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The Identity Trap: The Language of Genocide

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to create a framework for thinking about how language themes propagated in radio broadcasts start to degenerate into the reification of a culture that tolerates and even encourages classification and dehumanization. Understanding these language themes becomes an early warning system that begins to signal the beginning of a genocidal spiral. This framework is termed the *Identity Trap*, and it demonstrates how various linguistic conventions combine to establish a social context that builds up the speaker's social identity while denigrating the "enemy's" social identity, which provides the rationale for escalating conflict against that enemy. Two broadcasts from the 1994 Rwandan genocide are used as examples.

Keywords

genocide, social identity, dehumanization, Rwanda

The hate speech inciting the 1994 Rwandan genocide is well documented by Simon (2006). Extremist Hutu media outlets produced a title wave of hate speech advocating the ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi minority. One radio station even identified targets for Hutu militias, resulting in the executives from this station being convicted for their role in the genocide. Although the airing of these messages alone did not cause the genocide, it is clear that they created a social climate that legitimized tribal hatred that ultimately eliminated any social sanctions preventing genocide.

In his article asking whether the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented, Stanton (2004) argues that prevention means understanding the process of changing a social climate within any given state and how that climate devolves into one group seeking to exterminate another. He identifies eight stages of social change that each yields

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markers that, if recognized, can serve as early warning systems for possible intervention. The first three stages are Classification ("us versus them"), Symbolization (groups are given names or symbols of their second-class citizenship such as ID cards), and Dehumanization (groups are given names of bad things, e.g., cockroaches or cancer). These first three stages mark the onset of the death spiral toward genocide. The final five stages include Organization (hate groups organize into armed forces), Polarization (in which moderates are targeted and assassinated), Preparation (planning and training for the final genocidal attacks), Extermination (beginning the genocidal extermination of "less than human" enemies), and Denial (justifying their actions and denying that a crime has been committed). Stanton argues that intervening in the social climate at early stages provides a greater chance of success than waiting until extermination begins and then trying to stop that process.

These three early stages are important because they have the greatest potential for prevention by first understanding how the public language displayed through the media and other outlets is classifying, symbolizing, and dehumanizing groups within that society. Based on that understanding, interventions can then be crafted to both warn of impending violence and perhaps even turn that language in a more constructive direction. Nevertheless, crafting an intervention system that might include a warning mechanism means first focusing on the themes displayed by the classification language that sets the kind of social context within the society at risk for genocide. The article applies a framework developed to understand the linguistic context of the Oslo I accords (Donohue & Druckman, 2009) to an analysis of the language leading up to the Rwandan crisis of 1994. The purpose is to determine how the media systematically constructed a context of classification, symbolization, and dehumanization that made the genocide possible. These language themes signal the beginning of the genocidal process. The framework that will be used to understand this genocidal path is termed the *Identity Trap*, and its development begins by better understanding how language establishes social contexts in the course of ethnic disputes.

Language and Social Climate

In a recent article focusing on Israeli–Palestinian language leading up to the Oslo Accords, Donohue and Druckman (2009) sought to understand how leaders from both groups framed their public language to create the larger social context surrounding the secret negotiations. Selecting a series of speeches and interviews in the 6 months leading up to the accords, they coded the extent to which the messages were displaying power/affiliation, trust/mistrust, and forward-/backward-looking relational message frames. The study found that Palestinian language consistently displayed more power and backward-looking justice themes, and less trust. The primary explanation for this "tougher" looking language was centered on the notion of outbidding. This is a strategy that nonstate actors often adopt to appear "tougher" to show resolve to constituents and bid for their support over rival factions. In contrast, Israeli language alternated

between displaying high power and high affiliation; yet it was also more forward looking while showing glimpses of trust at times. This vacillation reflected more of a front-stage orientation, which is typical of state actors who must moderate their linguistic positions to appeal to broader political audiences. Israeli politicians must appeal to both conservative and liberal factions in order to win votes.

The study also explored the intersection of these three frames. When speakers focused on the past (looking backward with an emphasis on justice concerns), these issues were more likely to be accompanied with messages of high power and mistrust. However, when they focused on the future and the formulation of peace issues, they were more likely to infuse their language with trust and affiliation messages. In short, the data suggest that these constructs are highly interdependent; the use of more collaborative or competitive relational messages appears to be a function of whether individuals adopt a justice or peace frame in their communication. These results build on and extend the forward-backward, peace versus justice theme explored in Zartman and Kremenyuk (2005) by adding relational features to their substantive distinction.

