The Seven Stages of the Rwandan Genocide

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Abstract

Drawing upon a book by J.M. Lecomte on the genocide of the Jews by the Nazi Germans, the author examines the seven stages in the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda. These stages, which do not necessarily follow one another in time but may overlap, can be classified in the following way: (i) definition of the target group on the basis of some criteria; (ii) registration of the victims; (iii) designation or outward identification of the victims; (iv) restriction and confiscation of goods; (v) exclusion from professions, working activities and means of transportation, among other things; (vi) systematic isolation; (vii) mass extermination.

1. Introduction

In his book, Teaching about the Holocaust in the 21st Century, Jean-Michel Lecomte makes the compelling claim that the process undertaken for the dehumanization of the Jews during the Holocaust can be broken down into seven different stages. These stages are: (i) definition of the target group; (ii) registration of the victims; (iii) designation of the victims; (iv) restrictions and confiscations of goods; (v) exclusion; (vi) systematic isolation; (vii) mass extermination.

Lecomte persuasively demonstrates that these discernable stages provide useful examples to help identify and understand other mass exterminations.

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2 Lecomte explains that the stages may take place concurrently. Lecomte, supra note 1, at 47.
3 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 50.
Therefore, his thesis can be applied constructively to the genocide committed against the Tutsi of Rwanda. However, mass destructions, while sharing common aspects, are of course not all the same. Thus, Lecomte’s theory is applied here with the recognition that the Rwandan genocide has its own unique singularity and particularity. This article will demonstrate the benefits and limits to Lecomte’s theory by demonstrating the way the seven stages of mass destruction occurred in the case of genocide in Rwanda.

Before exploring each stage and comparing Lecomte’s writing on the Holocaust with the Rwandan genocide, it is worth noting that no example of mass extermination can be considered without taking into account the complicity of the larger population. While a small opposition can always be disposed of, for genocide to occur, the majority of the population must necessarily be transformed into complicit actors in the genocide. As Lecomte states, ‘in order to avoid too great and widespread an emotional reaction, the majority of the population has to be turned into indifferent witnesses, accomplices, or agents of the massacre.’

This point is exemplified in the case of Rwanda where, applying Lecomte’s theory, the Hutus had the option to either be victims or executioners, resulting in moderate Hutus being murdered alongside their Tutsi counterparts. Similarly, in Nazi Germany, in order to persuade young and old to turn against their well integrated and assimilated Jewish neighbours, the regime engaged in the process of dehumanizing the Jews in order to render extermination a more palatable project for the German people. Ultimately, mass extermination is accomplished when enough of the population is complicit in allowing it to happen.

2. Definition of the Target Group

According to Lecomte’s thesis, the first step for mass extermination is the definition of the victim group. As Lecomte states, a ‘decisive prerequisite’ to genocide is to define this ‘other category of persons who were so radically different that they had to be exterminated’. This exercise of demarcation of the group of victims often occurs in the form of creating scapegoats. As Lecomte explains with respect to Jews and the Holocaust, ‘the initial definition centred on a clear opposition between “Jewish race” and “Aryan race”‘.

In the same way in Rwanda, the Hutu were systematically opposed to the Tutsi from 1926 to 1957, for reasons of simple political domination by the latter. Even after an abrupt reversal of fortunes between 1957 and 1994, this process

4 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 47.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
of systematic opposition persisted. Although the desire of political domination by the Hutus remained in place, politics in Rwanda became increasingly infused with policies of dehumanization with a goal toward the extermination of the Tutsi. A culture of genocide was cultivated, for example, by the introduction of identity cards, which identified the Rwandans’ racial or ethnic heritage. Introduced by the Belgians when they colonized Rwanda in the 1930s, these identity cards resulted in administrative reforms that destroyed the harmonious and stabilizing elements of the past. As Lecomte suggests with regard to Germany, the definition of the victim group ‘had to be made in order to move on from individual scapegoats, from the pogrom, to the undertaking of... extermination’.9 In Germany, of course, the definition of the victim group was almost an industrial undertaking; if not quite to that extent, in Rwanda, too, the process was similarly systematic.

