in Argentina was pure power. The government possessed the means to produce terror and to execute its citizens, so it did. This creation of terror also strengthened the government’s political position as most of the citizenry were too terrified to oppose it.

¹⁰ John, Milbank, “Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 2 (2002): 305-323.

¹¹ Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History* (USA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), 45.

¹² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 213.

¹³ Irving Louis Horowitz, *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power, Fourth Edition Expanded and Revised* (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 70.

After planning actions, once in power, the Junta wasted no time in distorting the legal language and system to suit their purposes of full control of Argentina. Moreover, “in 1976 the majority welcomed the military takeover and initially accepted and justified the repression and violence that followed.” Most of the people in Argentina wanted order and believed the military could provide it. This may have been the reason many also accepted the extreme measures implemented by the military. For instance, “upon taking power in 1976 the military junta adopted the Statute for the Process of National Reorganization. It issued communiqués and enacted special laws further suspending basic rights and justifying subsequent actions.”¹⁴ This ‘statute’ is an excellent example of a distortion of language that is ‘legal’ and transmitted to the population at large. This ‘reorganization’ can include anything the government wants and successfully conceals the true nature of what the military will enact.

In actuality, ‘national reorganization’ signified that “Argentine institutions were drastically subverted. A kind of 'executive-legislative-constituent power' was created. It assumed extraordinary governmental powers and supreme public authority.” This meant that the executive government essentially broadened its powers to include legislative powers, or creation of laws. It also altered the judiciary through replacement of judges and diminution of judicial power, or oversight. Furthermore,

The composition of the highest levels of the judiciary . . . changed on the first day of the coup. . . . All judges, whether newly appointed or confirmed in their posts, had to swear to uphold the Articles and objectives of the 'Process' instigated by the Military Junta. From then on . . . it now condoned the usurpation of power and allowed a host of judicial aberrations to take on the appearance of legality. With a few exceptions, it recognized the discretionary application of the powers of arrest under the state of siege, and accepted the validity of secret reports from the security services as justification for the detention of citizens for an indefinite period. At the same time, it turned the writ of habeas corpus into a mere formality, rendering it totally inefficient as a means of combating the policy of forcible abduction.¹⁵

¹⁴ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 217, 219.

¹⁵ Nunca Más (Never Again), ‘Part III, The judiciary during the repression.’

In this manner the government assumed an extreme level of state power while at the same time diminishing and stripping the citizens in Argentina of any power or legal recourse. These actions may be connected with symbolization, whereby the state has legally separated itself and the military from the rest of the population and has consequently symbolized and created a powerless population; much like the Nazis and their legal language regarding Jews. The government clearly planned meticulously to combat their civilians' rights and "as disappearances progressed, changes in laws and court procedures [further] weakened individual rights. The habeas corpus law was enfeebled . . . and the right to leave the country was often denied."¹⁶ In fact, citizens had very little power to petition either for themselves or their family mainly due to the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, which is one of the oldest and most basic rights. Petitioning the courts was also difficult because "legal representation in court was seriously affected by the imprisonment, exile or death of defence lawyers."¹⁷ This illustrates the fact that the state easily moved from eradicating legal rights and recourse to eradicating any right to life at all. This is evident in one of the last decrees issued by the government that "seemingly requires killing without due process of the law."¹⁸ By the end of their process to subvert the legal system, the government did not even attempt at much of a pretense of a legal system. The system itself was clearly farcical in nature after the junta was done tinkering with it.

Another facet of state power in Argentina was the dominance of the intelligence services within a well-disciplined military. For example, "long-term patterns of brutality may be made more systematic and 'effective' (although no less ruthless) when the security forces undergo a process of 'professionalization.'" This alludes to the fact that outside state power was used to

¹⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 219.

¹⁷ *Nunca Más (Never Again)*, 'Part III, The judiciary during the repression.'

¹⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 219.

train the Argentine military. Germany, France, and later, the United States all took part in ‘professionalization’ of the military in Argentina. This process involves training a military so that it may engage in ruthless acts in a ‘rational’ and impersonal manner. Powerful countries wielded their own state power to augment and hone the state power wielded by the Junta in Argentina. In fact, “under the authoritarian regime during the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, intelligence services became an autonomous core within the authoritarian state, acquiring immense power,”¹⁹ which was greatly assisted by the training received at institutes run by the U.S. government. One, which is well-known, is the School of the Americas, used to train Latin American militaries in counter-insurgency techniques.²⁰ Moreover, the United States found strong state power to be a necessity in other countries in order to combat the ‘evil’ known as Communism.

At the time of President Johnson's swearing in, MacNamara told the US Congress:
*Our primary objective in Latin America is to aid, wherever necessary, the continual growth of the military and paramilitary forces, so that together with the police and other security forces, they may provide the necessary internal security.*²¹

Even the outside world furnished the military regime in Argentina with the language necessary to execute thousands of people in a quest to create a strong, ‘secure’ state, devoid of any ‘leftist’ or potentially communist leanings. The United States, from this example, used language that confirmed the importance of a strong military and highlighted the idea that there existed internal threats in Latin American countries that needed to be ‘secured.’ Therefore, the junta succeeded

¹⁹ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 308.

²⁰ Lesley Gill, *The School of the Americas: military training and political violence in the Americas* (USA: Duke University Press, 2004). This is a good source to find more information about this institution which played a significant role in the power and military structures in Argentina, among other Latin American countries.

²¹ Nunca Más (Never Again), ‘Part V, The Doctrine behind the repression.’

in creating a strong state capable of performing mass murder and mutating the legal system/language so that it would aid instead of impede them, using further justifications provided by one of the most powerful democracies in the world.