This finding is relevant to the issue of genocide because it reveals a linguistic profile that typifies the "classification" language described by Stanton (2004). This classification process works to create two polarized identities aimed at building separation between in-groups and out-groups or separating one's own belief system from the belief systems of others (Rokeach, 1960). The process typically begins by classifying the out-group as possessing a set of dangerous and morally bankrupt characteristics. The goal is to create an out-group identity for the main enemy by proposing that this group is a significant and credible threat to the well-being of the in-group. The main vehicle for creating this identity is forging a simple, evil stereotype of the out-group, a "disbelief system" (Rokeach, 1960) that stems from their past injustices. "Here's the evil they have perpetrated," so "they can't be trusted," and as a result, "they must be controlled and eliminated." Notice the themes of looking backward, mistrust, and power in this language and how this vilification process begins by looking backward and focusing on the specific evil acts perpetrated by this out-group. After building the case that the out-group is evil, the conclusion is that they cannot be trusted and must be dealt with summarily. The steady drumbeat of injustices and mistrust aims at inciting emotional reactions of fear and anger. In turn, this negative emotion motivates those who consume these messages to take quick and decisive action that will eliminate the threat.

Part of this polarized identity for the out-group is forging an identity for the in-group as the only viable counterforce to fight the threat. The foundation of this identity is the in-group's claim that only it has the courage and strength to identify the threat and stand up to it. "We see what they're doing and we're not afraid to say it" is the general theme of the language. The more they "call out" the out-group members as perpetuating outrageous injustices and forming unholy alliances with other recognized evildoers, the more prominently the in-group displays its identity as called on to save the day. Thus, the purpose of fighting the out-group is not just to eliminate the threat but to bolster the ability of the in-group to provide justice and create a better society.

The argument in this article is that creating these identity extremes through polarized language forms an "Identity Trap" in the sense that it frames the conflict as being about the clash of identities instead of focusing on substantive issues and the exploration of a middle ground. The more extreme and polarized the identities become, the bigger the trap that is created and the fewer choices people have to stay out of the conflict. The idea of this process creating a "trap" stems from the extreme paradoxical state this situation presents to individuals. The steady drumbeat of inflammatory, extremist language simultaneously *pulls* enemies closer together (more talk about, confrontation of, and more physical engagement with the enemy) in a struggle to *push* (defeat, separate from, or in other ways eliminate) the enemy further away. This paradoxical push–pull state traps people into a sense of confused outrage and becomes the new "normal" for them. At its worst, this push–pull paradoxical identity entraps entire societies, making individuals feel caged and backed into a corner.

As their frustration builds they look for authority figures that will provide a way out of the paralyzing trap. These authority figures emerge from the in-group and become the voice of action by first building an increasingly extreme identity of the targeted out-group and then providing a path that leads to the elimination of the out-group. If there are no moderating influences on this destructive path, individuals will face a difficult challenge in both recognizing their entrapment and escaping it constructively. If the authoritarian leader is discredited, or some critical incident causes parties to dramatically shift their views of the out-group members, they may recognize and uncover the paradox. In fact, the goal of any kind of political reconciliation process is essentially a guided introspection about the out-group's identity and an attempt to broaden that identity to shift the conflict away from identities and toward a focus on the issues (Moon, 2008). This shift eliminates the paradox and essentially closes the identity trap. However, the longer the conflict focuses on identities by referencing past atrocities, the deeper the paradox becomes and the bigger and more formidable is the identity trap. Unless some kind of intervention occurs, the language shifts from grievances to classification and can then move quickly toward symbolization and ultimately dehumanization.

Thus, the building of an identity trap is best viewed as a process that begins with a steady drumbeat of grievances or criticism against the out-group while simultaneously forging the identity of and praising the in-group as a counter to the threat. The process escalates with the use of symbolization language as a means of making the out-group threat more concrete and significant. The symbolization then leads to dehumanization and the call to action aimed at eliminating the out-group. Whillock (1995) provides further insights about how this process evolves. He offers the idea of a "hate stratagem" to describe how groups build a social identity around hate themes. He argues that groups first seek to inflame members' emotional reactions to the targeted out-group as a means of enhancing the in-group's identity. By using hateful, verbally aggressive discourse that vilifies the targeted individuals, the group creates a stronger sense of purpose. They must stick together to eradicate the threat. To further solidify this collective identity, the group pulls the enemy closer by expanding the list of

undesirable qualities of these targeted individuals and making that list very public. It becomes important to find more and more qualities that threaten the in-group's identity. This continuous throng motivates the group to then inflict harm on the out-group by verbally attacking its members, its perceived friends, and things they value. If successful, the group will then begin physically attacking the out-group members directly to eliminate them. That is, verbal aggression gives way to physical aggression. The final part of the hate stratagem is to rhetorically conquer the enemy by glorifying the killing and destruction of the out-group, its friends, and the things it values. This glorification is needed to show that the group can successfully achieve its goals, which further build its collective identity.

