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Imagined Enemies, Concrete Victims. The Speech of Léon Mugesera and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994

by

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Abstract

The case that will be analyzed is the speech delivered by the political figure Léon Mugesera in November 1992, linked to the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Through his words, it is possible to trace some of the main narratives that primed the ground for the genocide. They are an example of the processes through which a clear enemy, the Tutsi, have been imagined and defined prior to and during the outbreak of 1994 large-scale violence.

The first aim of this paper is, therefore, to understand how modern state-level forces in Rwanda operated to generate narratives that strengthened ethnic affiliations on the eve of the genocide.

The second aim is to investigate to what extent the genocidal violence was the product of relentless propaganda, unfounded rumors, prejudices and of collective memory.

Keywords

Rwandan genocide, Léon Mugesera, Tutsi and Hutu, cultural violence

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❖ Introduction

International media often portrayed the 1994 Rwandan genocide as ‘tribalistic savagery’, ‘tribal slaughter’, ‘primordial bloodlust’, ‘meaningless horror’ caused by ‘blind obedience to tribal hierarchies’ (see Eltringham 2004:63; Taylor 2002). Such interpretations obfuscate responsibility, and overlook the fact that the genocide was instead *‘a political phenomenon, thought about, planned, spoken about and organized by political actors who were part of the state and the institutions’* (see Eltringham 2004:66). As Des Forges notes, *‘[w]hen the national authorities ordered the extermination of Tutsi, tens of thousands of Hutu responded quickly, ruthlessly and persistently. They killed without scruple and sometimes with pleasure. They jogged through the streets of Kigali chanting, “Let’s exterminate them all”’* (Des Forges 1999:260). In the 100 days from 6 April to 4 July 1994, about 1 million Tutsi and Hutu political opponents of the regime were murdered in the guilty indifference of the international community (see Des Forges 1999:15-17; Taylor 2002:138). These narratives could lead a large number of people to see their neighbors *‘not as fellow human beings entitled to lead their own lives but as an intolerable presence that must be isolated and eliminated’* (Hinton 2002:ix-x). How was it possible for the genocidal regime to recruit personnel, organize and perpetrate genocide with the implicit support for, or at least general indifference to, these policies by the majority of the population?

❖ Léon Mugesera’s speech, a blueprint for the genocide.

On 22 November 1992, in the town of Kabaya, in the northwestern prefecture of Gisenyi, the ‘professor-turned-propagandist’ (Des Forges 1999:72) Léon Mugesera gave a 30 minute-long speech before an audience of nearly a thousand members at a party

meeting of the MRND(D)³. This speech was recorded and broadcast frequently by the RTLM radio station, one of the main ‘hate-media’ (see Chrétien 2007) in Rwanda, and many authors regard it as a ‘blueprint for the practical implementation of the genocide’ (Fletcher 2014:2; see also Des Forges 1999:83), as a significant ‘archetype of speech that incites genocide’ (Biju-Duval 2007:350).

Under the presidency of Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994), party meetings were ‘nationalist rituals in the modern sense’ (Taylor 2002:143): emotionally-charged popular events where participants and speakers would compete in composing litanies about the country’s development, sing Hutu patriotic hymns, and celebrate the achievements and qualities of President Habyarimana and the political party he had founded, the MRND(D). However, by the time of the meeting in Kabaya, Habyarimana’s political and military power had suffered a considerable deterioration. For the first time in nearly 20 years of government, in the late 1980s, he saw his popularity declining amongst a consistent part of the Hutu population. A growing number of Rwandans became weary of the pervasive corruption and overt favouritisms within the ruling class, which was drawn mainly from the north-western districts and privileged all the close friends of Habyarimana.⁴ Another urgent threat to his hegemony was the military offensive of the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front), a movement founded by Tutsi refugees in Uganda that were aiming to overthrow the regime, retake the country and install a republic (see Des Forges 2007:41).

In this context of internal and external pressures, Mugesera’s choice of words and rhetorical style were designed to outline an overwhelming threat to the Hutu’s very existence, define a clear enemy and incite the audience to ‘defend themselves, their

³ *Mouvement Républicain National pour le Développement et la Démocratie* (National Republican Movement for Development and Democracy), former *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (National Revolutionary Movement for Development), the Hutu mono-party that had been ruling Rwanda since the coup of 1973, which installed General Juvénal Habyarimana as President and ousted Grégoire Kayibanda (see Eltringham 2004).

