The Rituals of a Massacre: Mapping Violence during the Rwandan Genocide

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Huxley (1932), Orwell (1949), Wallace (1996) and others have all sculpted dystopic worlds for us- worlds where the modus operandi of the 'Government' is the operationalization of social cohesion/coercion. Through acts of (both abject and soft) coercion, the dystopic governing apparatuses in these works of art, (re)create realities within which the norms of the everyday are twisted to normalize what would otherwise be considered violent behaviour. This dystopic principle of reality (re)creation/alteration that renders violence the norm through state- supported (and/or sanctioned) practices, performances and policies is not limited to the realm of fiction. In this article, I am hoping to see how this translates in relation to the Rwandan Genocide (April 7, 1994 – July 1994) by focusing on the following question: How did (certain) mechanisms of social-engineering contribute towards the specific form and extent of violence observed during the Rwandan genocide- the kind of political violence where neighbours were killing neighbours. (Fujii, 2011)?

By tracing mechanics of social-engineering like the use of Radio Rwanda (through a practice theoretical approach to understand permissibility of practicing violence) and the form in which the Interahamwe organized the killings (or rather "hunts"- through an organizational ergonomics approach to understand the possibility of performing violence) I am hoping to show that a 'surreal' reality was (re)created by the 'Government' where violence became the norm, reducing the physical and psychological costs (Randall, 2008) of performing violence, contributing to the conditions of possibility for the form and extent of violence seen in Rwanda during that period.

First, let's return to Orwell. A lot has been written about how Orwell's 1984 (Gleason 1984, Giroux 2014) or Huxley's Brave New World (Hale 2006, Diken 2011) act (almost) as fables cautioning us about the horrors of totalitarian realities. In fact, we have glimpsed shadows of these realities so many times in our own – we have traced instances of draconian control by propaganda and/or surveillance and/or misinformation so many times – that we even crafted a word for it: Orwellian. But Orwellian is typically an adjective (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2020)- it describes a noun: a 'state' (Barnett 2006), a state of being (Botting & Botting 1984), a system (Cohen 2006), an order (Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew 2018) and/or so on that exists in/through the intersection of absolute control, coercion, cohesion and compliance. I, on the other hand, am more interested in the adverbial connotations of the word- in tracing Orwellian processes of reality- (re)creation that participate in forming the conditions of possibility for the noun itself, especially in the case of the Rwandan Genocide (April 7, 1994 – July 1994) or rather, the Genocide against the Tutsis (Kagire 2014, suggesting a strong politics of naming here. Think of the work of Richer & Hopkins 2001 where they suggest that social categorization is intimately related to political activity.)

Those four months of the summer of 1994 are seared into global public memory as one of the most gruesome injustices (Olesen, 2012) the world has witnessed. Countless lives were lost at the altar of colonial baggage – ethnic tensions (the Siamese twins spoken of in the works of Prunier 1999) and social cohesions/ networks (Fujii, 2011/ building on Staniland 2014), and the horror of it all was perhaps only marginally surpassed by the shock of how this all occurred. Most people were killed in their own villages or towns, by their neighbours – quite literally – in rather physically intimate ways: through machetes (Verwimp 2006). The idea of intimacy echoes literature in Criminology that focuses on the concept of "weapon choice" (for a robust review the work of Dawson & Goodwill 2012 is highly recommended.) While there are many different theories about what the choice of weapon reveals ranging from

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demographic and lifestyle characteristics of both victims and offenders (Pelletier & Pizarro 2018) to psychopathologies of/in perpetrators (Catanesi et al. 2011), the primary impetus behind all these studies remains the same: the manner in which the killings occur, the weapons that are used tell the story of increasing/decreasing levels of intimacy between the perpetrator and the victim, and this distance is a useful unit of analysis. Here, when I speak of intimate violence, I speak of a violence that is relatively more intimate than gunfire where the physical distance between the victim and the perpetrator is larger and the killings are more 'clean' as compared to killing with machetes which requires greater physical interaction and strength on the part of the perpetrator and connotes a very strong affective element.

This affective element is also displayed through other actions- spaces typically considered sacred/safe like churches and schools (think here of the Gikondo massacre) were violated. Radio stations were mediums of instruction from those in uniforms (of many different kinds) to those without (to 'ordinary people' like you or me) that the latter were equally/primarily responsible for the performance of this violence.

"Either you took part in the massacres or you were massacred yourself" (Prunier 1995, 247). How was this made feasible? What processes led to the (re)creation of a reality where such a form of violence was even possible, especially to the extent that it was? Which mechanisms of social-engineering participated in the (re)creation of this 'surreal' reality where violence became the norm? These are the questions I am hoping to address within the scope of this article.