In other words, hate language that continuously performs the task of classifying the targeted out-group from start to finish is an intrinsic part of the genocidal process. The hate language serves to continuously reinforce the out-group's negative identity and the in-group's positive identity further widening the identity trap and making it more and more difficult to avoid succumbing to it. To understand the specific linguistic structures that promotes this continuous vilification and classification process, it will be useful to further describe the three-part conceptual framework described above that forms the outline of identity trap and ultimately propels group members toward violence.

Identity Trap Language

Forward- and Backward-Looking Language

One way to understand political language is in terms of forward- and backward-looking statements (Zartman & Kremenyuk, 2005). Backward-looking statements focus on justice themes such as ending the violence, accounting for past wrongs, and objections to compromise outcomes that do not address the underlying sources of conflict. These statements emphasize the symptoms of conflict, often implying that the other party is responsible for the problem and that a resolution depends largely on their concessions. They reflect and reinforce a competitive (or distributive) bargaining process. In contrast, forward-looking statements are characterized by an attempt to address the underlying causes of the conflict by creating a new framework intended to build a more constructive future. They focus on similarities, the acknowledgement of mutual responsibility, and an awareness of the underlying reasons for the conflict. The emphasis is on imagining a future in which peaceful relationships are sustained.

Power and Affiliation Language

An earlier conceptual scheme, devised by Donohue and Hoobler (2002), was used to capture the relational features of communication. It distinguishes between messages that emphasize power and those that promote affiliation between disputants. Power includes (a) strong, forceful acts; (b) control, or attempts to regulate or manage the

other; (c) attempts made to influence the other with direct or implied threats; (d) efforts to impress the other with reputational tactics; (e) a strong positive or negative emotional reaction; and (f) giving unsolicited advice or help. Affiliation messages consist of (a) expressions of positive, friendly, or intimate feelings; (b) expressions of sadness or regret for lost opportunities to restore relations; (c) statements of companionship or camaraderie; and (d) nurturing statements or acts. In the analysis of the Oslo I data, it was clear that power-oriented language was a standard tactic used to appear tough toward the enemy, whereas affiliation language was aimed at trying to appear more "reasonable" or "understanding."

Trust and Mistrust Language

Trust has been conceptualized frequently as risking vulnerability in situations where a person has little control over an outcome (Hoffman, 2002; Lewicki et al., 1998). The key to a trusting relationship is a willingness to take a chance on being exploited for the other's gain (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). Among the factors thought to contribute to trust are (a) perceived similarity and positive regard, (b) an interdependent relational structure in which the parties can help one another, (c) the initiation of trusting behavior by the other party, and (d) making concessions on key issues. When one or more of these factors are present, the parties are more likely to risk vulnerability and thereby strengthen a sense of trust (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985). The contrasting state of mistrust occurs when parties are unwilling to risk vulnerability or to acknowledge their dependence on one another. Expressions of (a) separation, (b) denials of similarity, (c) promoting suspicion of the other party's intentions, and (d) an unwillingness to offer or to reciprocate concessions are indicators of mistrust. In their study of negotiations to end violent international conflicts, Irmer and Druckman (2007) found that increasing levels of trust during the course of talks improved the prospects for obtaining a comprehensive, rather than a partial, agreement—or no agreement at all. Parties that made a transition from mistrust early in the talks to knowledge-based and then identity-based trust achieved better outcomes than those who remained mistrusting or were willing only to evince a knowledge-based trust.

The Paradox of the Identity Trap

At this point, it is useful to understand how these three pairs of linguistic markers function collectively to form an identity trap. To summarize the issue of paradox in the context of crisis communication, it appears that parties create and manage relationships by negotiating their identity as they exchange information. As they become more interdependent (pulling each other closer and being more direct) and less affiliative (pushing each other away through expressions of mistrust and dislike) they find themselves immersed in an identity trap. Individuals' identities are at risk in a conflict as they seek to support both their positive and negative face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Both parties place a great priority on the need to protect how others

see them (positive face) while resisting others' attempts to constrain their behavior (negative face). When these identity needs drive the paradoxical context of conflict interaction, parties risk falling into the trap of needing to use more extreme behavior (both linguistic and physical) to repel ever-expanding identity threats. Falling into the trap is easy since individuals are well practiced at protecting identity as it is essential to maintaining one's social standing. Unfortunately, staying out of the trap is often difficult since that requires not reciprocating identity attacks while also understanding the conflict from the other's perspective.

