

In order to confront the genocide of the Rohingya, we must recognize the compounding factors that ultimately engender genocide. From the Holocaust to the Rwandan genocide, the brutality committed relied on dehumanization and effective use of media against the most vulnerable. Together these tactics have been wielded by individuals and groups to wipe out whomever they deem a hindrance to their ideology.

In order to decimate a population, the perpetrators turn public opinion against those they wish to kill. This is accomplished by attacking the character of the people — dehumanizing them. As Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng stated, “you are being killed not for what you have done, but for who you are.”<sup>1</sup> The Tutsi were disparaged as cockroaches and snakes by state radio<sup>2</sup> just as Jews were disparaged as subhuman creatures and cultural parasites.<sup>3</sup> When people are dehumanized, it is easier to kill them without repercussions. In Myanmar, the existing ethnic conflicts were exploited by the military to deem the genocide of the Rohingya justified as a means against terrorism. Dehumanizing the Rohingya: treating them as threats to safety, rapists, and illegal immigrants both served to gain the acquiescence of the majority Buddhist Bamar and to encourage their active participation in mass murder. Dehumanization *became* genocide.

This dehumanization needed to be propagated through mass media. In the past this has been accomplished through newspapers and even more effectively, radio. Joseph Goebbels

---

<sup>1</sup> “Genocide Begins with 'Dehumanization;' No Single Country Is Immune from Risk, Warns UN Official | UN News.” *United Nations News*, United Nations, 9 Dec. 2014,

<sup>2</sup> Ndahiro, Kennedy. “In Rwanda, We Know All About Dehumanizing Language.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 24 Oct. 2019,

<sup>3</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,

himself asserted that radio was “the most important instrument of mass influence that exists anywhere.” Radio was used in the attempted extermination of Tutsis in Rwanda and its effects were profound. In a study of violence against Tutsis, it was found that broadcasts led to significant rises in violence against the Tutsi. An increase in one standard deviation of radio coverage led to a 12–13 percent increase in total violence, 13–14 percent increase in militia violence, and 10–11 percent in individual violence.<sup>4</sup> We face an increased risk today with the rise of new media, namely social media. Facebook played a crucial role in proliferating hate speech against the Rohingya. A UN investigator referred to it as a “beast” that incited violence against the Muslim minority group.<sup>5</sup> With increasingly powerful media, the rapid spread of hate speech only increases exponentially and thereby the human casualties that accompany it.

It is critical to recognize the ever growing power of social media and its ability to influence public opinion. Only through this powerful tool could the Tatmadaw have killed with such impunity and gained the permission and participation of the Bamar. Hate speech may arise anywhere, but modern media creates the perfect environment for it to metastasize unchecked. The genocide of the Rohingya is the most prominent case of the amplification of hate speech on social media leading to ethnic cleansing. Cognizance of the permeation of hate speech into the public mind through vectors of mass media is necessary in confronting the factors that gave rise to the genocide of the Rohingya.

---

<sup>4</sup> Yanagizawa-Drott, David Hans. “Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Oxford University Press (OUP), 21 Aug. 2014,

<sup>5</sup> Stecklow, Steve. “Why Facebook Is Losing the War on Hate Speech in Myanmar.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 15 Aug. 2018,

## Bibliography

“Genocide Begins with 'Dehumanization;' No Single Country Is Immune from Risk, Warns UN Official || UN News.” *United Nations News*, United Nations, 9 Dec. 2014, [news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485822-genocide-begins-dehumanization-no-single-country-immune-risk-warns-un-official](https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/12/485822-genocide-begins-dehumanization-no-single-country-immune-risk-warns-un-official).

Ndahiro, Kennedy. “In Rwanda, We Know All About Dehumanizing Language.” *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 24 Oct. 2019, [www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/04/rwanda-shows-how-hateful-speech-leads-violence/587041/](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/04/rwanda-shows-how-hateful-speech-leads-violence/587041/).

Stecklow, Steve. “Why Facebook Is Losing the War on Hate Speech in Myanmar.” *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 15 Aug. 2018, [www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-facebook-hate/](https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-facebook-hate/).

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-propaganda>.

Yanagizawa-Drott, David Hans. “Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Oxford University Press (OUP), 21 Aug. 2014, [dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/13457754](https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/13457754).