III. Classification

Following the accumulation of absolute state power and consequent creation of an authoritarian military regime, the government in Argentina turned to classification en route to mass killing. This classification of in-groups and out-groups fell along the lines of military versus civilian. This was further drawn out to ‘logical’ implications in the form of ‘patriotic’ Argentine versus foreign-controlled enemy. Foreign-controlled refers to the Soviet Union, since at the time of the Dirty War in Argentina, the U.S. and USSR were at a ‘war’ that would draw in many other countries. This ideology only further heightened the military response to insurgency.

Classification was an important step in the Argentine military’s development along the ‘spectrum of violence.’ There were two forms of classification in Argentina. There was a classification of the perpetrators and of the victims. In general, new leaders, “respond to social conditions with a pervasive identity crisis, which leads them to adapt an extreme and rigid identity.” In this case the military identified itself with strength and as the ‘savior’ of Argentina. This in-group creation actually fulfilled a psychological need for the military. They finally felt needed “in the fight against a real enemy—‘someone who made sense of the long years of training, the military mystique, the long sacrificial years of barrack boredom; someone who enabled the professional soldier to test his own mettle, his skills, his self abnegations and patriotism.’”²² They felt like an elite group, obviously; however, they were frankly bored and needed some kind of diversion or purpose to justify their existence. As John Milbank asserts, “Without the possibility of the occasional emergency of war, there must be perpetual war against

²² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 32, 216-217.

an internal danger.”²³ This danger has to be created. For this reason, along with the violence in the country, Argentina’s dirty war was “launched against subversion – a concept defined by its very unpredictability and measurelessness.”²⁴ This vague term merely put power into the hands of the creator, the military, and left civilians open to interpretation as ‘subversive’ or not. In fact, “the definition of subversives was inexact, the line between in-group and out-group poorly drawn.” This language of ‘subversion’ allowed the military ultimate leeway and action in protection of the country. It also clearly situated the military in an ideal position as defenders of Argentina from this subversion. Another way to understand this self-imagination of the military is to say that

The military saw the nation as a living entity . . . Their views were somewhat akin to German ideas about the special nature of the state; individual interests and rights had to submit to the greater good of the country. . . . Individual rights did not have a strong tradition in Argentina. All this contributed to the military’s paternalistic view of its relationship to society.

This view the military had of itself was reinforced by most of the population of Argentina.

“Much of the population and political leadership relied on it [the military], and the rest accepted its dominance.” Due to the ease with which the military took power, consolidated and garnered the acceptance of their policies from the people, the military then began to attack “all who might possibly, even in the remotest way, be or become the enemy. This overgeneralization in the selection of victims occurred partly because of their view that all the forces that might change traditional values and the status quo were subversive.”²⁵

It is important to reiterate and expound upon the idea that, “lacking opportunities for self-defense or conquest, the army sought a new rationale for its existence in fighting against revolution, defending the nation and Christian civilization against communism.” In the case of

²³ ‘Milbank, ‘Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror.’

²⁴ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 305.

²⁵ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 224, 213,215.

Argentina, outside forces strongly assisted the phases that led to genocide. The Cold War ideology and framework of national security intensely assured that the classification developed by the Junta would prevail. The Junta issued numerous resolutions, acts, decrees, and declarations, to this end. One linguistically important act issued was the Institutional Act of June 18, 1976, whereby “the junta assumed the ‘power and responsibility to consider actions of those individuals who have injured the national interest,’ on grounds as generic as, ‘failure to observe basic moral principles in the exercise of public, political, or union offices or activities that involve the public interests.’”²⁶ This did not specifically create any group for consideration yet. However, this created the idea that there was an ‘us’ and a ‘them,’ thereby crafting the conditions for further action. Another linguistic element to consider would be the National Security Doctrine (NSD), which “placed ‘national security above personal security, the needs of the state before individual rights, and the judgment of a governing elite over the rule of law.’” This supports the contention about substantial state power. It is also important to note the language used: national security. This creates the strongest in-group possible: the state. The state, government, and military are all part of the in-group in Argentina. It is the state versus civilians and this language that once again highlights state power alludes to this fact.

This NSD was strongly aided by the Cold War. “According to this worldview, the intensity of the East-West conflict forced developing countries to avoid a neutral, or ‘third,’ position in order to preserve their national independence.” The threat of Communism merely added fuel to the war, already declared, on subversion. The threat of Communism was taken very seriously by the most powerful country in the world, the United States, and this provided confirmation to the government, and to many citizens that the Junta was fighting a real war. In addition, “this defense doctrine reduced communism ‘to the condition of internal aggression at

²⁶ Ibid., 220.

the service of a foreign power' and directed the armed forces to create a new societal model that would eliminate any interference."²⁷ The war on communism effectively turned threats within the state into foreign threats and allowed the Junta to treat these citizens as they would combatants in a war. To elucidate more, the military viewed "Marxist penetration and insurgency as an all-pervading presence of a new type of enemy fighting a new type of war. Civilians are also warriors, ideas a different form of weapon."²⁸ Due to the perception that civilians were akin to enemy combatants, the actions that could be used against civilians changed.

The armed forces' new professionalism emphasized the need for direct military involvement in politics and domestic intelligence, the use of unconventional methods to increase effectiveness in the anti-subversive war, and the adoption of a new hypothesis of conflict based on the concept of ideological frontiers.²⁹

Suddenly the military government went from being unnecessary to the last bulwark in Argentina from the threat of communism and takeover by foreign government. "The military came to see it as their primary role to protect the state from subversion by alien forces and ideas, preserve essential Argentine values, and maintain internal purity."³⁰ Along those ideas, the Junta also, "claimed to act on behalf of 'the highest interests of the nation' and to be preventing both 'the dissolution of Argentine society' and the disappearance of [the] Fatherland as a state'"³¹

The military always had a strong presence in Argentina, but never a purpose. Due to a need for purpose and convenience of the Cold War, the government used language to classify themselves as the only hope for Argentina. Anyone who questioned their authority was 'subversive' and therefore classified as with the enemy. In effect, Argentina followed along with

²⁷ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 311.

²⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 217.

²⁹ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 313.

³⁰ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 215.

³¹ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 306.

other “military dictatorships [that] used anticommunism to justify their brutal rule.”³² The state quickly shifted from linguistic classification into symbolization as ‘subversives’ became symbolized as an extreme threat to the state. This classification was a vital first step though. It was needed to identify the military as an in-group and anyone else as a possible part of the out-group. This foundation then made possible the next major step: symbolization.

IV. Symbolization

Following classification, symbolization in Argentina began when the government finally specified who the ‘others’ were within the population. Due to the language disseminated by the government this out-group was transformed into the ultimate threat for Argentina. Although the war against subversion became more specific, it was still broad and vague in defining ‘enemies.’ There were numerous groups targeted. “Individuals were defined as subversives or enemies of the state if they showed the slightest sign of either liberalism or concern for the poor.”³³ Shortly thereafter, the government began to take this symbolization further and used their perception of the ‘subversives’ to hone their techniques in battling that enemy.

The ‘Left’ and the ‘Right’ fought major ideological battles within Argentine politics and society leading up to the dirty war. Once, the ‘Right,’ or the military, won, the ‘Left’ had to be suppressed, because for the Junta, the ‘Left’ was the major source of dissidence in the country.

With that in mind,

Upon assuming power, the military proceeded with extreme ruthlessness to kidnap, torture, and in most cases kill not only suspected leftist terrorists but also anyone who in their minds was politically liberal or left-leaning or seemed to care for the welfare and rights of poor people, and even people who were accidentally associated with intended victims.

³² Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 218.

³³ *Ibid.*, 223.

The government was able to act in this manner through their use of language. “In 1974 the government . . . declared a state of siege and suspended constitutional rights.” Declaring a state of siege signifies that there is an enemy to be combated and the government cannot be impeded by laws of men because they are dictated by laws of security of the state. The Junta followed this declaration whereby “in 1975 a decree ordered the police to help the army eliminate subversion . . . A second decree set up an internal security council to direct all armed and police forces in fighting against subversion.”³⁴ From this language, one can discern that subversion is not only classified. Subversion is now fully vilified in such a manner that action must be proscribed by the government.

Subsequent to these decrees the Junta commenced laying out a broad net of potential victims. These victims were, in reality, inconveniences to the government because they questioned their legitimacy and actions. For this reason “the dirty war was waged against enemies who were perceived to range from locally armed guerillas to the international human rights organizations that denounced the military’s abuses.”³⁵ Furthermore,

All sectors fell into the net: trade union leaders fighting for better wages; youngsters in student unions; journalists who did not support the regime; psychologists and sociologists simply for belonging to suspicious professions; young pacifists, nuns and priests who had taken the teachings of Christ to shanty areas; the friends of these people too, and the friends of friends, plus others whose names were given out of motives of personal vengeance, or by the kidnapped under torture.

It is important to note that “although the military claimed to be defending Christianity, priests, nuns, and seminarians were among those kidnapped, tortured, and killed.” This would seem to contradict the rhetoric generated by the military about protecting ‘Christian’ values in Argentina. However, language can always be distorted and part of the Catholic Church in Argentina supported the Junta, while other priests and nuns felt their duty was to help the poor. According

³⁴ Ibid., 219-220.

³⁵ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 305.

to the Junta, their priorities were askew and they were simply aiding the subversive threat in Argentina. An insightful example on this subject from a priest kidnapped by the military illustrates how ideas and language can be completely distorted when he testified that,

The person who was interrogating me lost patience, and became angry, saying, ‘You are not a guerilla, you don’t believe in violence, but don’t you realize that when you go to live (in the shanty towns) with your culture, you are joining people, joining poor people, and to unite with poor people is subversion. . . . the only error you have committed was that you interpreted doctrine in too literal way. Christ spoke of the poor, but when he spoke of the poor he spoke of the poor in spirit and you interpreted this in a literal way and went to live, literally, with poor people. In Argentina those who are poor in the spirit are the rich and in the future you must spend you time helping the rich, who are those who really need spiritual help.’³⁶

All of this demonstrates the specific yet vague nature of defining and symbolizing subversion in Argentina. The government specified that liberalism, social work, union work, protesting, or anything that questions the system was possibly subversive. This symbolization is extremely dangerous because a simple kind act or donation to the poor, a profession, and anything else may be construed through the perception created by the state as a detrimental and threatening act toward society.

The symbolization engaged in by the state in Argentina transformed from a definition of who subversives are, to defining subversives as a dangerous enemy. When the language used by the government then symbolizes the ‘Left’ and others as enemies, the government can intensify their actions and symbolize themselves as at war. “The Junta exaggerated the *Montonero*³⁷ threat to have an excuse to wipe out Argentina’s non-violent Left.”³⁸ The government, in effect, associated the rebels (*Montoneros*), who were small in number, with the rest of the Left or

³⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 220, 224.

³⁷ This was a rebel group that operated during much of the 1970’s and through part of the Military Junta’s rule in Argentina. They were originally Peronists, but ultimately pressed for national socialism in Argentina and conducted raids and operated from the mountains and forests, hence the name *Montoneros* derived from the Spanish word for mountains.

³⁸ Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (USA: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 123.

dissidents in the country. This vilified civilians in a dangerous way, because now civilians can be treated as rebels. Following that line of reasoning, “torture was considered legitimate in the context of war.” This could mean war against the *Montoneros* or against the average person kidnapped under suspicion of subversion. “This legitimation resulted from two notions; first, that the information needed in the circumstances of war was of ‘sufficient importance to justify the torture.’”³⁹ Within this framework of symbolization, there is a strong presence of a language of rationalization.