As the identity trap deepens and language escalates in response to fulfilling identity needs, the language can signal what Zartman (2000) argues is a mutually hurting stalemate. In other words, both sides are involved in an escalating spiral in which both sides continue to endure the pain of conflict until that conflict becomes "ripe" or too painful to continue. This ripeness becomes manifest as an expressed willingness to move out of an identity-focused conflict trap and into a more constructive frame. This movement, or ripening, requires that parties focus quickly on two separate issues before they can begin dealing with the substantive or material concerns in the dispute: their relationship to each other and the context that has emerged in the course of the dispute. The challenge with the first problem is building a consensus about the fundamental parameters of their relationship simply as communicators. Regarding affiliation, how are they prepared to manage the issues of trust/mistrust, openness/closedness, public/private? And how can they also manage their interdependence issues focusing on connection/ autonomy or control/yielding? They might engage in a variety of face-saving and face-maintaining strategies all aimed at finding new levels of affiliation and interdependence that will free them from the trap and simply allow the parties to communicate again more constructively, or disengage for some period to cool off.

For example, in response to a mutually hurting stalemate fed by one identity-riddled crisis after another, one side may choose to renegotiate affiliation by being more open and revealing some sensitive information to show that they are being more trusting. Or they might yield control over some critical negotiation procedure that they used to stonewall the other. They might also agree to work with a third party that was previously not acceptable. The key here is that once parties feel trapped and see themselves imprisoned by it, the conflict is ripe for renegotiation.

Unfortunately, genocide occurs when one side chooses to resolve the stalemate by physically eliminating the enemy instead of promoting negotiation. If the individuals from one of the groups are nonstate actors, the Donohue and Druckman (2009) research indicates that they are more likely to use their linguistic opportunities to propagate extremist language as an outbidding strategy to gain legitimacy among their own constituents. This outbidding, extremist language began proliferating in the Rwandan conflict in late 1993 and escalated throughout the genocide becoming more extreme by the day. The key question becomes "what is that tipping point?" Is there a way to chart the course of the language using the Identity Trap framework to determine how close individuals are to experiencing a sense of ripeness and conflict resolution or to sliding toward a genocidal solution to the issues? The first step in answering this

question is conducting a qualitative analysis of some of the radio broadcasts leading up to the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

Rwandan Genocide

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation's time line (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3580247.stm), the 100 days of genocide began on April 6, 1994, when President Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed when their plane was shot down as it was about to land at the Kigali, Rwanda, airport. That event triggered the systematic killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by the Rwandan armed forces and the Interahamwe militia, which was dominated by Hutu extremists. This killing continued throughout April, so that by mid-May about 500,000 Rwandans had been killed. The conflict ended on July 18, 1994, when the RTF (the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front) seized control of the country and announced that the war was over. During the conflict, there were various attempts by the International Red Cross, French, and Belgian forces to intervene, but their troop levels were ineffective, rendering them unable to end the hostilities.

From mid-1993 to the end of July 1994, an extremist Hutu group controlled a popular radio station in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. The station sought to stir up ethnic hatred for the Tutsi minority (about 9% of the population). Here is an excerpt from a November 24, 1993, broadcast (the Inkotanyi is a nickname for Tutsis). These tapes are available at http://surplusknowledge.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55&Itemid=64.

> However, what has been found out, what is well-known is that this present government which spent much time in an impasse is a powerless one. Because its members are trying to work with *Inkotanyi* if they were ever to join that government. Because they are trying to get posts in that government. So, they can never say anything that should oppose them to the *Inkotanyi*. That is the reason people are being killed and they can never talk of "*Inkotanyi*." They are really afraid of that word so that they (*Inkotanyi*) will not hear them and get angry with them and scold them. That is why in the speech that Mrs. Uwilingiyimana Agathe delivered yesterday, people have always been telling her, "You are saying that soldiers decided that they will no longer negotiate because people died. Why did RPF make a great deal of fuss when thirteen people were lost? They even ordered you to rush and look for them in Ndusu until you handed them over to them. Even radio and television stations attended that. . . . So, why had they stopped the negotiations and instead of condemning them, you rather got afraid, you fussed about and you looked for those young men whom you handed over to the *Inkotanyi*? Maybe if you do not agree with me. . . . Furthermore, now that people have been killed and there is no doubt that it is RPF who killed them. . . . Now we are stopping the negotiations. I think

that if agreements are signed, I think that they have to be respected by two signatory parties.