In Rwanda, the Manifeste des Bahutu of 24 March 1957, the founding text of racial or ethnic ideology, declared the goal of genocide more than a generation before it actually took place in 1994. The introduction of the Manifeste spoke of:

...a problem that seems serious to us, a problem that might spoil or maybe even destroy one day the great works achieved by Belgium in Rwanda. ...And if by accident (may Fate save us from this) another force would intervene that could stand up to the number, bitterness and desperation will come upon the holders of a degree! The racial element would complicate everything and it will not be necessary anymore to face the problem: racial conflict or social conflict.

‘Stand up to the number...’ was the idea of a census there already, as an element of revenge politics, or perhaps as a furbished weapon? The Manifeste was translated in the national language, dispersed everywhere, and thus the population was engaged in the cause in 1957. By identifying the Tutsi as a race foreign to Rwanda, with a fate that could not be reconciled with that of the Hutu, they became ‘a problem’. Once the Tutsis were identified as a national problem, it was not long before a ‘final solution’ to this problem would be found.10

In contrast to Lecomte’s ‘definition’ stage, this stage for the Tutsi of Rwanda can more accurately be classified as ‘redefinition’. Colonial anthropology associated the Tutsi to the so-called Hamite race, and the Hutus were associated with the Bantu, despite the fact that Bantu refers primarily to language. Before colonization, Hutu and Tutsi acknowledged the same eponymous forefather: Kanyarwanda, father of the Gahutu, the Gatutsi and the Gatwa.11 Hutu and Tutsi therefore had the same founding myth, the same traditional religion, the same social and political organization, the same language and the same agro-pastoral vocation with the prevalence of herding for the Tutsi and agriculture

9 Ibid.
10 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 48.
11 The Twa constitute the third major population group in Rwanda. The Twa are rarely mentioned but they constitute 1% of the population.
for the Hutu. During pre-colonial times, Hutu and Tutsi had the same material culture and, additionally, the same immaterial cultural heritage.

There was much cohesion and integration among the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, as evidenced by the historically high rate of mixed marriages, ennoblement, adoption, blood pacts and socialization patterns. In Rwandese tradition, the criterion of defining Hutu or Tutsi was thus not a racial reference, but rather a socio-economic status that could confer political promotion. Historian and philosopher, Alexis Kagame, suggests the relationship between the Hutu and Tutsi communities can be put in the following terms: ‘On appelle mututsi en droit pastoral, quiconque possède plusieurs têtes de gros bétail, même s’il n’est pas de race hamite.’

Ethno-history and history more generally have demonstrated the permeability of the boundaries between the different groupings. One person could be at one time, depending on his fortune at a given moment—a Hutu or a Tutsi. Nevertheless, despite all historical evidence to the contrary, by the mid-nineteenth century, Hutu and Tutsi had been defined, or re-defined, as groups opposed to each other.

3. Registration of the Victims

According to Lecomte’s work, the direct corollary of defining the victims is to register them. As Lecomte states with respect to the Holocaust, the registering stage ‘was all the more necessary given that these different people were in reality no different.’ For example, Lecomte writes, ‘[i]n spite of the caricatures disseminated, Jews may not look Jewish. Hence the need to identify them, draw up a list, be able to locate them at an address, and be able to find them at the appropriate juncture.’

Similarly, the authors of the Manifeste Bahutu were almost obsessively afraid that Hutu and Tutsi might be mistaken for one another. The irony, of course, is that the need to register the victims and to identify the ‘cast, the nobility, the minority and the most Hamiticized regions’ betrays the absence of difference between the groups in the first place.