Another manner in which symbolization of the *Montoneros* and others as a threat became important was in the perception of power. The Junta imagined themselves as all-powerful. This meant that a threat they had to fight, must also be of importance to mirror their own power. “The actual and perceived power of the guerillas . . . are important factors to include in the analysis of state-sponsored repression.” This is a valid assertion because “the ‘construction of reality’ plays a central role in the configuration of repressive outcomes.”⁴⁰ This means that language is important because it constructs a reality or framework. Within this framework, people operate and therefore language directly affects perceptions, which directly affect actions. For example,

Because the police, or the state could not control the terrorist activity in Argentina, “the guerillas became demonized. The few thousand armed fighters began to be portrayed as merely the tip of the iceberg, which consisted not only of the ‘surface’ organizations of the left, but of the vast subversive conspiracy which, according to the military, had already taken hold of every aspect of life in Argentina. There was the ‘ideological subversion’ that pervaded the universities, the press, the arts, some professions like psychiatry and sociology; there was the ‘economic subversion’ detectable in the adoption of policies aimed at destroying the national economy; there was the infiltration of the state apparatus, and an orchestrated campaign to destroy the family and morals, to falsify history and corrode all traditional values.”⁴¹

³⁹ Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 308-309.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 315, 317.

⁴¹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 216.

The government began to create conspiracy theories, and this was due to their symbolization of the ‘enemy’ as being far more powerful and pervasive than was actually the case. “Of particular importance . . . was the military’s perception of the power capabilities of ‘subversion.’”⁴² The guerilla threat was no longer a threat only to the government, the military built up the *Montonero* and Leftist threat until it was a threat to the entire country. This language is important because it lays the foundation for dehumanization and killing. “Those engaging in genocide nearly always define the people to be purged and liquidated as alien or enemy populations.”⁴³ Even after the military was overthrown the military was still convinced they had committed no wrong. Conversely, President Menem indicated that Argentina should forget the past and claimed that “we fought and triumphed in that dirty war which took our community to the brink of collapse.”⁴⁴ Overall, this symbolization led the way for dehumanization, torture, and death.

V. Dehumanization

The military Junta continued along the stages of genocide/politicide from symbolization to dehumanization. Their methods were akin to those employed by the Nazis. They utilized concentration, or detention camps, where prisoners were no longer considered human. In fact,

Abducted persons were not taken to regular police facilities to be booked, where their detention would become a matter of public record, but to secret detention centers whose existence could be and was consistently denied. The regime set up approximately 380 of these facilities throughout the country, many located in secure areas within military bases and police stations. Others were in such diverse settings . . . Thus many people were held and tortured within feet or even inches of normal life.

Moreover, “regardless of size, all the detention centers housed torture facilities, prisoners’ quarters, military or police personnel, and, commonly, living quarters for the torturers

⁴² Menjívar and Rodríguez, *When States Kill*, 317.

⁴³ Horowitz, *Taking Lives: Genocide and State Power, Fourth Edition Expanded and Revised*, 22.

⁴⁴ Amnesty International USA, “Argentina,” Amnesty International, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/annualreport.php?id=B43BA5BEA750D99A80256A0F005BB4B3&c=ARG> (accessed March 18, 2007).

themselves.”⁴⁵ This was not difficult for the military to accomplish because they devalued not only terrorists, but large portions of society already. Furthermore, “the prisoners were identified only by numbers.”⁴⁶ This served the purpose of dehumanizing people by stripping them of their identity and aided the perpetrators in their task of torture. This is supported by *Nunca Más* who reported that “in the SDCs [Secret Detention Camps] they used numbers, sometimes preceded by letters, to identify prisoners, as another way of suppressing the identity of the abducted persons.”⁴⁷ Numbers also served a bureaucratic purpose in that people and their information could be filed away neatly as a number and never be thought of as human.

Documentation was an important part of the dehumanization process. An abundance of documentation meant that particular functions within the framework of mass murder could be compartmentalized, bureaucratized and not correlated with actions taken against people. People were now numbers and terrorists. They could be anyone. “The many types of victims made it difficult to differentiate between more and less worthy human beings.”⁴⁸ Actions like torture and killing became simple paperwork and documentation. The extent of this documentation was revealed after the investigation of the dirty war made public testimonies from

*Lázaro Jaime Gladstein (file No. 4912): . . . [who reported that] files of the targets to be arrested were called 'case 1000' . . . the cases were separate and information was collected under the same item . . . I saw about 800 of those files. There was in addition the card index in which some 5,000 were grouped by alias or name and surname. In the same office there was a book where all the cases which went through the Navy Mechanics School were recorded. The name, surname and alias, if relevant, date of admission and discharge, a column marked with an '(L)' or '(D)' or left blank which in his view indicated release, disappearance or execution, and the current place of captivity were all listed. The case numbers were allocated in order of admission and were recorded in sequence in the book.*⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Thomas C. Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America: Chile, Argentina, and International Human Rights* (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 110.

⁴⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 217, 227.

⁴⁷ *Nunca Más* (Never Again), ‘Part I, The Repression.’

⁴⁸ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 226.

⁴⁹ *Nunca Más* (Never Again), ‘Part I, The Repression.’

All actions and procedures were to be executed in a manner that was rational and orderly. Due to the dehumanization of victims, they could be referred to as case numbers and this allowed for the torture and killing that would subsequently follow many of their disappearances. There was yet a further intention for numbering the victims and “apart from constituting yet another way of making the prisoner lose his or her identity, this method complied with the need that nobody - not even the guards or prison wardens - should know the identity of the prisoner, to prevent their names from getting out.”⁵⁰ The government still wanted the ultimate control over life and death, meaning that the victims’ family need never know the fate of the victims.