There are at least two ways in which these questions can be interpreted based on how we choose to understand 'mechanisms.' Here, mechanisms could be socio-political dynamics like the legacy of Belgian coloniality, the ethnic tensions that were birthed in the wake of that and then perpetuated, the institutional mechanics of governance that facilitated this perpetuation, the disparities of class and urban-rural divides and so on. But they could also refer to practices of violence performance, rituals through which the killings were carried out in the most corporeal sense, the way in which groups were organized and/or the radio was operationalized. The former understandings of mechanisms, I think, are best suited to answer why questions: why did the genocide happen? Why was there so much violence involved? On the other hand, the latter understanding of mechanisms lends itself to more easily to the answering of 'how' questions.

Tracing Onto-Methodological Assumptions

Let's begin by addressing some of the onto-methodological assumptions that shape the manner in which I will be approaching these questions. The first assumption is that genocide is not an event, rather it is a culmination of a number of historical socio-political trends, and therefore processual in nature. This conceptualization of the genocide, also seen in Prunier's "The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide" (Prunier 1997), explores the complexity of the genocide temporally (by tracing the "cause/s" of the genocide to be grounded in the socio-political history of Rwanda: starting from Belgian colonialism and its use of the hematic hypothesis and the accumulation of grievances and feelings of antagonism along ethnic lines that plagued the Rwandan governance structures – be it the Tutsi monarchy or the Hutu Republic – since). However, the genocide is also a complex nexus of different processual networks, spatially i.e. complex in terms of organization. This paper seeks to explore this complexity.

The second assumption revolves around the definition of this "complexity in terms of organization." At the heart of this argument lies the work of Foucault. Through his concept of governmentality (Foucault 1991), Foucault argues that a government's production of its citizens, and of the social reality within which they exist, is not accidental; rather it is a conscious effort which involves the shaping of mentalities, rationalities and the techniques of subjectivity through governing policies. Typically, we conduct discourse analysis on history(/-ies) in order to understand this relationship between this governing power and the creation of reality and/or "truth" in a given context through a methodology Foucault calls genealogy. However, within the scope of this paper, I will be expanding this analysis to the practices of social engineering.

Here, social engineering (loosely inspired by the work of Karl Popper, "The Open Society and Its Enemies, volume I, The Spell of Plato", 1945) refers to the efforts made to influence social behaviours, norms and practices to produce

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desired characteristics in any given audience. When it was introduced by The Dutch industrialist J.C. Van Marken, the idea was simple: that modern employers needed the assistance of specialists —"social engineers"— in handling the "human challenges", just as they needed technical expertise (traditional engineers) to deal with non-human challenges (materials, machines, processes). Eventually this idea grew in terms of understandings and applications until it began to be used primarily to understand authoritarian regimes roughly until Karl Popper famously introduced the distinction between democratic (or as he called it, piecemeal engineering) and utopian engineering. This conception of social engineering is loosely inspired from his idea of utopian engineering i.e. bottom-down engineering.

In the context of governmentality, we begin to see that social engineering (here) has three fundamental characteristics: all societies (rather all groups and/or organizations of any kind) have an element of social engineering through which they "produce" both- members of their groups and social cohesion, this is done by focusing on shaping the psychology of the masses i.e. to rectify "the human problem" (see footnote 3), and as such, social engineers need to be "experts" i.e. they work from a position of knowledge, and that knowledge gives them power.

Now, though this is a systemic explanation for (alternative) reality creation, the explanation is not deterministic in nature. This brings us to my third assumption: social engineering is not an all- encompassing system and it is not the only system in place that makes the world we live in it even though it is an integral part of it. In the context of this paper, this means that the author is not giving contextual causes, but rather focusing on the correlation – however (in/)significant it may be – between the particular form and extent of violence observed in the Rwandan genocide and some of the social mechanisms that made that possible, thus treating violence itself as not just an act, but also a phenomenon.

Furthermore, this means that my unit of analysis is the Social. While references will be made to the individual, particularly in terms of the historical roles certain individuals played in this saga, or when we seek to speak of individual variance in behaviour, the bulk of the article will seek to discuss the socially constructed, power discrepancy-ridden, reality within which these individuals find themselves. In simpler words, the author is not looking to answer why ordinary people killed in the Rwandan genocide, but rather, what facilitated the violence they displayed i.e. made it permissible and possible in the first place.

