

## ***Stages of Language & the Rwandan Genocide: the rhetorical conflict between action and inaction and the reality of the rhetoric in the present.***

**Abstract:** Before, during, and after April of 1994 rhetoric surrounding the Rwandan genocide frequently shifted. The juxtaposition of calls to action with evasive, inactive language in many ways facilitated the violence of the era. After defining language of action and inaction, the focus will be on comparing and contrasting primary source texts from the time of the genocide to evaluate which type of language it was and what the impact it had in the real world. Following an assessment of the language before and during the genocide the focus will shift to evaluating how well Rwanda and the global community have acted on the optimistic language (like that of the 'Rwanda Vision 2020') that has dominated the conversation in recent years by asking:

- what is the relationship between language and action?
- does the current reality reflect the language being used?
- how can the understanding of the relationship between words and actions help Rwanda to prosper as it moves forward?

### **Activity: The difference between Action and Inaction**

**“What we call ‘commands,’ ‘pleas,’ ‘requests,’ and ‘orders’ are the simplest ways we have of making things happen by means of words... With words, therefore, we influence and to an enormous extent control future events. It is for this reason that writers write; preachers preach, employers, parents, and teachers scold; propagandists send out news releases; politicians give speeches. All of them, for various reasons are trying to influence our conduct -- sometimes for our own good, sometimes for their own. These attempts to control, direct, or influence the future actions of fellow human beings with words may be termed directive use of language.” - S.I. Hayakawa from *Language in the Thought and Action* (65)**

### ***Rwandan Myth: The Story of Origins:***

“... there was Kigwa, who fell from heaven and had three sons: Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi. When he decided to choose his successor, he entrusted each of the three sons a pot of milk to watch over during the night. At daybreak, Gatwa had drunk the milk; Gahutu had fallen asleep and in the carelessness of the sleep, had spilt the milk; and only Gatutsi had kept watch throughout the night, and only his milk pot was safe. So it was clear to Kigwa that Gatutsi should be the successor and by that fact should be exempt of any menial tasks. Gahutu was to be his servant. The utter unreliability of Gatwa was to make him only a clown in society. As a result, Gatutsi received cattle and command whereas Gahutu would acquire cattle only through the services to Gatutsi, and Gatwa was condemned to hunger and gluttony and would not acquire cattle” (Jean).

**Question: What are the lessons being taught in the myth?**

***The Hutu Ten Commandments*, first published in 1990, took the division in the *Story of Origins* and expounded with the directive use of language described by Hayakawa above. The language is simple and command based, but still open to interpretation. Unlike the ambiguity of the international community, it gives certainty and authority to Hutus in a way that absolves need for objectivity and empowers them to trust presumption over facts. The direct speech empowers certainty in what seems like ambiguous judgments.**

***Directions: Please underline words that are direct and/or empowering. Then, box words that are ambiguous and/or over-generalizations.***

#### **The Hutu Ten Commandments:**

1. Every Hutu must know that the Tutsi woman, wherever she may be, is working for the Tutsi ethnic cause. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who:
  - i. - Acquires a Tutsi wife;
  - ii. - Acquires a Tutsi concubine;

- iii. - Acquires a Tutsi secretary or protégée.
2. Every Hutu must know that our Hutu daughters are more worthy and more conscientious as women, as wives and as mothers. Aren't they lovely, excellent secretaries, and more honest!
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and make sure that your husbands, brothers and sons see reason.
4. All Hutus must know that all Tutsis are dishonest in business. Their only goal is ethnic superiority. We have learned this by experience from experience. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who:
  - i.- Forms a business alliance with a Tutsi
  - ii.- Invests his own funds or public funds in a Tutsi enterprise
  - iii.- Borrows money from or loans money to a Tutsi
  - iv.- Grants favors to Tutsis (import licenses, bank loans, land for construction, public markets...)
5. Strategic positions such as politics, administration, economics, the military and security must be restricted to the Hutu.
6. A Hutu majority must prevail throughout the educational system (pupils, scholars, teachers).
7. The Rwandan Army must be exclusively Hutu. The war of October 1990 has taught us that. No soldier may marry a Tutsi woman.
8. Hutu must stop taking pity on the Tutsi.
9. Hutu wherever they be must stand united, in solidarity, and concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers. Hutu within and without Rwanda must constantly search for friends and allies to the Hutu Cause, beginning with their Bantu brothers.
  - i.Hutu must constantly counter Tutsi propaganda.
  - ii.Hutu must stand firm and vigilant against their common enemy: the Tutsi.
10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961 and the Hutu Ideology must be taught to Hutu of every age. Every Hutu must spread the word wherever he goes. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for spreading and teaching this ideology is a traitor.