In addition to the reduction of victims to numbers, there was other language used to dehumanize the victims. Euphemisms, often bureaucratic in nature, were extensively used within the SDCs. For example, “prisoners for whom their captors had no further use were usually ‘transferred’ – strangled, dynamited, or shot, sometimes after being forced to dig their own graves.” Also, “the torture chamber was the ‘intensive therapy room.’ A person about to be killed was sometimes said to have ‘gotten his ticket.’ Those who were to be killed were ‘transferees.’” This euphemistic language helped alleviate the perpetrators’ guilt over the acts committed. The perpetrators also assuaged their guilt as “they [perpetrators] often talked to the victims about this absolute godlike power and the victims’ total dependence on them; as they did this, they strengthened their own belief in it.”⁵¹ The combination of euphemism and empowerment clearly illustrates the power of language to create a mindset conducive to action atrociously regarding human dignity and life. However, the truth of the matter is that euphemisms and power trips are more effective when paired with actions that further degrade people. In actuality,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 223-227.

The junta targeted anyone who opposed the regime and all those connected with them. Secret detention centers held political prisoners. The Naval Mechanics School in Buenos Aires is one of the most notorious. Detainees were given a number and led to large zinc sheds, restrained with a heavy chain and hooded. They were tortured, almost without exception, methodically, sadistically, sexually, with electric shocks and near-drownings, some buried to their necks and exposed to nature for days. They were beaten regularly. Many of those who were able to survive the torture were later killed and buried in mass unmarked pits, or sedated and thrown from an airplane into the Atlantic Ocean.⁵²

This account of occurrences within the camp also highlights the use of numbers for victims, hooding the victims to hide both the identity of themselves and the perpetrators, and the torture, which is meant to procure information and to degrade. These actions were not meant to be executed with sadistic intent. The actions taken by the perpetrators were taken with the language in mind that there was a purpose and ideology behind it that justified the torture and killings. “As the report shows, murder, rape, torture, extortion, looting and other serious crimes went unpunished, as long as they were carried out within the framework of the political and ideological persecution.”⁵³ Language governed what actions were to be taken and it also allowed torture and killing to continue unhindered by feelings of guilt due to the dehumanization of the victims.

The Junta also engaged in other linguistic feats during their tenure as state-sponsored terrorists in Argentina. One example would be that the military enhanced their power and hold over the citizens in Argentina through a campaign of terror. This had to be garnered through words and through a process, or “methodology of disappearance. . . the concealment and destruction of documentation . . . prolonging the uncertainty . . . the nameless bodies, without identity, driving people distraught at the impossibility of knowing.”⁵⁴ Through a language of concealment, the government, in effect, tortured more people than they held in detention camps.

⁵² Amnesty International, “The Fight Against Impunity in Argentina.”

⁵³ Nunca Más (Never Again), ‘Part I The Repression, A. General Introduction.’

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Another example of a subversion of language under the rule of the Junta was the very creation of the verb *desaparecer* in Spanish, which means to disappear. The sheer number of kidnappings led to the adoption/creation of a verb and a whole new idea of kidnapping on a grand scale. In addition, it is important to realize that one of the main functions of these facilities was dehumanization because their main purpose was “more than for the sheer physical suppression of the victims, for submitting them to a meticulous and planned despoilment of the attributes of any human. Because entering them meant in every case CEASING TO EXIST.”⁵⁵ There are not many better definitions of dehumanization than planned despoilment of all that is human and denying existence.

VI. Transmission

Yet another linguistic success for the Junta in their quest at dominating the subversive portion of society was transmission of language and ideas. The military controlled the radio, television, issued orders/decrees, and gave speeches. They also denied other platforms from transmitting by “suspending individual rights and press freedom [which] reduced the free expression of diverse views.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, “free expression of ideas in the press was denied through control of the mass media and through self-censorship practised as a result of the state terrorism unleashed on dissident journalists.”⁵⁷ However, it is important to note that the amount of state censorship on all aspects of transmission of ideas was considerable compared to the amount of self-censorship. In addition, the Junta created their own stories to print for the masses. They printed things like, “‘Shoot-out with 5 Subversives.’ You saw those stories most

⁵⁵ Wright, *State Terrorism in Latin America*, 110.

⁵⁶ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 217-218.

⁵⁷ Nunca Más (Never Again), ‘Part III, The judiciary during the repression.’

everyday. Only the cops ever had guns.”⁵⁸ The government further augmented their control of the press and transmission of language by exiling numerous writers and targeting many journalists for disappearances.

The military also gave numerous speeches whereby they “said they were doing it all for the sake of Argentina’s children, and the nation joined in or accept it.”⁵⁹ Overall, the government fed the people what they needed to either gain support or keep them quiet. It is clear that the language was effective, since many supported the Junta and continued on with life. The Junta only succumbed to defeat after the unsuccessful war with Great Britain over the Falklands, or Malvinas. It is also clear that the Junta’s control over transmission was important. They did engage in propaganda, created news stories, and gave numerous speeches, but the government fully suppressed and cowed any opposition that could possibly contradict their rule.

V. Conclusion

Overall, the amount of state power the Junta allocated allowed them to fully control and manipulate the legal and communicative structures within Argentina.

“We know,” said Admiral Massera, the grand orator of the regime, “that in order to repair so much damage we will have to recover the meanings of many misappropriated words.” High on his list for idiomatic repair were “rationality,” “lucidity,” “democracy,” “patriotism,” “sacrifice,” and “honor.” From the moment of the coup, there was a constant torrent of speeches, proclamations, and interviews. The barrage was constant and there was no escape. As the commanders talked, some 30,000 suspected “subversives” were kidnapped from the streets, tortured in secret concentration camps, and “disappeared.”