The actual identification of the Hutu and the Tutsi was done rather arbitrarily. The process was limited to an appreciation at first sight of the physical features, which were supposed to distinguish the Hutu from the Tutsi. The authors of the Manifeste des Bahutu admonished Hutus to be extremely careful

12 Hutu, Tutsi and Twa were socio-economic classifications rather than genetic labels.
15 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 48.
16 Ibid.
to preserve the efforts undertaken in the 1930s of colonial registration of the so-called races in Rwanda. Implicitly, this registration was also understood to include the casts, the nobility, the pupils and the students, the civil servants, the chiefs and the under-chiefs, the elite and, very specifically, the female teachers and other public Tutsi women. All elements of the population—Hutu, Tutsi and Twa—were involved in the registration process. It is worth noting that the Rwandan census in the 1930s identified the population as comprising 85 per cent Hutu, 14 per cent Tutsi and 1 per cent Twa.

The Hutu regime was constantly, almost obsessively, concerned with keeping updated versions of individuals’ ethnic profiles. The following examples illustrating this point are drawn from a recently published study in the national language by the researcher, Antoine Mugesera, at the Iwacu-Kabusunzu Centre. In 1965, M. Mpamo, the then Prefect of Cyangugu, filed a complaint with the Ministry of Public Administration against the civil servant, Murekezi Modeste, who worked for the radio-telegraphic services of Cyangugu. Modeste was charged with having changed his ethnic affiliation from Tutsi to Hutu. An investigation concluded that the accused had actually been listed as Tutsi. Modeste was punished for having lied to the Parmehutu government and for having committed forgery.

In 1966, the Prefect of Kigali, M. Sebatware, denounced to the Ministry of Education teachers who had changed the ethnic reference on some students’ records. The Prefect called for punitive measures against these deceiving teachers. Mugesera’s study provides many other examples and facts in support of the phenomenon of mayors being called upon to explain the changes in Hutu–Tutsi affiliation, or the appearance of a double identity reference for a single individual. Other mayors were sanctioned for having changed the ethnic identity of individuals under their authority. Both the requests for explanation and the issue of sanctions fell under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In 1975, Minister Alexis Kanyarengwe made up a list of about 25 mayors and teachers who were guilty of the charges; these names were then reported to President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Kanyarengwe’s report motivated subsequent research to determine whether a specific programme had existed to find out people’s ethnic origins in order to ascertain their ethnic identity. Mugesera’s research established that a list of people had secretly been the object of a programme under which the government attempted to determine their ethnic identity. Boniface Bikino, a priest and former professor at the Catholic Secondary School of Rwesero, was one such individual whose ethnicity was under investigation. The priest was a member of the Union Fraternelle du Clergé Rwandais (UCFR: Fraternity Union

of the Rwandese Clergy) which united devout Tutsi and Hutu. The UCFR was suspected of opposing His Eminence André Perraudin, the godfather of Hutu Social Revolution from 1957 to 1959. Minister Sebatware asked that information about this fraternity be sent to the Prefect of Byumba. The investigation that followed revealed that the priest had Hutu roots and that his membership to the UCFR was solely rooted in his Christian beliefs.

Another example of the controversy surrounding ethnic identity in Rwanda occurred with the aforementioned Social Revolution of 1959. Before that time, there had been Hutu who had taken on the status of Tutsi. When the climate changed to their disadvantage, these ‘new Tutsi’ asked to be given back their old identity. A political debate on this question was conducted in Kigali in 1966, with the participation of M. Harerimana Gaspard, the Minister of Internal Affairs and all the Prefects. The Minister’s conclusion of the debate was that in case a certain Hutu had become Tutsi in name and in behaviour, he could never again become Hutu. This new edict resulted in the suspension of the Rwandan practices of adoption. For example, traditionally in Rwanda, in a second marriage, the children from the wife’s prior marriage adopted their mother’s new husband’s ethnic identity. However, under the new ethnic order, Tutsi children would maintain their identity regardless of whether their mother had married a Hutu. Thus, in 1994, despite efforts to separate the victims, numerous individuals were killed despite their Hutu heritage.