Classification Linguistic Analysis

Using the Identity Trap framework outlined above, the classification themes displayed in this broadcast begin to emerge. Notice first that this broadcast was made in late 1993, about 6 months prior to the genocidal attacks. This excerpt is just one of the daily broadcasts by this extremist Hutu group, and their goal was to vilify both the government controlled by moderate Hutus and the Inkotanyi, or the minority Tutsi population in the country. As indicated above, these broadcasts were made by nonstate actors looking to gain support for their extremist cause. This is a typical outbidding goal that is achieved by using the kind of extreme language that appeals to extremists.

Before examining the specific themes used in the broadcasts, it is useful to examine the general approach the speaker is using to spring the identity trap. The first several lines are filled with accusations aimed at discrediting two out-groups: the moderate Hutu-run government led by Mrs. Agathe and the Inkotanyi, a pejorative nickname for the Tutsi minority. The accusations stem from corruption, improper negotiation strategies, and, most important, murder. On one hand, the speaker is working hard to create out-groups for both the government and the Inkotanyi. On the other hand, the speaker is creating an in-group identity for those who oppose these injustices. The focus then moves toward making sense of these incidents by building negative identities for the out-groups and a positive identity for the in-groups who would oppose such practices. To understand this extreme language more precisely, it might be useful to focus first on how power and affiliation messages were displayed in the broadcast.

Power/Affiliation Classification Themes

Recall that power themes focus on control, influence, emotional reactions, and the like, whereas affiliation themes emphasize camaraderie, friendliness, and other nurturing acts. In the first couple of sentences, the speaker is seeking to influence public opinion. This power move criticizes the government for being powerless because they are trying to work with the Tutsis. Notice first that the speaker is using the pejorative nickname for the Tutsis, calling them the Inkotanyi. The speaker then claims that the Inkotanyi are collaborators with the RTF (Rwandan government) and that both groups are involved in various killings. In fact, throughout this broadcast the speaker is trying to link the RTF and the Tutsis together in a conspiracy of some sort against the people. In essence, the speaker is trying to classify the Tutsis as another enemy of the people; the objective is to justify later dehumanization that occurs in subsequent broadcasts in April and May 1994. The dominance of power themes and the absence of affiliation themes in the language begin to set the context for later events.

The power themes are also propelled forward by the use of emotional language, the first component of Whillock's (1995) hate stratagem. The accusation that the Inkotanyi are working with the government to acquire posts strikes at the issue of fairness and works to forge the identity of the Tutsis as an entitled class who see themselves as superior to "the people." The Inkotanyi are then portrayed as people who must be feared because they easily angered and should not be trusted. The broadcast ultimately accuses them of working with the government to kill 13 people. These accusations are aimed at inciting the listeners' emotional reactions against the Tutsis while building the counteridentity of the group watching over the interests of "the people"—the Hutu majority.

Trust/Mistrust Classification Themes

The broadcast also seeks to establish listener mistrust of both the RTF and the Tutsis. Recall that the mistrust themes focus on separation, denials of similarity, fomenting suspicion, and an unwillingness to reciprocate concessions. Looking at each sentence in the broadcast, it is clear that the intent of each comment is to build suspicion about the RTF as well as the Tutsis. The speaker accuses the government of giving posts to the Tutsis, unfairly stopping negotiations after the 13 people had been killed, giving the killers over to the Tutsis, and accusing the RTF of committing the killings. The speaker's goal also appears to separate listeners from the RTF and Tutsis. The speaker is essentially accusing these two groups of doing bad things that are wrong and unfair for the Rwandan people. The mistrust theme is very strong in this broadcast and serves to again classify the RTF and the Tutsis as bad people.

Forward-/Backward-Looking Classification Themes

Finally, the hallmark of backward-looking language is the idea of seeking justice for past wrongs and not addressing the underlying sources of the conflict. The goal is to lay blame on someone for past wrongs such that if these individuals were eliminated, justice would be served in some way. Again, the goal of the broadcast is to lay blame for various injustices (e.g., killings, stopping negotiations) at the feet of the RTF and the Tutsis. The language clearly looks backward with no attempt to propose any alternative strategies for either understanding the current problems or negotiating a new set of arrangements. There is also no attempt to provide others' opinions or to get reaction from any other source. In other words, it is not about debate but rather stern accusation to incite hate.