Finally, my last assumption is about the use of the terminology of a "genocide". An argument can be made that my world(/s) are created through interacting – complimenting and conflicting – realities that overlap as if in a Venn-diagram. In the case of Rwanda, there are at least two conflict- related realities i.e. that of the genocide, and that of the civil war. There are many differences between the two such as the legal definitions (found in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948) for these concepts, the manner in which the international community approaches conflict situations based on which typology is operationalized and so on, but the difference which is of primary concern to us is the focus on the perpetrators of violence. In a genocide, the primary perpetrator is considered to be the State (in most cases), while in a civil war the violence is seen to have been a choice of operation for both belligerents. Within the realm of this paper it means that if we choose to analyse the production of the genocide, we will be focusing on the violence produced by Bagosora's governmental apparatus, while focusing on the violence produced by this governmental apparatus and the Rwandan Patriotic Front if we choose to analyse the reality of a civil war.

Mapping the Mechanisms

While it is extremely important to understand both these realities since they provide the contextual history we need, in terms of actively focusing on the social engineering of the violence produced, we will be doing that with the Genocide i.e. we will be focusing on the mechanisms that made wide-spread and localized grotesque violence possible and permissible; especially considering that the performance of violence is psychologically and physically taxing. To thus render its performance permissible, the psychologically dysphoric nature of perpetrating violence was to be blurred. The same holds true for rendering the performance possible through a reduction of physical opportunity cost. To understand these mechanics of social engineering that contribute towards the creation of a gestalt "surreal" (surreal because it is uncanny – strangely familiar (loosely inspired by the works of Freud, Lacan and other psychoanalysts)

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reality where violence is the norm, we will be utilizing two methodological lenses: a practice theoretical approach to understand permissibility and an organizational ergonomics approach to understand possibility. The diagram below is a visual representation for the theoretical argument of this paper i.e. it depicts the manner in which this gestalt surreal reality (mentioned above) is produced.
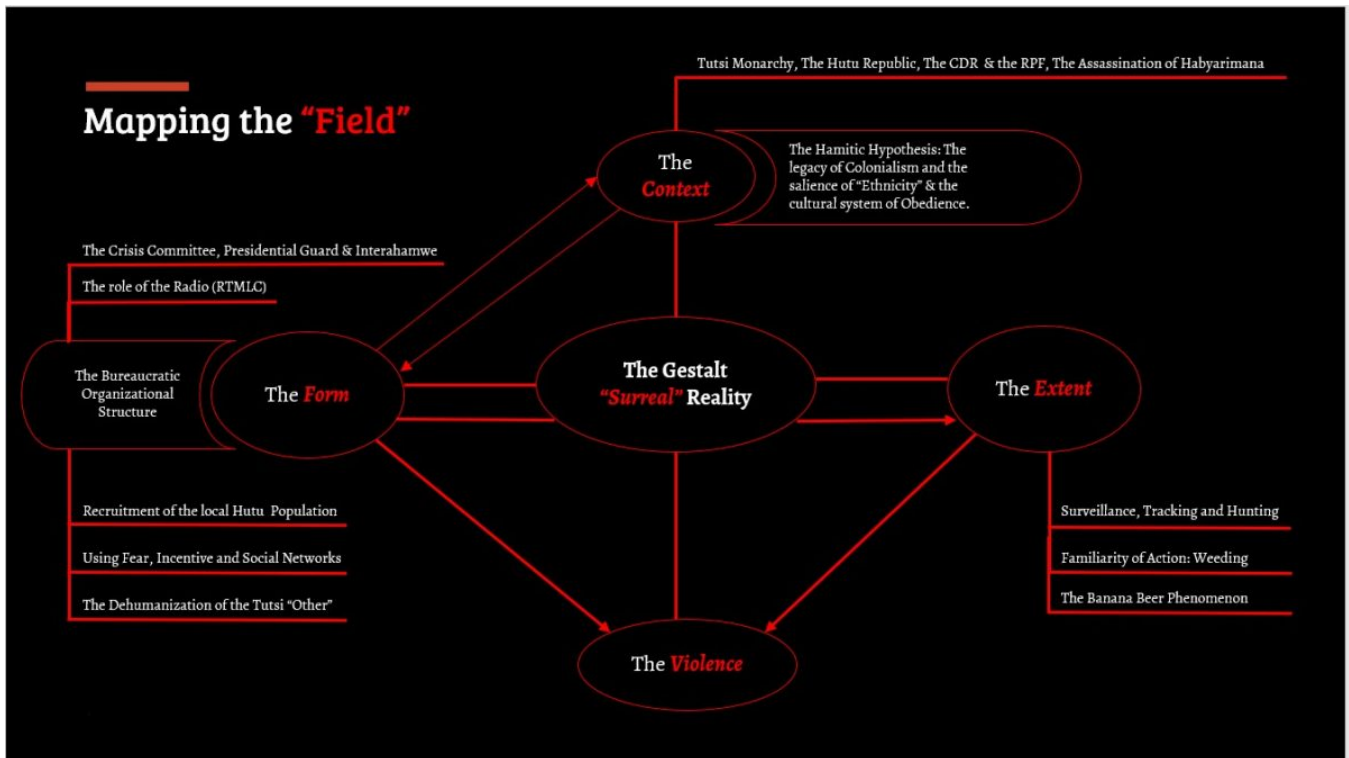
First, let us focus on understanding how violence becomes permissible. We will explore this by an implementation of Bourdieu's practice theory. In Bourdieu's theoretical universe there are three important terms: the field, the doxa and the habitus. In simple terms, a field is a system of social positions structured internally in terms of power relations in such a manner that the field forms a holistic social universe. This holistic universe has its own laws, rules and norms and these can be seen as the doxa of the field. Each individual's position is based on how much capital (which can be financial, social and cultural) an individual has, which (typically) correlates with conformity to the doxa. As such, pursuant to Bourdieusian ontology, the ability of an individual to follow norms and participate in social cohesion is of paramount importance. Hence, all individuals internalize their positionalities and the doxa of the field – to varying degrees – and that is referred to as the habitus of an individual. Bourdieu places great importance in this conformity, as it is essentially the symbolic violence that a field exerts on its embedded actors – it sets the stage for permissibility.