4. Designation of the Victims

Still pursuing Lecomte’s thesis, the definition and registration phases are followed by the third phase of genocide: designation, with the attachment of physical symbols to enable the population to easily identify the victims. Using the example of the Holocaust, Lecomte describes this phase as providing the general population with the ability ‘to see who was a Jew so that the propaganda references stigmatizing the Jews as an “inferior race” and the need to defend oneself against them could take on a physical form’. Prior to the Holocaust, Jews were required to wear an identifying mark like an armband or the Star of David. This mark was placed on individual Jews as well as on businesses, shops and workshops owned or operated by the Jews.

21 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Justice, Transcript of the meeting held in Kigali, 20 October 1966 by the Prefects of the Prefectures, at 6 and 7.
23 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 48.
24 Ibid. It is worth noting at this point that Lecomte also suggests that starting at this third phase, his so-called phases no longer operate in neat succession; instead, as exemplified in the case of Jews in Europe during the Holocaust, phases may occur at different times in different countries, and sometimes concurrently.
25 Ibid.
The designation system used in Rwanda to dehumanize victims operated on two levels. On one level, the potent symbolism of language was used to designate the damned. Indeed, language was used as a means of stigmatizing the targeted race, by attributing to Tutsis a set of characteristic labels, each one more horrific than the next: cockroach, feudal lord, snake, subversive, enemy. The power of such labels becomes clearer when we consider the instances of Tutsi paying off local leaders to prevent the possibility of being called politically compromising names. On a second, more typical and tangible level, identity cards and markings on houses, among other things, were used to identify and designate ethnicity.

While many Tutsi fled Rwanda prior to the genocide in 1994, those who stayed were considered subversive. These Tutsi bore the brunt of the regime’s wrath in response to attacks against it in Kigali spearheaded by the Tutsi of the diaspora.

Despite stereotypes of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa features, based on origin or group-specific eating habits, it is illusory to attempt to discern someone’s ethnic group or race by, for example, looking at their nose. The Manifeste des Bahutu acknowledged this problem, and thus the system of designation that developed was necessarily based on identity cards, which identified the ethnicity of the individual. Without the racial reference on the identity card, the proclaimer of the Manifeste des Bahutu realized that it would be too difficult to differentiate between Hutu and Tutsi, or at least to designate who was not Hutu. For this reason, registering the victims alone was not sufficient in Rwanda. Under the pretext of a better management of the partition of the public goods, a clear designation strategy was explicitly required by the Manifeste in order to better facilitate the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi.

The identity card was one way the individual was forced to publicly declare his or her ethnic identity. Required by the regime to be carried by each individual at all times and used for any administrative action and for any minor movement beyond one’s native hill for over two generations, the identity card served as the Rwandese ethnic recording system. It was the Rwandese version of the Star of David. Another example of this public declaration occurred, for example, every year at school, when the student was obligated to stand up and state loudly and clearly his/her race or ethnic origin. In the event that the student declared him or herself to be a Tutsi, he or she would be laughed at by all the other students and quickly transformed into the class scapegoat, blamed for all the misfortunes of the country.

5. Restrictions and Confiscation of Goods

Following, and sometimes occurring contemporaneously with designation, Lecomte’s fourth phase of dehumanization concerns the restrictions and confiscations of goods. According to Lecomte, this phase concerns the appropriation or confiscation of goods owned by the targeted victim group. In Lecomte’s
example of the Holocaust, this phase is exemplified in the “Aryanisation” of companies perceived as “Jewish”. In this phase, real estate and financial resources are also appropriated. As Lecomte explains, in the case of Jews in Nazi Germany, this phase was characterized with the process of the state gradually depriving Jews of their ‘pensions and all the various social rights’.

The Manifeste des Bahutu seized on this concept of dehumanization in its call for anti-Tutsi measures. These measures were implemented immediately, with the formation of the so-called Hutu Social Movement, followed by the formation of the Parmehutu, the Party of Hutu Emancipation, between 1957 and 1959. These anti-Tutsi measures were formalized with the authorization of the Belgian tutelary authority in 1959 with respect to the formation of political parties. On the eve of decolonization, the colonizer protected its own interests by means of cultivating or instigating a climate that permitted racist parties.