Symbolizing and Dehumanizing Linguistic Analysis

It is clear that the radio broadcasts leading up to the genocidal acts were aimed at accomplishing two key goals. The first goal was to focus listener attention on identities rather than on specific issues. Creating an extremist identity for the out-group

Tutsis on the one hand and building a rationale for viewing the extremist Hutu group as the salvation of the country on the other hand was a necessary first move. The second goal was to refine these identities by classifying the Tutsis as dangerous criminals causing problems for the country while offering the Hutu group as the voice of salvation. Having pounded away at these goals for months, subsequent broadcasts moved systematically toward genocide by concentrating on language that promoted symbolization and ultimately dehumanization. Below is a broadcast from May 16, 1994, about 7 months after the first transcript and about 1 month into the genocide:

> Those who are at the market you will be told things about those children you call street children. You will hear that many of them are *Inkotanyi*. Look at all of them and then touch on their heads, you will see a sign showing you that there are *Inkotanyi*. There is a zero sign shaved at the back side of their heads; touch and see. You will see RPF children who, in daytime, make themselves street children but who, in the night, disguise themselves and go to inform RPF on the situation.
>
> And you people who live down there near Rugunga, even though it is raining, go out. You will see *Inkotanyi*'s straw-huts in the marsh where horses are kept. It is clear then that this place shelters *Inkotanyi*. I think that those who have guns should immediately go to these *Inkotanyi* before they listen to Radio RTLM and flee. Stand near this place and encircle them and kill them because they are there.
>
> You are then going to listen to this *Inkotanyi* child we have captured this morning. You will know the course of the situation and how *Inkotanyi* are daredevils. You will learn that, our victory against them is certain. It is not even necessary to negotiate with them. We need ammunitions and enough weapons so that we can fight against them and no doubt we will have the victory we will win since *Inkotanyi* are desperate. People who bring sorcerers, women who suck and. . . . In a short moment you are going to listen to the interview I have had with that *Inkotanyi* but you should put into action what he tells you, arrest those street children. There are three at Kimisagara near Rose's. There is a team of 30 street children which informs *Inkotanyi* on the number of people who are on barriers, the kind of weapons they have, how they sleep. I don't want to take your time. Listen to this child.

Although this transcript is very difficult to read, it clearly demonstrates an important transition from the previous example. The first broadcast aired some months before the genocide began focused more on the classification process. The goal was to portray the Tutsis as dangerous and dishonest. However, this subsequent broadcast aired after the genocide began moves past this classification and works to achieve the goals of symbolization and dehumanization. Notice first that the broadcast lists in great detail how to identify members of the Tutsi Inkotanyi group. Just as with past genocides in which members of the majority population were given visual characteristics of the targeted

persons, the broadcasts revealed ways of physically differentiating Tutsi children from others. The "zero sign" shaved on their heads became a symbol of differentiation. That symbol enabled the classification of Tutsis as deceitful and dangerous.

The broadcasts also reveal many attempts at dehumanizing the Tutsis. This language labels them as daredevils, street children, sorcerers, and "women who suck." Other broadcasts labeled these Tutsis as cockroaches needing to be exterminated. The goal is therefore to hunt them down and totally eliminate them. No attempts at negotiation or problem solving of any kind are suggested. Victory is the main objective. These kinds of explicit instructions on how to hunt down and find these enemies are apparent in broadcasts after the April 6, 1994, plane crash that triggered the genocide. After months of classification, the broadcasts only needed to provide the instructions and the genocide was in full swing.

Notice that the language is oriented toward power, justice, and mistrust. The power language commands listeners to identify the Tutsis and hunt them down. The language is directive and forceful with few qualifications. Consistent with this language are attempts to show how the Tutsis cannot be trusted. The broadcast calls them daredevils and sorcerers who pose a significant threat.

The overriding theme of the broadcast is the need to seek justice for these problems. The only way the broadcast advocates for addressing the problem is to take up arms and exterminate the enemy as they sleep. The concept of victory is offered as the moral imperative for achieving this justice and for ultimately escaping the identity trap. The broadcasts make the case that as long as the Tutsis are allowed to live, they offer nothing but problems. The people can crawl out of the trap and find a certain resolution by pushing away the enemy completely and eliminating the paradox. The broadcasters established themselves as the saviors of the people with a unique and forceful understanding of the threat posed by the Tutsi minority. They then used powerful language to make sure the threat was addressed decisively.

Avoiding the Identity Trap

The United Nations passed only 2 resolutions during the genocide in an attempt to separate the parties and avoid further violence but then another 16 after the genocide ended. A more preventive approach to these kinds of tragedies is to understand the clear signals leading up to such an event. The argument forwarded by this article is that this prevention effort can begin by concentrating on how language promotes extremist identities and ultimately traps populations into making horrendous choices.