### **Quotes from *Machete Season***

“There is no need to ask how to begin. The only worthwhile plan is to start straight ahead...right now, without hanging back anymore behind questions” (Hatzfeld 11).

“Killing is very discouraging if you yourself must decide to do it, even to an animal. But if you must obey the orders of the authorities, if you been properly prepared, if you feel yourself pushed and pulled, if you see that the killing will be total and without disastrous consequences for yourself, you feel soothed and reassured. You go off to it with no more worry.” (Hatzfeld ).

### **US/UN:**

***Gregory Stanton's definitions of genocide as found in source #5 from the project readings offers a framework that the conflict can be measured by. These give outside forces the necessary criteria with which to intervene.***

### ***Directions: Please underline words that are ambiguous or vague.***

The International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines “genocide.”  
 ‘In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

...

The crime of genocide is defined by the Genocide Convention as “acts of genocide.” It does not exist apart from those acts.

...

The Convention declares the following acts as punishable:

- a. Genocide;
- b. Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- c. Direct public incitement to commit genocide;
- d. Attempt to commit genocide;
- e. Complicity in genocide.

*Below are two representative excerpts from **White House Press Secretary, Christine Shelley**, when the press questioned her on the White House’s approach to Rwanda at the time of the genocide.*

**Directions: Please underline words that imply inaction. Then, please draw a line through words that have no meaning.**

Q How would you describe the events taking place in Rwanda?

MS. SHELLY: Based on the evidence we have seen from observations on the ground, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred in Rwanda.

Q What's the difference between "acts of genocide" and "genocide?"

MS. SHELLY: As you know, there is a legal definition of this. There has been a lot of discussion about how the definition applies under the definition of "genocide" contained in the 1948 convention. If you're looking at that for your determination about genocide, clearly, not all of the killings that have taken place in Rwanda are killings to which you might apply that label.

Some of the difficulties over actually arriving at a definition of "genocide" and formulations on genocide are the reasons why -- particularly, in late May, the U.N. Human Rights Commission, with the very strong support by the United States, appointed a Special Rapporteur for Rwanda, specifically to compile the information on possible violations of human rights and on acts which constitute breaches of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity, including acts of genocide.

His preliminary report, which is due later this month, will provide the additional information about the human rights violations -- the types, and presumably how they might be characterized -- and that is something that we have to wait for.

As to the distinctions between the words, we're trying to call. What we have seen so far, as best as we can, and based, again, on the evidence, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred.

Q How many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide?

MS. SHELLY: Alan, that's just not a question that I'm in a position to answer.

...

Q Christine, I've noticed the wording from yesterday to today has changed somewhat. Yesterday it was "acts of genocide may have occurred," and now you're saying, "We believe they're likely to occur." Has there been a change from yesterday to today on our view of that situation?

MS. SHELLY: I don't know if there has been a change in our view. This is after careful examination by a lot of those who are involved in very careful tracking of this, including also the lawyers, because there are obligations which arise in connection with the use of the term.

When I gave the formulation at the outset, that's the formulation that we have all agreed accurately reflects the situation and our understanding of it.

*Nearly four years after the tragedy, **President Clinton went to Kigali and delivered what can be called more of an acknowledgement than an apology. In it he expresses sympathy and sadness and offers a five point plan predicated on caring for current victims, awareness, responsiveness, and punishment of future acts. It is for the international community to reflect on the sentiment and determine if the high-minded rhetoric below is a reality both in Rwanda and globally. Myanmar currently offers the world an unfortunately appropriate opportunity to test this.***

The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy, as well. We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe haven for the killers. **We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide.** We cannot change the past. But we can and **must do everything in our power to help** you build a future without fear, and full of hope.

We owe to those who died and to those who survived who loved them, our every **effort to increase our vigilance and strengthen our stand** against those who would commit such atrocities in the future here or elsewhere.

Indeed, we owe to all the peoples of the world who are at risk because each bloodletting hastens the next as the value of human **life is degraded and violence becomes tolerated, the unimaginable becomes more conceivable.** We owe to all the people in the world our **best efforts to organize ourselves so that we can maximize the chances of preventing** these events. And where they cannot be prevented, we can move more quickly to minimize the horror.