The late 1950s ushered in a period during which a whole set of measures were implemented which aimed at dispossessing the Tutsi of their goods and depriving them of their economic and social rights. In the period following the decolonization of Rwanda, the new government made no attempt to pacify the people or repatriate the refugees. Instead, the new political leaders of the country distributed, or divided amongst themselves, the refugees’ possessions, their lands, their cows, their furniture and their real estate. The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock assisted in 1964 in creating modalities of partition. This phenomenon of confiscation, misappropriation and redistribution of goods is clearly demonstrated in the example of the property belonging to the people who had been internally displaced to Nyamata and Sake, as well as with the goods owned by the Tutsi in exile outside the country.

The land confiscated from the Tutsi became a contentious issue amongst the new Hutu leaders, as evidenced in a letter by M. Munyaneza, the then Prefect of Cyangugu. In some places, revenues generated from the sale of Tutsi goods were stolen and did not end up in the state treasury. The population of the Municipality of Buhanga in Byumba actually denounced its representatives in a report. Compared to the confiscation of their goods and their lands, Tutsis objected with less vigour to the loss of their pensions and social rights. Some of the greatest losses of goods were the most symbolic. An example of this concerns the confiscation of the Inyambo cows, known as the most beautiful variety of Rwandese cattle and the pride of King Mutara Rudahigwa. These cows were sold in an auction. The revenues from this sale were, of course, not dispensed to the owners. Another symbolic act of confiscation

26 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 48–49.
27 Ibid.
28 A. Mugesera, supra note 17, at 87 ff.
30 Prefecture of Cyangugu, Letter no. 03 of 5 February 1962.
32 Mugesera, supra note 17, at 91.
concerned the treasures of the Queen Mother, which were plundered while she was still alive.\textsuperscript{33} Her lands and other possessions fared no better.

### 6. Exclusion

Although they do not necessarily operate contemporaneously, Lecomte’s fourth phase of confiscation is often inextricably linked to his fifth phase of exclusion. Lecomte demonstrates this phase by the exclusion of Jews from public service as well as their inability to work in numerous professions, such as law and medicine, in which they had traditionally been well represented. Also, Jews were banned from certain places, such as public buildings, and prohibited from using public transportation. Jews were also severely limited in their access to daily supplies, e.g., they could have access to shops only for one hour on a given afternoon. In the areas of German-occupied Europe, the exclusion of Jews was accentuated by restricted curfews or their total ban from certain neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{34}

In a similar fashion, the Tutsi in Rwanda were denied their social rights and excluded from public functions and public life, including economic, cultural and artistic life.\textsuperscript{35} Tutsis were entitled only to subordinate positions in public functions. For more than a whole generation, the Minister of Foreign Affairs had not employed more than two Tutsi agents, and they were quickly fired. The exclusion of the Tutsi from public life was exemplified by the absence of any Tutsi Prefect until 1990; and, even then, the emergence of a Tutsi prefect was instigated by an external military attack led by a social and political organization, which had managed to integrate Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Every Tutsi merchant, importer or industrialist had to employ a Hutu promoter to generate business.

In order to maintain positive relations with the Vatican, the government appointed a Tutsi ambassador, M. Katabarwa, to represent Rwanda in Rome. Only one Tutsi, M.A. Murindangabo, had worked for the Presidency of the Republic. One Tutsi under-colonel counted amongst the high-ranked officials of the country. Over the period 1972–1973, of the 26 Secretary-Generals of the Ministries, only one Tutsi—M.A. Kataberwa—held that position. Out of the 55 directors of the Ministries at the time, there were only two Tutsis—P. Kabagabo and Côme Rwamakuba, whose promotion was seemingly assured by their friendly relations with well placed, influential Hutu. In the 10 years following its establishment, the University of Rwanda failed to produce a single Tutsi doctor. Thus, in every way, there were policies in place that impeded any kind of social or political promotion for the Tutsi. The Tutsi who remained in Rwanda after other Tutsis had gone en masse into exile were often viewed