⁴ ‘By the mid- 1980s, Habyarimana’s home prefecture of Gisenyi, one of ten in the country at the time, had provided the office-holders for one-third of the most important jobs in government as well as virtually all the leaders of the army and security service’ (Des Forges 1999:47). This close circle became known as *akazu* (‘the little house’) or ‘Zero network’ (see Des Forges 1999:44).

country, and the revolution' (Des Forges 1999:83), representing it as an inescapable moral duty.

Militants of our movement, as we are all met here, *I think you will understand the meaning of the word I will say to you*. I will talk to you about only four points. . . . I was going to tell you to beware of kicks by the dying M.D.R. . . . [The second point] is *that we should not allow ourselves to be invaded*, whether here where we are or *inside* the country The third point . . . is an important point, namely *the way we should act* so as to *protect ourselves against traitors* and those who would like to harm us. I would like to end on the *way in which we must act*. (The Kabaya speech 1992:1-2)⁵

After obtaining a doctorate at the University of Laval in Canada and teaching briefly at the National University of Rwanda, Léon Mugesera had been an influential political figure and held office in many state institutions.⁶ The structure of his speech, carefully designed in points, the frequent use of inclusive terminology ('we', 'us', 'ourselves') and metaphors ('kicks by the dying MDR') prove that he was a 'skilled orator who was cognisant of the spoken word's potential power' (Fletcher 2014:4). The devices of empathy and identification were employed to pursue one of the main intents of the speaker, to unite the faithful supporters, and ultimately all the Hutu, against the Tutsi 'traitors' and 'invaders'. Despite the four-point structure, the key themes of this speech can be grouped under two main overarching purposes:

1) To define the enemies of the MRND(D) and Hutu unity, both political (the parties of the CDC coalition), and ethnic (the Tutsi, the RPF);

⁵ This and the following quotes from the Kabaya speech are taken from its English translation accessible at <http://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/2273/index.do>. The original translation from Kinyarwanda into French, which is also the one officially adopted during the legal proceedings in Canada, is by Rwandan linguist T. Kamanzi. Some of the main issues concerning the translation will be addressed in this paper. The references relate to the section divisions used by the online text. All emphasis are added.

⁶ By 1992, he had been the head of the Party Political Affairs, vice-President of the MRND section in the prefecture of Gisenyi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Information, and advisor on political and administrative affairs at the Department of Family and Promotion of Women (See Des Forges 1999:72).

2) To shape a moral imperative to self-defense with arguments drawn from sociocultural symbolism, history, religion, and law, under what has been described as a ‘masquerade of legitimacy’ (Des Forges 1999).

1) The Enemy Within

a. Political oppositions to Habyarimana:

As M.D.R., P.L., F.P.R. [RPF, *Ed.*] and the famous party known as P.S.D. and even the P.D.C. are very busy nowadays . . . trying to injure the President of the Republic, namely, the President of our movement, but they will not succeed. They are working against us, the militants: you should know the reason why all this is happening: in fact, when someone is going to die, it is because he is already ill! (3)

The first enemy that Mugesera outlines is a political one, the MDR, *Mouvement Démocratique Républicain*, one of the opposition parties that arose during the late 1980s as a response to the economic decline and the corruption of Habyarimana’s regime. By 1990, two major factors had made foreign aid vital for Rwanda, a sharp drop in the prices of coffee and tea, which accounted for 75% of its foreign exchange (see Des Forges 1999:46), and the RPF massive offensive that had begun on 1 October along the border with Uganda. With most of the state’s resources devoted to the war effort against the RPF, the urban elites saw their privileges threatened but were not willing to relinquish any of their comforts, while the rural poor suffered from severe droughts and hunger (see Des Forges 1999:46). The enormous social inequalities between the wealthy Hutu from the north-west and the rest of the population sparked widespread protests and demands for reforms. Further demands for democracy and a multi-party government were backed by powerful donor nations that had made development aid conditional on democratization (see Eltringham 2004:76). Opponents to Habyarimana’s hegemony

began organizing in parties that were legally allowed to register from March 1991. Apart from the MDR, which was a new form of the historical MDR-*Parmehutu*⁷; these new parties were the *Parti social-démocrate* (PSD), the *Parti Libéral* (PL) and the *Parti Démocratique Chrétien* (PDC).