The Argentine public was inundated with language that served to classify the in-group as the military and the government and the out-group as anyone else who may be subversive. The military then symbolized the subversives as anyone Left-leaning and as an extreme threat with

⁵⁸ Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.

⁵⁹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 228.

numerous resources. This led to dehumanization of victims in concentration camps, along with torture and executions. All pertinent propaganda was transmitted to the public, while all most of the actions taken by the government were suppressed under the control of the press by the Junta. All of these facts strongly support the contention that language was a deciding and powerful factor in the politics during the Dirty War. A final thought to consider is that “some of those who commit or support heinous violence are functioning, successful, even admired members of their communities. One need not be pathological to do horrible things. The pathology, then belongs to society.”⁶⁰ The question then becomes, who controls that society? What kind of language do they employ? The government in Argentina was controlled by the military, which fully controlled the public. They employed a language that created groups, enemies, threats, and then disappearances. Furthermore, “the rest of the world had tolerated torture and murder in South America for years, confirming for the Argentine military at least its acceptability, if not its rightness.”⁶¹ There is also a language of silence that tacitly accepts the actions taken by the state. This language was present both in Argentine society and in the world that was only concerned with the fight against communism. Even this language of silence aided the Junta because it supported their actions through inaction.

I think it is vitally important to compare the case of Argentina with Rwanda and Germany. We may find that although genocide correlates with ethnicity or race, in reality it may be defined in the same manner as politicide. It is important to understand that ethnic conflicts, genocide, or any mass killings are truly political in nature and sometimes merely fall along ethnic lines. To state this in different fashion, genocide may usually or always be politicide that falls along ethnic lines. Although a group may be targeted ethnically it is always for a political

⁶⁰ Rosenberg, *Children of Cain*, 18.

⁶¹ Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, 229.

reason. This is a concept that must be stressed. Within the Argentine example the Junta did not include specific targeting of ethnic groups, except Jews, and is therefore, better understood as a politicide. However, the reasons for the mass killings and methods used are very similar between the countries of Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina. State power, politics, and the language used are significant elements to study in order to understand the workings of a genocide or politicide.

Conclusion

In all three particular cases of democide that I have examined: Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina, it is apparent that language was used in a particular way to implement mass killings. Each country possessed a powerful state that had full control over the means of political discourse, was efficiently organized, and used and abused language in a manner that has been categorized into such categories as classification, symbolization, and dehumanization. Moreover, the overriding element present in these countries that engaged in democide was language. As one can discern, a powerful state was also a key component, but although these states possessed power and the means of violence, they all still engaged in the three linguistic techniques of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization, yet still needed to justify their actions. Who were they persuading: themselves or their respective populations? This question highlights the fact that language is crucial to execute democide, especially through the process of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization, because the state does have to convince itself and its population.

Consequently, in this study I looked at Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina. I chose these countries for the obvious presence of democide and due to the fact that they are very different countries on different continents, in different time periods throughout the twentieth century. When beginning this project, I thought that these particular countries would be interesting to compare because of the differing levels of development, which I thought may signify different methods of propaganda, classification, symbolization, and dehumanization. However, I found that although Argentina and Rwanda were not the most developed, they were 'developed' and 'modern' in the ways that were crucial for

this study. Their governments utilized sophisticated propaganda, possessed a high level of state power, as well as efficient organization of that state.

In particular, Germany was chosen because the Holocaust is the quintessential example of modern genocide. This study explored the fact that there was a history of classification of the Jewish population in Germany, and in Europe as a whole, as an out-group. This was exacerbated after WWI when it was thought that the Jews were one of the causes of Germany's loss. Hard times ensued following WWI and Hitler took advantage of German anti-Semitism and augmented it on his way into power. He and the Third Reich then continued the campaign of classification by using eugenics and ideas of race to foster the idea of in-group, consisting of pure Aryan Germans, and the out-group consisting of Jews (among others).¹

Symbolization then occurred, when Hitler further defined 'Jewishness' and categories of 'Jewishness,' enacted the Nuremberg laws, which further separated Jews and categorized them as non-citizens and not part of the state, and included the required wearing of the Star of David. After these legal changes that made use of discriminatory language, the Third Reich began to symbolize the Jews as threats to the German *volk*, or people. The government portrayed the Jews as 'contaminants' of the Aryan people and as part of a 'Jewish Conspiracy' against the German people.

Dehumanization occurred in a multiplicity of ways. There was a process of devaluation of the Jews themselves and a process through which the perpetrators desensitized themselves to their actions and plight of the victims. In the process of

¹ Please note that this study is aware of the numerous groups targeted by the Nazis. However, for the sake of brevity, clarity, simplicity, and more literature, this study chose to mainly focus on the classification, symbolization, and dehumanization of the Jewish population in Germany during the Holocaust.

devaluation, the Jews were rounded up and deprived of citizenship, possessions, and could not be killed before they were forcibly placed in ghettos and concentration camps. Extensive propaganda and the legalization of the Jews' diminished status by the Nuremberg laws aided the dehumanization process and ascribed a 'less than human' identity to the victims, while desensitizing the perpetrators because they were not acting unethically regarding humans, they were acting in such a manner against 'vermin' or Jews. This atmosphere was further assisted by the conversion of the 'Jewish question' into the 'Final Solution' by the government, where the extermination of all Jews became a quest and goal. The Jews were no longer considered human. Moreover, the dehumanization was completed by the conditions of the camps, which were designed to eradicate human dignity and life. In addition, the language rules and bureaucratic methods also allowed the perpetrators to compartmentalize their actions and further distance themselves from those actions and the victims.