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., at 98.
\textsuperscript{34} Lecomte, supra note 1, at 49.
\textsuperscript{35} Mugesera, supra note 17, at 296 ff.
as the lowest of the low. The reality, however, was that these Tutsi had been so severely impoverished by the regime that they had no choice but to endure the misery imposed on them.

The policy of exclusion of the Tutsi was extended beyond the borders of the country. Tutsi were excluded from working in the foreign embassies in Kigali and in international organizations. In 1965, M. Lazare Mpakaniye, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, asked his counterparts in the Ministries of Education, Internal Affairs and Justice to facilitate the return of Tutsi from abroad after the termination of their studies in order to better monitor them from within the country. That said, Mpakaniye urged his colleagues to keep the Tutsi in second-class positions despite the latter's degrees entitling them to better positions. The motivation for Mpakaniye's request was that the Tutsi '[could] put up the Hutu against the Hutu, using all their sly tricks'. Mpakaniye believed that the promotion of these Tutsi would alienate the Hutu population from the Parmehutu government. The government had also decreed that no aspect of the private sector would be left vulnerable for the Tutsi to control. It was argued that if the Tutsi controlled a sector, they would be in a position to cause the government trouble. This policy was maintained by the MRD-Parmehutu of President Grégoire Kayibanda and by the MRND of Juvenal Habyarimana. Indeed, testimony extracted from a Prefect's administrative report following a visit to the municipality of Rwamatamu clearly demonstrates this policy of dehumanization. In his report, the Prefect writes, 'Unfortunately there are still some Tutsi intellectuals left'.

In the context of the genocide that followed eventually, the stage of exclusion also includes the policy of deportation and forced emigration. This stage should be understood as the geographical exclusion of the Tutsi in Rwanda. From the 1950s onwards, measures for deportation and forced emigration effectively condemned the Tutsi into exclusion. The United Nations nevertheless continued to request the tutelary regime of that moment to reintegrate Tutsi refugees and the displaced into their original municipalities and to return their goods to them. The press kept a record of this for history.

The (Belgian) administrator of Kibungo, M. de Weerd, was a functionary who encouraged such emigration. De Weerd even went as far as to pay the costs of the emigrants. The emigrants were most often people or families who were banned from their community councils. The decision to deport the banned was taken on the 22 April 1959 by Colonel Guy Logiest, together with A. Prude'homme, who was still a resident of the country at that time. The first destination of deportation was Nyamata. The location was euphemistically

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36 By Note no. 177/cab of 17 January 1967, the Minister of International Cooperation and Plan enumerated the reasons why the Hutu state would not benefit from having Tutsi in the embassies, the consulates and the international offices.
37 Mugesera, supra note 17, at 303.
38 Rudipresse, no. 182 of 30 July 1960, at 3.
called a ‘relief centre’. The uninhabitable and infested character of the region provided for a rather macabre reception: of a population of about 5,433 persons, 105 people were hospitalized in the four first months (i.e. 35 people a month) and for every 37 births, there were 32 deaths. The most vulnerable ones were, of course, the children and the elderly. Other similar centres for deportation included Bwiriri and Gihinga.

The Rwandese National Union Party brought the question of the forced deportation of the Tutsi before the United Nations in New York in 1960. The deportation of the Tutsi to these locations was the result of a manifest process of exclusion, as indicated in a communiqué from M.A. Sebatware, Prefect of Kigali, eight years after deportation. Sebatware’s communiqué was in keeping with the goal of avoiding complaints by the exiles to their representatives. It is with this in mind that the deported were categorically refused their request to move from their new habitat to reclaim their goods that they had left behind on their lands. A letter by the Prefecture of Kibungo demonstrates an instance of forced internal exclusion by describing the case of a Tutsi veterinarian, Jean Ntabana, who was accused of visiting the deported of Rukumbeli at Sake. This process of geographical exclusion of the Tutsi was also manifest in the regime’s policy of first ignoring and then, since 1959, categorically refusing to allow for the repatriation into the country of the Tutsi refugees.