Eltringham notes that at this phase, these parties appeared as a solid bloc, known as the *Comité de Concertation de Partis Politiques Démocratiques* (CDC) and their manifestos ‘were more or less identical, dedicated simply to the removal of the single ruling party and its president Habyarimana’ (2004:77). In June 1991, the CDC stated that the war with the RPF was mainly a political, *not* an ethnic issue, resulting from Habyarimana’s bad management of the refugee question, and thus declared peace negotiations with the RPF a priority for its political action. For this reason, the MRND(D) and the pro-genocidal propaganda labeled these parties (officially mixed, or non-ethnic) as traitors. They were referred to as ‘accomplices’ (*ibiyitso*) of the *inyenzi* (cockroaches), a derogatory term used to indicate RPF fighters, but later applied broadly to all Tutsi (see Eltringham 2004:81; Fletcher 2014:1; Des Forges 1999:50). There is little questioning that the audience at Kabaya identified the MDR as a Pro-Tutsi party, a traitor to the ‘Hutu Republic’, and the initial remarks by Mugesera (*‘I think you will understand the meaning of the word I will say to you’*) prove that his words were not falling on ‘deaf ears’ (see Des Forges 1999:85).

[T]his party [the MDR, *Ed.*] and those who share its views are accomplices of the *Inyenzis*, one of them . . . stood up to say “We are descended from Bahutus and are in fact Bahutus”. The reply to him was “Can you lose your brothers by death! Tell us, who do you get these statements about Bahutus from?” (5)

As this passage testifies, a ‘war of symbols’ (Eltringham 2004:78-81) had erupted between the MDR and the MRND(D) over which party was the real incarnation of the

⁷ The *Parti du Mouvement de l’émancipation Hutu* (Party of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Hutu) was the Hutu-liberation party that ruled Rwanda from its independence in 1962 under the leadership of Gregoire Kayibanda (see Eltringham 2004; Des Forges 1999).

1959 social revolution's ideals. During the 1950s, under the United Nation's pressure to end the colonial rule and install a democratic government in Rwanda, the Belgians quickly shifted their allegiance to the Hutu majority, leaving the once-favored Tutsi elite to face a political and identity crisis. Tutsi rulers had been privileged by the colonialists for their supposedly 'natural superiority' over the Hutu, bolstered by the long-standing anthropological notion of the 'Hamitic Hypothesis', the belief that 'a superior 'Caucasoid' race [also referred to as 'Hamitic', 'Nilotic', or 'Ethiopia', *Ed.*] from north-eastern Africa was responsible for all signs of true civilization in 'Black' Africa [also referred to as 'Bantu', *Ed.*]' (Des Forges 1999:36). With independence approaching, what was seen before as a legitimising condition for the indirect rule (being a superior race from Ethiopia), became a condemnation from the Radical Hutu who wanted to gain control of the political system and get rid of the 'Tutsi interloper' (see Des Forges 1999:38; Eltringham 2004:20). In 1957, nine Hutu intellectuals (educated in Catholic schools) published the '*Bahutu Manifesto*', which stated: '*at the heart of the [Racial Native] problem is double colonialism. The Muhutu must suffer the domination of the Hamite and the European. . . . [I]t is a problem of a political monopoly of one race, the Mututsi*' (see Eltringham 2004:20). One of the signatories of this document was Grégoire Kayibanda, the founder of the MDR-Parmehutu, the Hutu emancipation movement, and soon-to-be first President of Rwanda. In November 1959, Parmehutu militants targeted Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs; many were killed and many others forced to flee the country (see Eltringham 2004:35). Through first communal elections in 1960, a referendum in 1961, and the declaration of independence in 1962, the MDR-Parmehutu successfully established its dominance and the Tutsi monarchy was abolished. Genocidal propaganda would thus refer to the 'social revolution of 1959' as a metonym symbolically condensing 'the broader 'triumph' of a binary, racial image of Rwandan society' (Eltringham 2004: 46). The MRND(D) was one of the movements relying on this racist narrative that 'the 'feudal-monarchical' minority, 'the Tutsi', had oppressed 'the Hutu' and the so-called '*peuple majoritaire*' ('the Hutu') had expressed its 'popular' or 'democratic' will in 1959 by raising against 'the Tutsi'" (Eltringham 2004:44). On the other hand, The MDR of the 1990s focused on the Republican, anti-

monarchist and democratic values of the ‘social revolution’, in an attempt to dissociate itself from the Tutsi massacres of its previous incarnation⁸.

In order to bridge this divide between the two main political factions, many propagandists backed Habyarimana’s calls for a ‘Hutu common front’ and sought to strengthen racial affiliations. In the two years preceding the genocide, the media, particularly Radio Rwanda⁹ and the bimonthly pro-genocidal publication *Kangura*, intensified the diffusion of unfounded rumors that exacerbated ethnic problems.