Also, this extensive bureaucratization of the state attests to the importance of organization within the government. In Germany, the military played a key role, but bureaucrats, like Adolf Eichmann, had specific roles, like transportation of Jews, and this allowed the whole operation of the Holocaust to operate 'efficiently' in murdering around six million people. This power and organization possessed by the state also allowed for the most 'effective' transmission of the language that would be used in classification, symbolization, and dehumanization. The Third Reich transmitted propaganda via education in schools, pamphlets, speeches, newspapers, radio, group meetings, and rallies. All of these mediums were used to inundate the German people with the Nazi ideology and were effective in garnering support for the government's policies, or silent

approval. This propaganda also aided the more direct perpetrators in convincing themselves that their actions were for the ‘fatherland,’ for the state.

The next case I examined was the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which superficially seems completely different from the example of the Holocaust. Rwanda is a very different country from Germany in many respects: level of development, culture, level of technological attainment, and lack of sophisticated weaponry. However, Rwanda sadly proved that these differences did not generate any sort of barrier to the government in conducting a democide. So what do the cases of Rwanda and Germany have in common then? Rwanda possessed a strong state with complete control over every aspect of its citizens' lives, extensive organizational networks throughout the country, and, most significantly, sophisticated methods of propaganda. Rwanda, like Germany, conducted an extensive propaganda campaign against Tutsis and moderate Hutus and did so through the same process of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization.

Moreover, the Rwandan government’s classification campaign also relates somewhat to the history of the country. There was a history of collusion of the Tutsi aristocracy with the Belgian colonizers, but this power structure was reversed with the advent of independence under the Parmehutu government. Therefore, there was already some concept of in-group and out-group in Rwanda, between Hutus and Tutsis. However, some Rwandan historians believe that these ‘ethnic’ groups are colonial creations, and contend that the terms ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ signify class differences. However, under the Habyarimana regime, the ‘differences’ between the two groups were taught in schools, perpetuated in history books, used to favor northern Hutus, over Tutsis, southern Hutu, and Moderate Hutu, and supported by ‘scientific’ claims that the two

groups were genetically different races.² All of these actions taken by the government rigidified the in-group of northern Hutus and the out-group of everyone else, especially Tutsis.

Following the campaign of classification, the government moved forward into symbolization of the victims and of themselves. The Tutsis were symbolized as the 'former oppressors' and as a threat to the country and all Hutus. The government engaged in sophisticated propaganda techniques and created the myth that all Tutsis were planning to rise up to take over the country again after the murder of all Hutus. Ironically, this is what the Habyarimana regime planned for the Tutsis and all other politically convenient groups, like the moderate Hutus. Thus symbolization successfully portrayed the out-group in Rwanda as a threat and identified them by ethnicity through the continuing use of identification cards dating from the colonial period.

Subsequent to symbolization, the government moved even further along the 'spectrum of violence' into dehumanization of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Government officials like Mugesera, began to call for extermination of *inyenzi*, or 'cockroaches' and began to connect atrocities the Rwandan Patriotic Front supposedly committed with the Tutsis in the country. The Tutsis were symbolized as a threat, and then they became identified as complicit with the Rwandan Patriotic Front. This organization had already been completely demonized and devalued by the government and this carried onto the Tutsis in the country. Furthermore, the perpetrators used other interesting euphemisms for murder, such as 'tree felling' or 'work.' This language also dehumanized Tutsis and moderate Hutu because murder was no longer murder; it was

² The moderate and southern Hutu were classified as overly sympathetic to Tutsis, and possibly 'mixed' in 'race.'

simply the community work in which the Rwandans were used to participating. Overall, the language must have been powerful to motivate killings that were very personal, due to the fact that they were carried out with hand tools.

In addition, the language that classified, symbolized, and dehumanized Tutsis and moderate Hutus was extremely effective in its transmission. The government in Rwanda was repressive and censored all press and radio. The government also controlled newspapers, pamphlets, radio, organized rallies and group 'animation' meetings. Also, newspapers and radio were mediums that all Rwandans had access to and were easy to disseminate. The radio was the most powerful tool of the Hutu extremists and the Rwandan government before and during the genocide. Via radio, the extremists and government incited violence and murder, identified people to murder, and aided in organizing *interhamwe* militias, military and government groups. Within this example and country, radio was the most powerful weapon and its arsenal is language, of classification, symbolization, dehumanization, hate and violence. Overall, language was a vital component that aided the powerful and well-organized Habyarimana regime in murdering 800,000 to 1 million people.

After examining Rwanda, I moved to the case of the Dirty War, or *Guerra Sucia*, in Argentina. This was an interesting case because it illustrated the danger of a powerful military state; it was heavily influenced by the West, particularly the United States; and it is defined as a politicide, as well as a genocide. This military state also engaged in CSM, though it was more difficult for me to identify because there was not an ethnic basis for the selection of victims. Therefore the process of classification, symbolization,

and dehumanization is slightly different than the processes that were implemented by the governments in Germany and Rwanda.

Classification in Argentina was different in that the in-groups and out-groups were not ethnic.³ The in-group was essentially the military, and marginally those that supported the military government and its policies, while the out-group were civilians in general, and particularly critics of the government or sympathizers with the poor and unions. The military took its job very seriously and needed some sort of mission; so they fully embraced the fight against communism. In general, there was a history of military rule in Argentina and a propensity for the military to think of itself as elite and superior to the rest of the population. This was exacerbated once the military returned to power after overthrowing Isabel Perón.