The policy of exclusion corresponded initially to the goals of the extremist party, Parmehutu, in the First Republic. As for the Second Republic, the pretext for the exclusion of the Tutsi was the overpopulation of the territory. President Juvenal Habyarimana expressed this repeatedly: in July 1974, after talks with Uganda; in 1982, in a magazine with international coverage; in 1986, at the Sixth Congress of his party MRND; in Uganda, in Semuto on 5 February 1988; and in France on 3 April 1990.

Not satisfied with draining Tutsi refugees of all hope of returning to Rwanda, the government sought to persecute the refugees in their new host countries. The government requested that host countries confiscate any passports issued prior to Rwanda’s independence; that neighbouring countries extradite certain Rwandese people; that the naturalization of the Rwandan refugees in their host country be delayed or denied; that the marriage between politicians of the host countries with Rwandese women be hampered.

40 The tse-tse mosquito, typhus, meningitis and dysentery were the principal causes of death.
41 Imvaho no. 28 of 30 December 1961.
42 Imvaho no. 33 of 28 February 1961.
43 Prefecture of Kigali, Communiqué to the population of Kanzenze, Letter no. 440/20 of 9 May 1966.
44 Prefecture of Kibungo, Letter no. 967, 23 Conf. 1/02 of 23 September 1964.
7. Systematic Isolation

As Lecomte demonstrates from the example of the Holocaust the policy of exclusion is a preamble to the sixth stage: systematic isolation. This sixth stage can be characterized as the ‘systematic practice of the previous stage’.\(^48\) During the Holocaust, Lecomte describes, Jews were removed from the general population and forced into ghettos, and interned in camps—labour camps and concentration camps.\(^49\) These ghettos and camps were unable to sustain the growing numbers of Jews forced to exist there, as Germany continued to expand eastward across Europe.\(^50\) Food was scarce and disease rampant. As living conditions worsened, the deaths of thousands of Jews were portrayed simply as ‘natural’ disappearances.\(^51\)

In the context of Rwanda, no similar systematic isolation of the Rwandese Tutsi occurred. The isolation of the Jews had spanned over several years: in Rwanda, the systematic isolation of the Tutsi was remarkably swift, despite the existence of the policy of discrimination from 1959 to 1994. The main reason for the swiftness of the genocide in Rwanda may be due to the fact that the Hutu regime could not afford the infrastructures and the technology that Germany and its satellite states had at their disposal.

As revealed by the work, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*,\(^52\) the speed of the isolation stage before the massacre served a different goal in Rwanda. Arguably, the regime chose to isolate the Tutsi at the last possible moment ‘to mislead the foreigners in order to avoid any type of criticism and even possibly receive support, lure the Tutsi in order to kill them more easily and manipulate the Hutu so that they would energetically participate in the carefully planned genocide’.\(^53\) Indeed, several Hutu officials even encouraged the Tutsi to gather in public places, like churches, which had always, in the past, served as shelters. This time, churches served to isolate Tutsis systematically, with the goal of accelerating their extermination. Systematic isolation also took the form of trapping people with barriers, roadblocks, with nightly razzias or by surrounding them at the swamps, infested in April due to the season’s tropical rains.