Significant is the Bugesera massacre, which occurred a few months before Mugesera’s speech. Following a local PL meeting, several pamphlets were distributed in the district of Bugesera warning of an infiltration by ‘inyenzi’ into the leadership of the party, ending with the phrase ‘they must not escape us’ (see Eltringham 2004:82). Additionally, the content of a fictitious ‘letter’, said to come from the *Commission Interafricaine de la non-violence* in Nairobi, was broadcast by Radio Rwanda five times on 3 March 1992 alone. The letter was warning about a plan to assassinate local Hutu leaders of the MDR, MRND, and PSD, by militants of the PL, the alleged collaborators of the RPF inside Rwanda. Following these broadcasts, all Tutsi were being labeled accomplices and from the night of 4/5 to 9 March 1992, at least 300 Tutsi were systematically massacred (see Eltringham 2004:82). As Des Forges reports, other 15 similar episodes would occur in the two years preceding the genocide (Des Forges 2007:42).

The MDR promptly condemned the brutality of the Bugesera massacres and denounced the letter as a fake. Faustin Twagiramungu, one of the leaders of the party and son-in-law of Kayibanda, openly criticised Radio Rwanda and demanded the removal of those responsible for inciting the slaughter. Deluded by the moderate positions adopted by the MDR (which had also dropped ‘Parmehutu’ from its name), a

⁸ To disavow any genocidal interpretation, some exiles interviewed by Eltringham referred to the widespread massacres of 1959 as ‘*politicide*’, claiming that the violence was directed towards those in power, not indiscriminately to all Tutsi (see Eltringham 2004:39).

⁹ At the times, the only radio station in Rwanda, under the directorship of the ORINFOR (*Office Rwandais de l’Information* – The Government Information Service). RTLM (*Radio Télévision Libre Des Mille Collines*) would be broadcast on the same frequencies from July 1993 to July 1994 (see Chrétien 2007).

new group rose in April 1992, the *Coalition pour la Défense de la République* (CDR), an openly racist party whose members had to prove ‘Hutu ancestry’ going back three generations (see Eltringham 2004:79). In this context, the skirmishes between the parties’ youth wings became extremely violent. Among these groups, the *Interahamwe* (‘those who attack together’), MRND(D)’s youth wing, were the most numerous and widespread. They had received political and military training from MRND officials, army soldiers and from French military advisors (see Taylor 2002:174). Their role would be decisive for the genocidal apparatus as they kept updated lists of all Tutsi and political opponents, and set up deadly roadblocks in 1994, where having a Tutsi ID card equated to a ‘death warrant’ (see Des Forges 1999:17). Even before the genocide, political opponents were often intimidated, beaten and occasionally assassinated by those militia groups:

The *thief* Twagiramungu appeared on the radio as party president . . . so he could speak against the C.D.R. However, the latter struck him down. After he was struck down, in all taxis everywhere in Kigali, militants of the M.D.R., P.S.D., and *accomplices* of the *Inyenzis* were profoundly humiliated, so they were almost dead! (4)

In April 1992, under pressure from US and Belgian embassies, Habyarimana was forced to reach a ‘Protocol of Understanding’ and create a coalition cabinet with 9 ministries from the MRND(D) and 11 from the CDC; with the Prime Minister drawn from the main opposition party. On 2 April 1992, Dismas Nsengiyaremye, the MDR’s candidate, was appointed Prime Minister and began a series of reforms against corruption and inequalities¹⁰. The new government was willing to sit at the table of negotiations with the RPF and the other parties. Provisions for a Broad-Based Transitional Government (BBTG) were stipulated in the Arusha accords between June 1992 and August 1993.

¹⁰ The secret service was dismantled; Ferdinand Nahimana, head of the Government Information Service (ORINFOR), whose broadcast had incited the slaughter in Bugesera, was removed; Habyarimana was forced to relinquish his position as chief of the armed forces, and the regional/ethnic policy of access to the education system was replaced by entrance exams (see Eltringham 2004:83).

While these accords were being discussed, Habyarimana kept using a ‘double language’ with the international community, maintaining a democratic and liberal façade, whereas his party was actively disavowing the negotiations as ‘*Inyenzis* born of *inyenzis*, who speak for *inyenzis*’ (The Kabaya speech 1992:21), as impediments for the people’s right of self-defence against the Tutsi.

That was when the Prime Minister named, they say, I don't know whether I should say *Nsengashitani* (I beg Satan) or (*Nseng*) *Iyaremye* (I beg the Creator) . . . [tried] to *prevent the Bahutus defending themselves against the Batutsis* who were laying mines against them(6).

In this last passage, for the first time in the speech, Mugesera used the term ‘Tutsi’ instead of ‘inyenzi’ to explicitly indicate the identity of the enemy who was actively undermining the unity of the Hutu Republic.

b. The internal Other

You know what it is dear friends, “not letting ourselves be invaded” . . . [y]ou know there are “*Inyenzis*” in the country who have taken the opportunity of sending their children to the front, to go and help the “*Inkotanyis*” (15).

