

Evil's Voice in Rwanda
Lewis Napolitano
ENG 20001, Sec. 5540
Professor Ferrell
New York City College of Technology
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There are events which take place in every lifetime that quake people from the shelter of their perceptions of the world. WWII was such an event, and is responsible for introducing many to the word genocide. It's principally identified by images, because words that could describe its absolute hatred were never conceived of by anyone other than the perpetrators of such acts: Shoes emptied of the feet they belonged to, snow made of ashes from human beings just incinerated, bodies malnourished to the point where they appear more dead than alive and then those same bodies, when finally emptied of their souls, handled like garbage. It's a shock for any civilized human being to consider these images, and even more shocking to contemplate that the same cruelty seems compassionate and even civil when compared to the acts that took place in Rwanda in 1994.

In a tug-of-war conflict that's dated back through generations of Tutsi's and Hutu's, a climate was created in the early 1990's which forced fear onto Hutu's who weren't full of hate for Tutsi's, and gave support to those who were. The result was so horrific that disgust consumes me at times when I learn more about the acts that took place in a time span of just under three months. I've never had to close a book because I was sickened by what it said, but I've done it with every book I've read from concerning this incident which took so many lives. The average agreed upon number of those lives taken come close to 800,000. I can't give authors for these numbers, because every book or web site that I've researched gives different numbers ranging from under 700,000 to over one million. Paul Rusesabagina speaks of how Rwanda's nickname is "the land of thousands of hills," (1) it seems almost poignant when thinking of all those lives that needed to be buried.

I have a hard time trying to give a definition for evil. I've heard in one way or another, for so long, that every human being has some good in them; personally I've always focused on all the bad. One thing that I need to make clear, when a human being takes a life it is either planned or not. Planned murder usually involves a gun for the same reason why unplanned murders

usually involve a blunt instrument or something with a sharp edge: humans generally have a hard time seeing a face up close, or feeling their own hands in the process of taking the life. When a knife or object is used, it's a reactionary measure, a temporary insanity. There is no excuse, but it's easy to understand that in an incredible surge of anger, anything is possible. In the case of Rwanda, blunt objects and sharp tools were the weapons of choice, and it wasn't done in the spur of the moment. I read that some murdered "...because they opportunistically used the period of confusion and violence to obtain power and property." (2) I find this less than an acceptable reason or excuse.

The following quotes were taken from the mouths of a group of Hutu men who were interviewed regarding the acts that they committed or saw others commit. I am not using quotes out of laziness. On the contrary, I put some time into trying to gather thoughts that might describe how these atrocities have affected me. In the end, I strongly believe that their own words give a voice to evil.

At the beginning we were too fired up to think. Later on we were too used to it. In our condition, it meant nothing to us to think we were busy cutting our neighbors down to the last one. It became a goes-without-saying. They had already stopped being good neighbors of long standing... They had become people to throw away, so to speak.(3a)

During the killings, we had not one wedding, not one baptism, not one soccer match, not one religious service like Easter. We did not find that kind of celebration interesting anymore. We did not care spit for that Sunday silliness. We were dead tired from work, we were getting greedy, we celebrated whenever we felt like it, we drank as much as we wanted.(3b)

We had sessions with girls who were raped in the bush. Nobody dared protest that. Even those who were edgy about it, because they had received blessings in church

for example, told themselves it would change nothing since the girl was marked for death anyway.(3c)

Man can get used to killing, if he kills on and on. He can even become a beast without noticing it. Some threatened one another when they had no more Tutsis under the machete. In their faces, you could see the need to kill.(3d)

As disturbingly cold as those words are, the following plant images in my head that I feel fortunate haven't grown into dreams. The difference between evil, anger, and everything else, is that as angered as I've gotten when these images were forced upon me, I couldn't even fathom having the same attitude towards the killers. That's one difference between what is and what isn't evil. The next three statements... they too speak volumes, and to me, much louder:

"I saw papas teaching their boys how to cut. They made them imitate the machete blows. They displayed their skill on dead people, or on living people they had captured during the day. The boys usually tried it out on children, because of their similar size. But most people did not want to involve the children directly in these bloody doings, except for watching, of course.(3e)"

There were even tramps who gave up wandering. Suddenly their arms were just as strong as everyone else's. They grew rich before they knew what was happening. They took advantage of their hoarded spoils to pick themselves out a rich wife, someone they would never have dared to mix with before. Thanks to the killings, they now enjoyed great esteem in a woman's eyes.(3f)

"When my husband came home in the evenings, I knew the disturbing gossip, I knew he was a boss, but I asked him nothing. He left the blades outside. He no longer showed the slightest temper anymore in the house, he spoke of the Good Lord. He was cheerful with the children, he brought back little presents and words of encouragement, and that pleased me.(3g)"

Finally, I honestly described the next two statements as my favorites to someone over this past weekend. I caught myself doing it, and wondered how sick a person must be to say such a thing. The book closed for each of these statements, and looking back, I wish I could have cried right on the subway where I sat when first reading them. Maybe it would allow some of my sickened feelings to be lost, rather than my thoughts of humanity. The first is described by a Hutu woman who had to choose between two babies, on which one she could safely carry away and thereby save its life. There was a newborn and a somewhat older child. She realized she wouldn't have milk for the newborn, so it was included in what happened to the rest.

“They surrounded the maternity hospital. They ripped down the gates, they simply shot up the locks. They wore very handsome cartridge belts of highly polished leather, but they wanted to avoid wasting bullets. They killed the women with machetes and clubs... When a mama had hidden a child underneath her, they picked her up first, then cut the child, then cut its mother last. They didn't bother to cut the nursing infants properly. They slammed them against the walls to save time, or hurled them alive on the heaps of corpses.(3h)”

This last moment is told by the author regarding a 65 year old hutu man:

The first day of the Tutsi hunt on the hill of Ntarama, Isidore Mahandago was sitting on a chair in front of his house... Some strapping fellows armed with machetes came singing up the path that ran near his house. Isidore called to them in his deep old voice and lectured them in public... “You, young men, are evildoers. Turn on your heels and go. Your blades point the way toward a dreadful misfortune for us all. Do not stir up disputes too dangerous for us farmers. Stop tormenting our neighbors and go back to your fields.” Two killers approached him, laughing, and without a word cut him down with their machetes. Among the band was Isidore's son, who according to witnesses neither protested nor stopped to

bend over the body. The young men went on their way singing.(3i)

I can't remember the amount of quotes I started this paper with. I decided that these said the most, but there were so many more things that only the voice of evil could relate. I'm sorry it's so long, and I'm sorry it's so harsh. If these absolutely nonsensical acts of violence that people committed are not acts of evil, I don't know what is. What particularly stood out to me was how those who committed the acts called it "hunting" or "work" and while innocent parties spoke of slashing, and hacking people to death, those killers simply say they "cut" someone. What really relates the evil of this to me is the thought of how good neighbors, friends, even in some cases family members, could be treasured one day, and hacked to pieces the very next. I couldn't do it to my worst enemy - they did it to their best friends.

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