Before the great rush to these new death sites, the radio station recommended people should stay home for their own protection. The genocide had to be one of proximity, as had been insinuated by the famous Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines through its spokesperson, Valérie Bemeriki. Bemeriki incited people to keep an eye on their own Tutsi. In one announcement,

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48 Lecomte, *supra* note 1, at 48.
49 *Ibid*.
50 *Ibid*.
51 *Ibid*.
he stated: ‘The people have to observe their neighbours, watch out that they are not conspiring against them. Because these plotters are the worst, the people have to stand up to unmask the plotters; it is not really difficult to see if someone is conspiring against you…’\(^{54}\) As is widely known now, this kind of incitement was directed towards the whole of the Hutu population. With the ethnic proportion of the country of approximately eight Hutu for every one Tutsi, the masses were directly responsible for the genocide.

8. Mass Extermination

The seventh and final stage of Lecomte’s theory of genocide is, of course, that of mass extermination. In Germany, the genocide had been achieved through different means of killing the Jews, including through the political commissars, the Einsatzgruppen, hunger, forced labour and maltreatment in the concentration camps, and the extermination camps.\(^{55}\) In stark contrast, genocide in Rwanda was quick and coordinated. Three days before the start of the genocide, the very day that the plane carrying President Habyarimana crashed, one commentator on *Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines* declared:

> The people, they are the real shield; they are the really strong army… the military fights, but the people say: we back you, we are the shield. The day the people will stand up, and that they will not want you anymore, that they will hate you, profoundly and all united, when you will make them sick… I wonder whereto you will escape. Where will you be able to pass?\(^{56}\)

According to the information obtained from Alison Des Forges and her colleagues, as well as from other sources: ‘The death of Habyarimana allowed for Colonel Bagosora to take over the situation.’\(^{57}\)

It is to the name of this retired colonel that contemporary history links the initiation of government-sponsored genocide and the assassination of the Prime Minister, Mrs Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who was supposed to have saved Rwanda from the macro-social and contentious phenomenon of the genocide. Under the iron rule of the old colonel, Théoneste Bagosora, the infernal machine of death was put into motion. The regime employed the following strategies, as reported by Des Forges: (i) the launch of the genocide by the initiators that beforehand had plotted and organized the death squadrons; (ii) the focus on the Tutsi as the target group after having removed those few Hutu obstacles, of which one was Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana; (iii) complete extermination of the Tutsi; (iv) the impediment of escape by

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54 Valérie Bemeriki, RTLM, 13 April, recorded by Faustin Kagame (*ibid.*, at 300).
55 *ibid.*, at 48–49.
56 RTLM, 3 April, recorded by Faustin Kagame, in Human Rights Watch and Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l’homme, *supra* note 52, at 214.
means of roadblocks and both civilian and military nightly patrols that crossed the entire country; (v) the relay by the civilian population, under militia supervision and supervised by the political and administrative leaders from all different levels, with mobilization supported both by the Radio Nationale and the Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines and reinforced by the army; (vi) the management of the cooperation of the moral authorities four days before the crash of the presidential plane; (vii) the rape of Tutsi girls and women as a weapon of genocide; and (viii) the destruction of the symbolic Tutsi patrimony.

In short, while each massacre has its own particularities, Lecomte’s seven-step thesis of genocide has universal value. Though his discussion focuses specifically on the Holocaust, Lecomte’s breakdown of the stages of dehumanization of the targeted group helps us understand the process of genocide. Further, as the story of the Holocaust and Rwanda demonstrates so amply, at each stage of the dehumanization process, the involvement and complicity of the larger population is required.

From April to July 1994, Rwanda experienced, to paraphrase the well known Nazi formula, the Endlösung of the case of the Tutsi. Similar to the formula employed by the Nazis against the Jews during the Holocaust, for the victims in Rwanda, the ‘isolation was a preparation for the abuses which were to follow’.58 Whereas in Germany, the population had to be educated to separate themselves from the Jews, to no longer frequent Jewish businesses, no longer speak to Jews, no longer to see them ‘to the point that when ultimately they disappeared, the population would hardly notice’,59 in Rwanda, the alienation of the Tutsi had been achieved years earlier; the abruptness of their isolation and the genocide in 1994 was thus, by contrast, not jarring.

58 Lecomte, supra note 1, at 56.
59 Ibid.