The military then turned to symbolization in their fight for 'order' and against communism. This meant that the out-group was now better defined as 'subversives,' which could include lawyers, journalists, aid workers, priests, nuns, union leaders, sympathizers of the poor and unions, leftists, and any other political opposition. These groups were all symbolized as threats to the state and threats to the security of the state. They were also considered dangerous 'subversives' that were intent on destroying Argentine society. Then, the military was consequently charged with dealing with these government defined 'subversive' elements. Its brutal procedures regarding the treatment of 'subversives' were also 'legal' after the government's subversion of legal structures within Argentina. In this manner, civilians who acted in a manner that displeased the

³ There existed a slight exception in that the small population of Jews that were targeted during the Dirty War. This was due to the historic connections between Argentina and Germany and the fact that many in the military fancied themselves to be Nazis. However, the Jewish population targeted made up a small number of the disappearances and were not the main focus of the kidnappings, tortures, and killings.

government could be labeled as ‘subversives’ and thus as internal enemies, or agents of the *Montoneros*, or rebels. Therefore, these civilians were now possible enemy combatants to be dealt with accordingly.

The next step for the Junta was dehumanization. This first occurred with the lack of legal rights, like habeas corpus. However, this final stage primarily occurred within the secret detention centers, or concentration camps, and consisted of documentation of victims as numbers. Additionally, the perpetrators of detention, torture, and killings used euphemistic and bureaucratic language that dehumanized the victims and distanced the perpetrators from their actions. For example, victims were called ‘transferees’ and if tortured, were sent to ‘intensive therapy chambers.’ Evidently the victims were merely casualties of the war against communism and not human beings.

As for transmission of language in Argentina, the military government followed a similar path to the governments in Germany and Rwanda. It disseminated plenty of government propaganda. However, it mainly suppressed any dissent and heavily censored their citizens. Sometimes the government would create stories for the newspapers. In addition, the government would utilize pamphlets, radio, speeches, and rallies to garner support for the government, fear of the government, and instill a wariness of ‘others’ who may be subversive. In general, the democide that occurred in Argentina was largely ‘successful’ because of the power of language coupled with the power of the state. Both of these aided in the process of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization, and enabled the military to torture and kill tens of thousands of people.

So what do these three cases tell us about the role and power of language in politics? All three examples provide substantial evidence that supports the theory that

language does matter. It is powerful because it creates a reality and framework for perpetrators, victims, and others that can lead to massive amounts of deaths. Furthermore, language defines in-group and out-group and who belongs to these groups. It is used to identify threats. It is also used in order to devalue people. The process of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization via language transmitted by the government allows governments to separate certain groups from the rest of society, demonize them, and then devalue them. This process is sometimes carried out by governments to such an extent, that the deaths of marginalized populations are inevitable and not 'wrong,' because these groups are not considered human. In fact, these groups may now be considered expendable.

In addition, these countries are similar in that all possessed a powerful state, used specific 'persuasive' language, and had experienced hard times that led the government to feel threatened or have a political need to create a scapegoat or common enemy.

Therefore, language is important because, "difficult life conditions by themselves will not lead to genocide."⁴ Also, the fact that a country possesses a powerful state does not necessarily signify that mass murder will occur; the state still needs to persuade itself and the rest of the population that these actions are justified in some manner. This is why language is so vital.

However, there was one significant difference I noted among the various countries. The level of transmission differed among countries, but I think that has to do with the level of involvement expected from the rest of the population. In Rwanda, the majority of the population perpetrated in the killings, so a massive and comprehensive

⁴ Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13.

propaganda campaign was necessary. In Germany, there was extensive propaganda, but it was used to motivate the population to accept the treatment they saw of the Jews, like the Nuremberg laws and the wearing of the star, which was not nearly the full extent of how the government was dealing with this group. So the propaganda aimed at the general public was slightly less extensive than the Rwandan campaign. As for Argentina, while there was also evidence of an extensive propaganda campaign, it was not carried out to the extent of the campaigns in Rwanda and Germany. I think this has to do with the level of secrecy involved in the ‘disappearances’ and the majority of tortures and killings being carried out by secret service and military personnel only.

Furthermore, I would argue that my typology for the linguistic process engaged in by governments was useful in that it simplified the understanding of the techniques used. The concepts of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization are all fairly easy to understand and identify. However, there were some problems I encountered when I felt the distinctions between these steps were indistinguishable at times, especially regarding language that symbolized a group as a threat versus language that dehumanizes or language that classifies versus language that symbolizes. I would have also liked to examine more in depth, the role of the state in persuading citizens to act in a homicidal manner, because language originating from the state is even more powerful because of the authority that accompanies the language. This would be interesting to develop further. I would have also liked to examine the role of bystanders in determining whether or not genocide will occur. In this manner, language would have become relevant again, because bystanders use a language that reawakens the conscience of the perpetrators, or “active opposition by bystanders can reactivate the perpetrators moral values and also

cause them to be concerned about retaliation.”⁵ However, by not saying anything at all or engaging in a language of silence, bystanders tacitly acknowledge and approved of governments engaged in democide. The role of bystanders would have incorporated language and been interesting topics to explore in conjunction with Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina.

Moreover, Germany, Rwanda, and Argentina also raise other questions about the role of language in politics, especially regarding governments and abuse of human rights. The democides that occurred in these countries are extreme examples of what governments can enact utilizing the weapon of language. However, they provide us with a guide to nascent forms of politicide/genocide, or abuse of human rights in other countries. In general, language is powerful, and a skillful government or group that can harness and utilize language will be the more powerful for the possession of these skills. In addition, democides are not rational, even though some may consider them as such. Mass killings are tribal in character and the language used by government attests to this fact because the language creates tribes, otherwise known as in-groups and out-groups. Mass killings may also be a way for governments to maintain power, even at the expense of the country. Regardless of the motivations, though, language will be integral to the success, failure, or implementation of government policies. To close, one must return to the quintessential political critic of the twentieth century who constantly questioned the state and its use of language, George Orwell. He phrased it best when he wrote that political language “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to

⁵ Ibid., 5.

give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”⁶ The fact that language can act as such constitutes a testimony to its power and danger, especially in politics.

⁶ John Carey, ed., *George Orwell: Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 954-967. From “Politics and the English Language.”

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