So let us challenge ourselves to **build a world in which no branch of humanity, because of national, racial, ethnic, or religious origin, is again threatened with destruction because of those characteristics**, of which people should rightly be proud. Let us work together as a community of civilized nations to **strengthen our ability to prevent and, if necessary, to stop genocide.**

### **Rwanda Vision 2020:**

“We aim, through this Vision, to transform our country into middle-income nation in which Rwandans are healthier, educated and generally more prosperous” (i).

“Major emphasis will continue to be placed on vocational and technical training in the fields of technology, engineering and management. This will be targeted at secondary and tertiary levels, as well as various sections of society (with particular emphasis on youth and women). To encourage skills development, micro-credit schemes will continue to be promoted specifically to extend finance to young, self-employed technicians. Special emphasis will be given to innovative, small-scale entrepreneurs. To promote efficiency and continuous upgrading of skills, large scale employment creation programs will be launched in the national institutions aimed at on-job-training, in-service training and distance learning” (11).

“In order to strengthen gender equality and equity, Rwanda will further update and adapt its laws on gender. It will continue to support education for all, fight against poverty and practice a positive discrimination policy in favour of women...” (17).

### **Language of Action with Directive Based Language in Contemporary Rwanda**

#### **Kanempure “Village of Orphans:”**

- After Rwanda began closing the orphanages in 2012, many of the grown children were adopted or moved in with other family members. However, there were many grown children who did not have any extended family. Therefore, the government and First Lady Jeannette Kagame created “Village of Orphans” to give those young adults who lost their families in the genocide a place to call their own. Housed next to other orphans, groups began to form families of their own. They were taught how to budget their money, cook meals, maintain a household, and work. By helping these surviving orphans, the government has taken their promises and moved forward with actions to ensure these survivors become successful Rwandans.

### **Memorial Sites: Kigali National Genocide Memorial, Nyamata, Ntarama**

- The vast number of genocide memorials around Rwanda prove the government wanted to honor their promise to help Rwandans move on while vowing to never forget about the Genocide of 1994.
- In every district a memorial site is constructed to give the victims the honor and remembrance they deserve while giving the survivors a place to go to honor the memory of their loved ones.
- These memorial sites also serve to educate anyone who enters, continuing the government's promise to never forget.

### **Testimonials: Theogene and Mama Rose:**

- When asked what his favorite thing about Rwanda was, Theogene promptly replied, "President Kagame, the Government Army (because they were the ones who saved him), and all Rwandese."
- Mama Rose, a survivor of genocide, told us she actually lives next to the man who killed her two children during the genocide.
- She attributed part of her ability to move on to the Gacaca Courts. These small courts put into place after the genocide helped her to find and bury her children, giving her much needed closure.
- When we had trouble understanding how Mama Rose could live next to the man who killed her children, she gave credit to the government and the church. She said forgiveness "comes from everyday teachings," and Mama Rose told us the government taught the Rwandans how to forgive on a daily basis. They set the example first, putting their words into actions.

### **Imihigo and the *Unity and Reconciliation Document*:**

- To facilitate forgiveness: enable structured contact between survivors and perpetrators (page 81)
- Establish and Foster Constitutional Priorities: (among others) equitable power sharing, fighting genocide ideology, promoting national unity, ensuring equal gender rights, and eradicating ethnicity or regionally based divisionism (71).

### **Statements in the Media:**

"The key principle we must insist on is not to allow political or technical dilemmas to override our strategic imperatives, but rather to address them as they arrive."

- President Kagame on his commitment to the reforms proposed by the African Union in spite of the sort of political rhetoric that can slow progress and development as reported by *The New Times* on July 4th.

"Fighting bad leaders and bad leadership was accomplished. But the liberation also requires getting rid of the consequences of bad leadership - hunger, poverty, and disease."

President Kagame on his commitment to actionable goals and improving tangible concerns for citizens as reported by *The New Times* on July 5th.

**End thoughts - As English teachers, we believe in the power of words. However, words that are evasive or vague leave people confused, without purpose or clear direction. On the other hand, ACTIVE words can change the world - they have in Rwanda.**

### **For Further Thought and Discussion:**

There is currently consistent and clear evidence that ethnic cleansing is occurring in Myanmar, but it is getting little or no attention in the west. There is also a painfully familiar linguistic dance reminiscent of Christine Shelley's language during Rwanda.

Considering the result of western negligence in Rwanda, what is the human rights current responsibility in Myanmar? More importantly, how do you affect broad change in an era of constant domestic distractions?

Is destructive action easier to undertake than constructive action?

Is *language of action* inherently more dangerous than *language of inaction*?

**Questions, Comments, or Concerns:**