The key to avoiding identity traps is first to recognize that one is present or looming in the language. Extreme responses to problems such as genocide are not sudden, unexpected events. They are telegraphed. Left to fester, such language catches people in an identity trap. As the trap begins to close around the population, it is important for dissenting voices or external forces to intervene and figure a way out of the trap that can transform the culture away from one that tolerates or even encourages the transition to genocide. To achieve this goal, it might be useful to highlight strategies for

recognizing when identity traps are emerging. First, it is important to note that traps generally emerge when extremist groups gain access to popular media and begin the outbidding process that consists of attempts to classify. Often, these classification attempts can be very subtle. Showing disrespect by dismissing the other's issues, demonstrating a lack of interest in listening to the other, or labeling the other as unjust or illegitimate are active attempts to build a climate of mistrust, power, and looking backward. Repeated over time with more intense language or sensitive topics can further escalate the move from classification to symbolization and dehumanization. These strategies are common in most international disputes, such as the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, in which both sides seek to paint a black-and-white picture of the other side's words and actions.

Another side of the identity trap that emerges shows a fixation on a linguistic trope. Tropes represent frames for shaping the rhetorical frame. Putnam (2004) examines the concept of tropes (the use of metaphors, irony, metonymy, and synecdoche) to understand how individuals reference and manage relational tensions. She focuses specifically on the use of metonymy (a figure of speech in which a word stands for its constituent parts, e.g., using the word *culture* to stand for an organization's values, rituals, and myths) and synecdoche (a figure of speech in which the part stands for, or symbolizes, the whole, e.g., substituting the word *crown* to stand for the role of the king or queen). In other words, how are people using words to conceptualize complex relational dialectics that define the nature of the parties' interdependencies? In her research, Putnam (2004) focuses on how tropes are used to negotiate autonomy and interdependence in a teacher bargaining context. She found that the term *language* referred to the creation and discussion of policy issues and the term *money* referred to any budget-related item. The bargaining often revolved around who owned the money and the ability to craft the language that would ultimately guide the negotiation. Thus, these concepts were used to negotiate the dialectical tensions of autonomy and interdependence between the parties.

In classification language, similar kinds of tropes often emerge that serve to build identity traps. Several tropes are featured in the November 24 broadcast. The most obvious is the use of the pejorative nickname "Inkotanyi" to refer to the Tutsis. The speakers made several references to this nickname and often formed the broadcast around it to ensure that the classification objectives were reached. The other trope that appears is use of the word *negotiation* as a way of denigrating what would be a more reasonable and rational way of resolving the conflict. The repeated references to *negotiation* seek to justify the preferred strategy of the speaker's extremist Hutu supporters and characterize it as a symbol of the moral high ground in the dispute. Such tropes are commonly used by groups seeking to build a case for their side, or in this case the listeners, to adopt a particular frame for the dispute and ultimately a course of action to resolve the dispute.

These tropes often serve as windows for disclosing paradoxes. The label "Inkotanyi" is not only used to classify all the individuals who identify with the Tutsi tribe, but it also serves as a linguistic tool to justify actions. For example, the Hutu fixation in

calling all of the people who oppose their extremist vision as "Inkotanyi" represents a classic identity trap. The Hutu extremists use this term in their language to express their fears and press their demands with the listeners and other supporters while also using it to resist demands and assert rights. Thus, whatever trope either side uses represents a bid for the support of a specific identity while also signaling the entrance into the identity trap. The fight between the Hutus and Tutsis was not about the appropriate form of government or specific grievances. Rather, it was about a lack of trust and affiliation, and a refusal to work together for a better future. Listeners were led into an identity trap that deepened dramatically as the broadcasts progressed.

Once caught within a trap, which is often very difficult to avoid, it is important to understand how the interaction can be transformed to escape it. The most obvious strategy is to recognize first that the other is setting a trap with some kind of identity attack. Reciprocating the attack springs the trap and captures everyone. Avoiding the attack by reestablishing another topic or focusing on the substantive issue begins to circumvent the trap. Another strategy for avoiding the trap is to simply decrease interdependence. Sometimes it is useful to separate for a while and not continue to interact. Or one can bring in a mediator to create and enforce interaction rules.

The Rwandan situation is typical of many genocidal situations in which a powerless group finds itself in a death spiral at the hands of the more powerful party. Caught in an existential struggle, the powerless group must pursue a unilateral strategy to avoid the identity trap and deescalate the conflict. History tells us that outside intervention, if it ever materializes, comes only after significant atrocities have already taken place. And often the interventions, as in the case of Rwanda, are ineffective at stopping the violence. Recent events in Libya suggest that Arab League and United Nations interventions may have prevented a humanitarian crisis in that country. Far too often genocide continues unabated until a major event blunts the attacks. Within their existential struggle, what could the Tutsis have done as a unilateral strategy? Given their limited resources, their last hope would have been outside intervention when it was clear that a climate of hate was emerging in Rwanda. Perhaps there is a case for a genocide that might alert the United Nations or the International Criminal Court (ICC) to take action.