Inkotanyi (‘the brave ones’) was the term adopted by RPF fighters, and often distorted by Hutu extremists to *inkota* (‘snakes’) as another means to depict the Tutsi menace. Such dehumanizing metaphors were widely employed by genocidal propaganda in a process of ‘social speciation’, by which ‘*one people manage to neutralize the humanity of another to such an extent that the inhibitions which normally prevent creatures of the same species from killing one another wantonly are relaxed*’ (Erikson 1996:55, as cited in Arnold 2002:101). To validate the message that Tutsi had slipped ‘like snakes’ into parties and organizations at every level, from local to international meetings,

propagandists asserted that many people who claimed to be Hutu were, in reality, Tutsi who had changed their identity papers¹¹ (see Des Forges 1999:74).

So tell me, these young people who acquire *our identity cards*, then they come back armed with guns on behalf of the “*Inyenzis*” or their accomplices to shoot us! (18)

Another clear example of this evasiveness is represented by the warning from *Kangura* about ‘*the detestable habit that many Tutsi have adopted of . . . changing their ethnic group . . . which allows them to pass unnoticed and to take places normally reserved for Hutu in the administration and the schools. If this disease is not treated immediately, it will destroy all the Hutu*’ (as quoted in Des Forges 1999:75, emphasis added).

Omer Bartov in his study on the making of victims during the Holocaust, notes that the notion that ‘*the enemy is among us and cannot be unmasked [. . .] has always been the stuff of fear and paranoia and the cause of destructive imaginings and violent eruptions*’ (Bartov 1998:780). The fabricated image of Tutsi as elusive enemies prepared the path for the atrocities of the genocide by creating a society of ‘*doppelgangers, where each individual might [...] be metamorphosed overnight into a repulsive insect*’, and therefore a society ‘*being prepared to apply the most powerful insecticides to rid itself of its perceived monstrous traits*’ (Bartov 1998:781). In his prophetic speech, Mugesera echoed (if not directly crafted) the feeling of categorical betrayal that would breed the urge to look for culprits, namely the Tutsi, but also ‘ethnic cheaters’ and ‘hybrids’ (see Eltringham 2004:62). This enormous commitment to unmask the Tutsi enemy revealed how the body could be deceptive; subject to ‘categorical uncertainty’ (see Appadurai 1998:232). De facto, the differences between Hutu and Tutsi had been arbitrarily institutionalized in racial terms under the Belgian

¹¹ The differences between Hutu and Tutsi had been arbitrarily ‘manufactured’ in racial terms during colonial times, with their misinterpreted ethnicity being printed on Identity Cards. Nonetheless, intermarriages had continued, and the people lived together as neighbours and friends for periods of relative peace, thus was virtually impossible to identify one’s ethnicity only by physiological features. After the independence in 1962, and the establishment of the MDR-Parmehutu government, the Tutsi status became politically prejudicial, but not economically, they could gain wealth and status through other venues (see Taylor 2002:143).

colonial rule, with the category ethnicity appearing officially on identity cards after the 1933-34 census, and being inherited through patrilineal descent (see Eltringham 2004:19). The Belgians privileged the Tutsi (15% of the population) granting them access to higher education and jobs in the colonial administration. Nonetheless, during colonial times, social mobility continued to be possible (although more difficult than in the past) through intermarriages, purchase of cattle, and military careers (see Des Forges 1999:34). After the independence in 1962 and the shift to Hutu rule, the Tutsi status became politically prejudicial, but not economically, as they could gain wealth and status through other venues (see Taylor 2002:143). In modern Rwanda still, to a considerable part of the population ethnicity appeared as an irrelevant issue compared to the regional favoritism and corruption of the Habyarimana regime (see Taylor 2002:144). Because of colonial misinterpretations of ethnicity and a long history of coexistence and intermingling, the stereotypical physiological features and the social customs associated with the two groups were not accurate markers of identity. Many stories of survivors report that when roadblocks were established by the *Interahamwe*, those who were not carrying ID cards and could not bribe the militias were judged by their physiognomic features; this way, even many Hutu fleeing the country were robbed and killed. ‘Tutsi or Hutu opposition party members were pulled from cars and summarily shot. Simply looking Tutsi was sufficient ground for execution’ (Taylor 2002:163). In a sense, the abstract enemy category needed to be grounded in concrete victims. Ethnic violence acted accordingly by filling the void between this imagined category and real subjects, producing ‘*tokens of ethnicity out of the bodies of real persons*’ (Eltringham 2004:25).