In the case of Rwanda, the social engineers of the genocide, were able to construct a (social) field for the same, building on their knowledge of internalized cultural systems of obedience and ethnic distinction. These cultural systems (Hinton, 1998) are a product of the historical socio-political context of Rwandan governance. At this heart of this structural continuity is the Hamitic Hypothesis- the idea that the Tutsi's were taller and "more beautiful", and therefore of Caucasian descent, subsequently being the superior race compared to the Hutus and the Twa. The narrative produced by this Hypothesis was the legacy of the Belgian colonial era (Prunier, 1997) that was subsequently translated into policy and law (Mamdani, 2001), institutionalizing a system of ethnic distinction. This institutionalization found a repetitive and accumulative process in the Tutsi Monarchy, the Hutu Republic and especially in the creation of (conservative) parties such as the Coalition for the Defence of the Republic (for the Hutus) and the Rwanda Democratic Front (for the Tutsis) shortly prior to the genocide.

This system of ethnic distinction was complemented by another cultural system- that of obedience. Power was not just distributed along ethnic lines, it was also – and (an argument can be made) primarily distributed – in a centralized

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manner. This was established through the reverence associated with the king during the period of the Tutsi monarchy in such a manner that when the Hutu Republic was established, the "system" of governance changed, yet it retained two important characteristics. First, power was still centralized around a singular figure, now the President. Second, there was still a significant split between the "bureaucratic" elite and the public, with discrepancy existing not just in terms of economic holdings but also socio-political power and influence. While the contours of the field appeared to shift, its doxa did not.

These two cultural systems made it such that the (bureaucratic) organization structure that acted as the backbone for the genocidal endeavour (Bagosora's Crisis committee, the Presidential Guards and the Interahamwe) was able to integrate the local population into its ranks, using tools like the radio, feeding on the internalized notion of obedience to ensure social cohesion and on ethnic distinction to provide justifications for violence perpetrated against the de-humanized Tutsi "Other". The (socially engineered) outcome of this set of moves was that violence did not just become permissible, it became the norm. Therefore, there was a significant reduction of the psychological tax incurred by performing violence.

Now that we have understood how violence became permissible, let us focus on how violence became possible. In order to understand that we are going to build on ideas from organizational ergonomics. "Organizational ergonomics is concerned with the optimization of socio-technical systems, including their organizational structures, policies, and processes." (International Ergonomics Association, 2014) In simple terms, this means that organizational ergonomics is concerned with making any organizational system more efficient and comfortable for human participation. In case of the Rwandan genocide this meant that social engineers had to put practices in place that would make the "hunting" expeditions efficient and, more importantly, sustainable. This was made possible through two steps: following the principle of familiarity in shaping everyday practices and ensuring that individuals involved in "hunting" trips had access to various coping mechanisms.