Establishing an Early Warning System for Genocide Avoidance

Language that classifies signals the slippery slope toward genocide. What kinds of systems ought to be in place to both detect such language and then to mitigate its effects? Creating a linguistic early warning system would certainly be easy to implement. One could imagine a system in which a computer program sponsored by, for example, the ICC could analyze the verbally aggressive language coming from various media broadcasts or computer websites and then look for trends over time to determine the appropriateness and timing of an intervention. That system could focus on the three constructs proposed here including power/affiliation, trust/mistrust, and

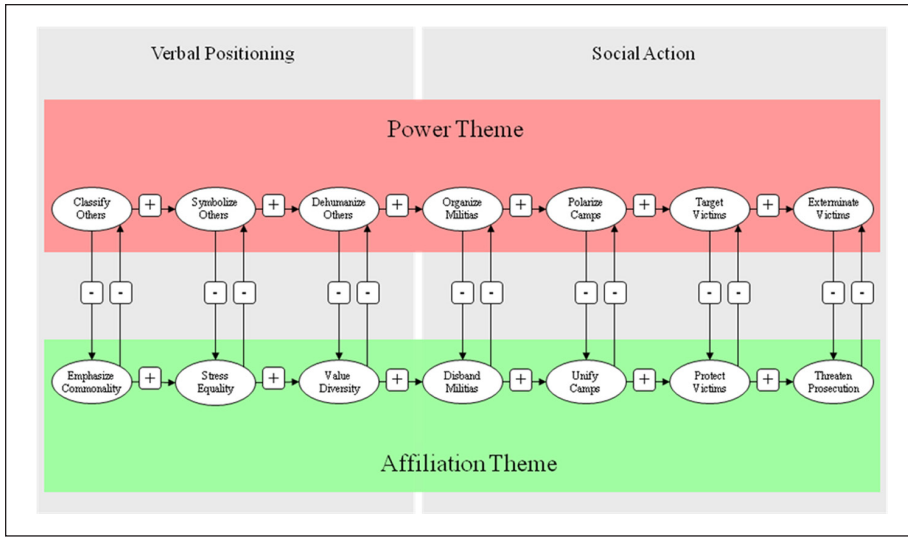

Figure 1. Identity Trap framework

forward-/backward-looking language. If that system were fed into a central ICC site that monitors such language, it would be possible for those analyzing the information to create a list of countries/areas on a "watch list" of some kind. As the language intensified, the more vulnerable places would be targeted for some kind of action.

Figure 1 presents an Identity Trap framework that provides a useful way of conceptualizing how a genocide alert system might function. Using Stanton's (2004) framework, it would be possible to adopt the seven power themes he describes in his genocidal stages. If the rhetoric were analyzed and the verbally aggressive language began to move into the red power theme zone, and away from the green affiliation theme zone, then a body such as the ICC could begin to flag that nation or region for greater scrutiny. If verbally aggressive language progressed past the first stage or two into more dehumanizing themes, then it could be expected that the aggressors were moving beyond language-based actions and more toward the implementation of physical violence in the form of militias that target victims.

What action would be appropriate to mitigate classification language? Aside from military intervention, there are various aid programs that seek linguistic moderation through economic development. Factions from different groups could learn to work together and benefit from jobs and increased prosperity. Underlying these efforts could also be attempts to initiate dialogue groups that allow individuals from different sides to simply become more comfortable with one another. Would that have been possible in preventing the Rwandan genocide? Certainly the government was weak and vulnerable to an onslaught of classification language. Yet stronger interventions aimed at addressing grievances might have created a different climate, one capable of heading off the horrific escalation. Clearly, public language matters; it creates a

context for how people can interact with one another. Will they choose a productive path that emphasizes understanding and negotiation or will they choose a destructive path that emphasizes vilification through classification and violence? The point of this article is that language is real in the sense that it really matters. Language creates a context that moves people to action, particularly when access to multiple communication sources is fairly limited, as it was in Rwanda. Events taking hold now in the Arab world are another example of how language matters. As protestors from Tunisia to Egypt and Syria to Libya find the communication tools and form the language needed to cast leaders in an oppressive light, they are practicing identity trap politics. Certainly as these events illustrate, there is no shortage of conflicts around which to devote preventive resources. However, the more we come to grips with the reality that language may be the key to quick and effective conflict resolution, we can create interventions to detect and avoid genocide.

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Bio

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