2) The moral imperative to act

a) A ‘masquerade of legitimacy’

Mugesera appealed frequently to the oppression endured under the Tutsi rule and used symbols from Rwandan cultural tradition to reinforce a strong sense of victimhood. In this way, he genuinely sought to convince his audience and exhort its members to react

to an intolerable offense, rather than merely resorting to slogans and directives. Victimhood is a common trope in episodes of ethnic violence; ‘*a dangerous prism to view the world*’ (Bartov 1998:811), it breeds an urge to look for traitors and serves to justify violence as a form of retribution for past offenses.

Tell me, if you as a man, a mother or father, who are here, if someone comes one day to move *into your yard* and *defecate* there, will you really allow him to come again? It is out of the question. (9)

In this passage, the speaker subtly equated the family and its land (*Arago*, the traditional enclosure surrounding the family home) to the party and the nation (see Fletcher 2014:5). With a scandalous metaphor (‘*defecate*’) he described how the Tutsi had betrayed the Hutu hospitality. It was therefore presented as a duty of the Hutu to seek for retaliation for such a descriptive act. Additional force to the argument of legitimate defense was given through references and distortions of the Bible:

[T]he priests has taught us good things: our movement is also a movement for peace. However, we have to know that, for our peace, there is no way to have it but to defend ourselves. Some have quoted the following saying: “Those who seek peace always make ready for war” . . . It says in the Gospel that if someone strikes you on one cheek, you should turn the other cheek. I tell you that the Gospel has changed in our movement: if someone strikes you on one cheek, you *hit them twice on one cheek* and they *collapse on the ground and will never be able to recover!* (9)

In the legal proceedings held in Canada¹² to establish his role in the 1994 genocide, Mugesera’s defense team would quote this passage to show how the speaker was committed to a message of ‘peace, love, and democracy’ rather than hatred and violence¹³. From the standpoint of Mugesera’s defense, those democratic values were

¹² Mugesera and his family had in fact been granted political refugee status in Canada in 1993 (see Fletcher 2014).

¹³ Hearing at the Canadian Minister of citizenship and immigration 2003: “This speaker was a fervent support of *democracy, patriotic pride* and *resistance to invading foreign forces*. The themes of his speeches were *elections, courage* and *love*. His family life, his personal and professional relationships, his past, did not indicate any tendency toward racism. Even though it is true some of his statements were

expressed through the repeated invocations of the Rwandan law and the Gospels, such as the following.

The punishment for such people [the politicians negotiating the Arusha Accords] is nothing but: “Any person who demoralizes the country's armed forces on the front will be liable to the death penalty”. That is prescribed by law. Why would such a person not be killed? (14)

If justice, therefore, is no longer serving the people, as written in our Constitution which we voted for ourselves . . . we must do something ourselves to *exterminate this rabble*. I tell you in all truth, as it says in the Gospel, “When you allow a serpent biting you to remain attached to you with your agreement, you are the one who will suffer”. (17)

The appeal to the Rwandan law and the Bible was instrumental for the speaker to give an appearance of legal and moral legitimacy to his arguments, which would have been translated into deeds shortly after. In this case, in fact, As Eltringham reports, Mugesera's words turned out to be prophetic: ‘*Of the eleven members of [Nsengiyaremye's] cabinet drawn from the opposition parties (all of whom, but one were Hutu) Félicien Gatabazi (Secretary-General of the PSD) was assassinated on 21 February 1994, probably by the Presidential Guard, and three other ministers killed in the first few days of the genocide (as was the single Tutsi minister, Landoald Ndasingwa (PL))*’ (Eltringham 2004:82).

b) The Cultural Face of Violence

It was crucial for Mugesera that some elements of his speech had a lasting impact on the public, given his stated purpose to instruct them on how to act. Some were more evident, i.e. the term ‘invasion’ is omnipresent in the speech: ‘*At all costs, you will leave here taking these words with you, that you should not let yourselves be invaded*’ (9). Among

misplaced or unfortunate, there is nothing in the evidence to indicate that Mr. Mugesera, under the cover of anecdotes or other imagery, deliberately incited to murder, hatred or genocide” (available online at <http://unictr.unmict.org/en/genocide#timeline>).

the most powerful but less manifest symbols he employed, one image acquired a certain notoriety (see Fletcher 2014:9): the river Nyabarongo (which flows northward towards Ethiopia) as a means to expel the Tutsi.