In fact, colloquially referring to the killings as "hunting trips" itself stands as evidence of how these practices of de-humanization were set up. Ignace, one of the people Hatzfeld interviewed for his book described his experience as, "We gathered into teams on the soccer field and went out hunting as kindred spirits. (Hatzfeld, 2006)". Here, the act of killing itself has been reduced to a sport, and the Tutsi's – the hunted – are being given the same consideration as game animals i.e. a particular kind of subject is being created in this instantiation of governmentality- a subject that 'hunts' the de-humanized "other" (an other that is no longer a part of the body subject) and that 'hunt' forms an intrinsic part of what it means to perform said subjectivity. Elie, another interviewee of Hatzfeld's exhibited these sentiments when he said, "Everyone was hired at the same level for a single job – to crush all the cockroaches (ibid)."

This was also the underlying principle that structured the everyday practices working in tandem with the principle of familiarity. This principle of familiarity could be observed through examples like the utilization of every- day spaces such as the football fields to gather every morning for "debriefing" (Hatzfeld, 2006) or the use of machetes as a weapon of choice for the masses since the participants either knew how to "weed" their gardens (the Tutsi's were compared to cockroaches and weeds in the Radio programs) using machetes or if they didn't, there was no special training required (as with firearms) since machetes are weapons of force not precision. This choice of a weapon that utilizes force also contributed towards the grotesque-ness of the violence performed since it was not clinical and detached as a fire weapon would be, rather it was intense and involved bodily contact between the perpetrator and the victim. Moreover, most participants were local and therefore asked to "hunt" in terrain they were extremely familiar with. This process of hunting was also made "easier" through tracking and surveillance systems such as check-points for identification cards and Radio surveillance (Hatzfeld, 2006). These check points essentially acted as sieves that filtered out the Tutsis that were trying to escape, making them easy "prey."

Furthermore, there were also coping mechanisms in place to help incentivize and facilitate this performance of violence as a "hunting" expedition. Chief among this was the formation of routines. The killings only took place between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. re-creating a job like rhythm for the participants. Plus, Gould talks about the central role of solidarity in the performance of violence during the genocide (Gould, 1999). However, an argument can be made that it was not just solidarity, rather comradery that played into the performance of this form and extent of violence. This was observed through the everyday rituals such as the participants drinking banana beer together before and after a

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"hunt", or "hunting" in groups of their friends/ extended family/ peers i.e. performing violence through – and with – the social networks they had. This additional layer of group dynamics coupled with the incentive of loot contributed significantly towards making this violence possible. The (socially engineered) outcome of this set of practices was that violence had not just become the norm, it had also become relatively easy to participate in. Therefore, there is a significant reduction of physical tax incurred through performing violence.

Pulling the Strings Together

This argument, that the creation of a socially engineered alternative reality where violence is permissible and possible, has two potential threats to validity. The first is that this argument relies heavily on the "conscious" development of the genocidal violence, through social engineering, and thus the state's intent is central to the argument. This assumption is grounded in the following observations: the manner in which the bureaucratic-organizational structure was created (Prunier, 2009) seems to be specifically designed to carry out precisely the form and extent of the violence we observed, the state undertook endeavours like the creation of RTLMC in 1993, to replace Radio Rwanda once it became too "liberal" (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014) through which it operationalized the cultural system of ethnic distinction and focused on the extreme dehumanization of the Tutsis. Finally, the initiation of the planning process for this genocide can be traced back to a time prior to the assassination of Habyarimana; instead arguments have been made that it was grounded in the RPF invasion (Melvern, 2004). Thus, this paper stands with the assumption that there was significant intent on the part of the governing apparatus.

The second caveat is variation in whether or not individuals chose to participate in violence, and if so, to varying degrees. However, theoretically, this can be understood with the help of Theodore Schatzki. In his seminal work, Social Practices, presents the idea that: Practices make up people's 'horizon of intelligibility'. As such, it is almost as if the social engineering provides the incentive, punishment & options of mediation, through which individuals can interact with surreal reality, but the final choice remains with the individual allowing for some Hutus to help their Tutsi neighbours and others to "hunt" them.

Though these two points need further investigation, it does not take away from the idea that (as shown in this article) in the case of the Rwandan genocide, a socially engineered nexus of state-sponsored organizations, practices and narratives together created a "surreal" real – an alternative reality – where violence became the norm, and the performance of this norm was rendered relatively easy while simultaneously being socially rewarding. This allowed for a very specific form of violence to breed: grotesque (Hatzfeld, 2007) violence through mass participation.

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