Language and Genocide: The Dehumanizing Power of Language

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Key Terms

- **Genocide** - acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

- **Language Discourse** - any piece of extended language, written or spoken, that has unity and meaning and purpose. (Terrorist vs. Freedom Fighter)

- **Dehumanizing Language** – Language which denies the human-ness or person-ness of a group of people.
8 stages of Genocide

8 basic stages of genocides
- 1. Classification
- 2. Symbolization
- 3. Dehumanization
- 4. Organization
- 5. Polarization
- 6. Preparation
- 7. Extermination
- 8. Denial
Dehumanization has been used in every genocide recorded in history
Turns people into sub-humans (Untermenschen)

Examples of dehumanization
“_____ is a cancer of society”
“_____ are like rats.”
“_____ are like cockroaches.”
Racial stereotypes / Eugenics
Governments use official dehumanizing language to “other” a group
Excludes the target of aggression from the moral community
This allows for populations that are indifferent or approve of killing
Psychologically hard to kill another human
Allows humans to overcome natural inhibitions they have against treating other people like game animals/vermin/dangerous predators
Historical Examples

- Genocides of Indigenous
  - Term “Savages” “Civilize or Exterminate”
- Holocaust
- Rwanda
- Bosnia / Herzegovina
- Cambodia
  - “Intellectuals” killed, referred to as flies
The Holocaust

- Persistent portrayal of Jewish people as:
  - Rats or Vermin
  - Bacilli, parasites, and disease
- Media directed at both children and adults
  - Nazi Comic Books
  - The Poisonous Mushroom
  - Stereotypical images of Jewish people
  - “Pamphlets” about Jewish people for adults
Nazi Comic Books
The Poisonous Mushroom
Radio and Newspapers used, calling Tutsis:
- dogs, cows, goats, hyenas, lions, monkeys, pigs, snakes, and, of course, cockroaches
- Cockroaches was main image used in genocide

Radio was main form of media in Rwanda
- Anti-Tutsi radio shows were main source of dehumanization

Euphemisms
- “The graves are only half empty; who will help us fill them?”
- What tools will we use to defeat the Inyenzi [cockroaches] once and for all?
Rwandan images
The Serbs thought of the Muslims as the "others" or as if they were subhuman.

Serbian controlled media sources such as Radio Television Belgrade ruled the airwaves, victimizing the Serbs and demonizing Bosnians.

Non-Serbians called “Aliens” or “others”
Dehumanization and the Media

- Dehumanizing language not just carried about by governments, but by people.
- Media often used to further images of people as subhuman.
- Let’s look at some current media:
Governments use dehumanizing language and images to create an atmosphere where its citizens can kill.
Dehumanization can come from media, film, books, literature, and education.
Dehumanization leads to violence, genocide or otherwise.
We must always be on the look out for how groups of people are portrayed in media and by government officials.

SAY NO TO GENOCIDE
Works Cited