Recently . . . I told [to a PL member] “The mistake we made in 1959, when I was still a child, is to let you leave”. I asked him if he had not heard of the story of the Falashas¹⁴, who returned home to Israel from *Ethiopia*? He replied that he knew nothing about it! I told him “So don't you know how to listen or read? I am telling you that your home is in Ethiopia, that we will send you by the *Nyabarongo* so you can get there quickly”. (25)

This passage presents three of the main threads in the fabric of Hutu nationalism: the 1959 revolution, the Hamitic origin of the Tutsi, and the evocation of sociocultural symbolisms through the image of the river. Taylor, who studied cultural understandings of the body and local medical practices in Rwanda during the 1980s and 1990s, witnessed the outbreak of the genocide and argues that ‘*[Much of the violence] followed a cultural patterning, a structured and structuring logic, as individual Rwandans lashed out against a perceived internal other who threatened, in their imaginary, both their personal integrity and the cosmic order of the State*’ (Taylor 2002:139). The root metaphors underlying the concept of the body were flow and blockage: an orderly state of humoral and other flows was indicative of health, whereas an irregular production (or absence) of fluids was a pathological condition, caused by human negligence and malevolence (see Taylor 2002:146). On wider social terms, an obstructed body was considered capable only of receiving, but not giving back (due to the irregularity of its flows), thus an ‘asocial’ body, incapable of reciprocity. In drawing an analogy from the body to the ‘body-politic’ (i.e. by equating the family with the party, the Hutu, and the

¹⁴ Falashas were a people of Ethiopia who claimed descent from Menelik I, the son of the queen of Sheba and King Solomon. They followed some Jewish traditions including circumcision, observing the Sabbath, attending synagogue, and certain dietary and purity laws. They were recognized in 1975 by the Chief Rabbinate as Jews and allowed to settle in Israel. In 1984-85 thousands of Falashas resettled to Israel from refugee camps in Sudan as part of the Israeli government's "Operation Moses" and the U.S. government's "Operation Sheba" (see Abbink, J. 1984. ‘The Changing Identity of Ethiopian Immigrants (Falashas) in Israel’ *Anthropological Quarterly*, 57(4), 139-153).

nation), Taylor argues that the notion of ‘obstructing beings’ has been associated implicitly with the Tutsi, perceived as a menace to the cosmic unity of the Hutu nation. In a sense, therefore, violence was perpetrated ‘mythically’ (see Malkki 1995; Taylor 2002:141). The techniques of cruelty used in the genocide presented a certain underlying logic concerned with the movement of persons and substances and with the channels along which they flow, such as ‘*rivers, roadways, pathways, and even the conduits of the human body, such as the reproductive and digestive system*’ (Taylor 2002:158). The establishment of roadblocks, which would become the most widespread places of execution, testifies the evidence of this preoccupation with the flow of people. Likewise, the severing of the Achille’s tendons, declared by MSF the most frequent injury during the genocide (see Taylor 2002:164), was a way by which the *Interahamwe*¹⁵ and the perpetrators were asserting their power to obstruct the movement of the hated internal other. Emasculation, breast obliteration, forced incest, the severing of the tendons of children, elderly people and others who couldn’t walk (and even of cattle owned by Tutsi), could all be interpreted as ways of blocking a group by hindering its mobility, its livelihood assets and its future reproduction (see Taylor 2002:169). Accordingly, Rwanda’s rivers fulfilled their ritualistic function as means of purification, as ‘excreting organs’ when, in June 1994, thousands of victims’ bodies began washing up on the shores of Lake Victoria brought by the Nyabarongo (see Taylor 2002:160).

c) Inciting extermination

Images such as the Nyabarongo River and the invasion of the sacred family land were powerful for their embeddedness in people’s ‘structures of feeling’ (see Appadurai 1995:153), but Mugesera resorted even to less subtle terms to convey his message:

Why do they not arrest these parents who have sent away their children and why do they not *exterminate* them? Why do they not arrest the people taking them away and why do they not exterminate all of them? Are we really waiting till they come to exterminate us? (15)

¹⁵ The *Interahamwe* is a Hutu paramilitary organisation

Do not be afraid, know that *anyone whose neck you do not cut is the one who will cut your neck*. Let me tell you, these people should begin leaving while there is still time. (28)

Another important point is that we must all rise, we must rise as one man . . . if anyone touches one of ours, he must find nowhere to go. (29)

As Fletcher's analysis of these passages notes, it is difficult not to see these words as an explicit call for the extermination of the Tutsi: '*[t]he syntactical structure of these lines with their question format, further enhanced by repetition, carries the strong communicative force of suggestion*' (2014:7). During the legal proceedings at the Canadian Court that had to determine his intents and decide about his extradition to Rwanda, Mugesera constantly sought to attenuate his personal responsibility by systematically obfuscating the meaning of his words. An alternative translation of his speech was presented to the court; it bore no mention of the word 'exterminate' (*gutsemba* in Kinyarwanda). Its author, the Rwandan linguist Eugène Shimamungu, had decided explicitly not follow a 'word-for-word' approach for his translation but attempted to reconstruct their intended meanings in each precise micro-context. The results are often contradictory and paradoxical, as the same verb *gutsemba* is translated (against the French-Rwandan vocabulary) in different ways across the text, depending to whom it is being addressed (see *Mugesera v. Canada* 2005; Fletcher 2014). Shimamungu's version of the passage translated the verb 'exterminate' with 'subject to judgment': '*Why don't we arrest these parents who sent their children to the enemy front and why don't we subject them to this judgment? Why don't we arrest those who send them and all the members of that network in order to subject them to this judgment?*' (As cited in Fletcher 2014:12). Such significant differences between the two translations could not be merely the result of personal preferences of the translator, rather they suggest 'a deliberate intention to attenuate the force of Mugesera's vilification of the Tutsi in order to minimise the risk of being interpreted as incitement to genocide' (Fletcher 2014:11). After a careful scrutiny, the court opted for Kaminzi's translation,

the one continuously questioned by Mugesera's defense for containing the 'most violent words' (see Fletcher 2014:13). Against the claims of meanings being 'lost in translation'; however, these explicit incitements to violence have been judged as a tangible evidence of a '*consciously constructed campaign to convert all listeners to the genocidal cause*' (Fletcher 2014:14). With these charges, Mugesera was extradited from Canada in 2012 and given life sentence in Rwanda on 15 April 2016.¹⁶

❖ Conclusions

Like national communities, the enemies of a nation are imagined entities; those with whom the community is unimaginable (see Anderson 1983). In this process of 'othering', '*[t]he boundaries of an imagined community are reshaped in such a manner that a previously 'included' group (albeit often included only tangentially) is ideologically recast (almost always in dehumanizing rhetoric) as being outside the community, as a threatening and dangerous 'other' [. . .] that must be annihilated*' (Hinton 2002:6). Faced with an internal political competition, a dire economic crisis and an ongoing conflict with the RPF, the ruling elite of Rwanda chose this deadly path in order to preserve its hegemony. Mugesera's speech offers an example of the concrete ways in which power penetrated the subjects' very bodies and structures of feeling. His words contributed to prime the ground for future violence by providing the people with an ideology to act upon, a legal and religious legitimation, and plenty of dehumanizing metaphors that made it possible to 'imagine a friend as a friend' (see Appadurai 1996). To be made graspable, such ideological constructs required a vindication upon bodies of real subjects. Accordingly, the ways in which the violence was carried out demonstrate that '*killing one's adversaries while communicating powerful messages about them and oneself are not mutually exclusive*' (Taylor 2002:171).

The image of corporeity played an important role. Following the physical and

¹⁶ For recent news reports on the matter see BBC - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-36057575>; CBC - <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/1%C3%A9on-mugesera-rwandan-genocide-life-sentence-1.3537607>; Reuters - <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-rwanda-genocide-idUSTRE80F1D620120116>.

sexual stereotypes that were created during the colonial period, the ethnicization of the social came to life. The Tutsi were better than the Hutu. The man had a more powerful body and the woman embodied the colonial racial classification of sexual desirability thanks to its more feminine forms of Hutu women (Fusaschi 2010). As a result, after 1994 thousands of children have been abandoned as consequence of mass rape and sexual slavery to which women have been forced (White 2009). Not less than eight in ten women were victims of sexual violence (Fusaschi 2010). The basic assumption that rape and analogous acts are inevitable in modern warfare, encourages passive reactions that do not allow one's own defense (Bourke 2009). Furthermore, according to Fusaschi (2010), in the Rwandan case sexual violence has led to the nullification of the solidarity networks built on patrilineal bonds. Moreover, striking sexuality has determined the impossibility of reproducing the group and the kinship system. The Rwandan genocidal logic is, however, more complex. Not only the biological and social interdiction of the bodies was determined, but it was made sure that they would always depend on external aid thanks to the spread of HIV (Thomson 2010).

Following Bartov's recommendation that '*we must not become so detached from the horror as to avoid perceiving some of those fundamental factors at its roots that are still very much with us today*' (1998:816), this paper aimed at describing the 'entirely modern' (see Hinton 2002) process of 'defining enemies and making victims' (see Bartov 1998) that preceded and accompanied the Rwandan genocide. In contrast with approaches that interpreted this event as an explosion of tribal enmities, exposing this process proved crucial to identify human agency behind the racial categories and the apparent irrationality of violence.

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Biography

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