

Human Rights in the Post-War Era: Genocide in Mass Media

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Introduction

The word genocide was first coined in 1944 by a Polish-Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin used the Greek root “geno”, meaning “race”, and the Latin suffix “cide”, meaning “killer”, to create the term “genocide”. In his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, he defined genocide as:

“a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves” (Lemkin 79).

In 1950, the United Nations declared genocide a crime punishable by law, but clauses within this definition are interpretable in different ways. We study the evolution of this interpretation and how the term genocide is used in print media.

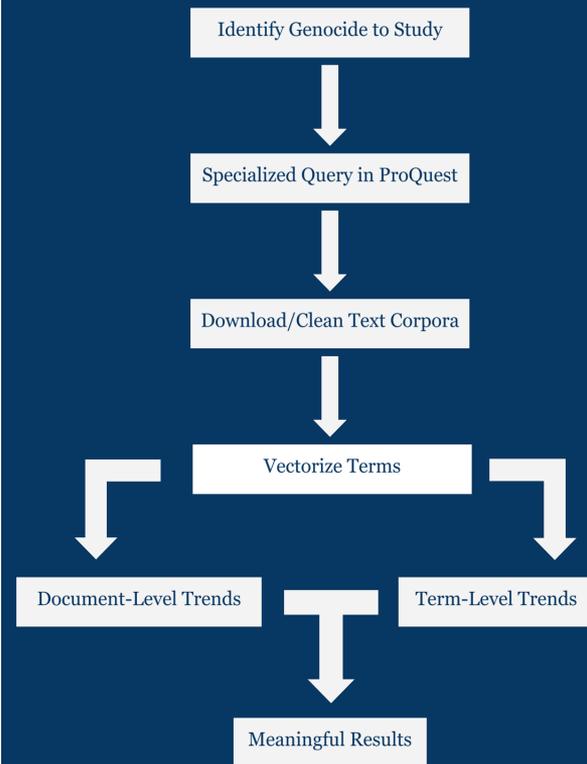


Raphael Lemkin
Duke University (1941-1942)

Objectives

- Evaluate whether reporting language differs between instances of genocide in Western media
- Explore the discrepancies in language (if they exist)
- Identify the rates at which the term genocide becomes associated with certain events
- Construct an efficient pipeline that can parse massive, delimited documents with multiple newspaper articles into a coherent set of texts for data analysis
- Identify the connection between the disparate findings of document-level analysis and term-level analysis
- Maintain a sense of moral responsibility while interpreting the data
- Create a publicly accessible platform to display our findings. (This can be accessed at: <https://sites.duke.edu/dataplusteam152019>)

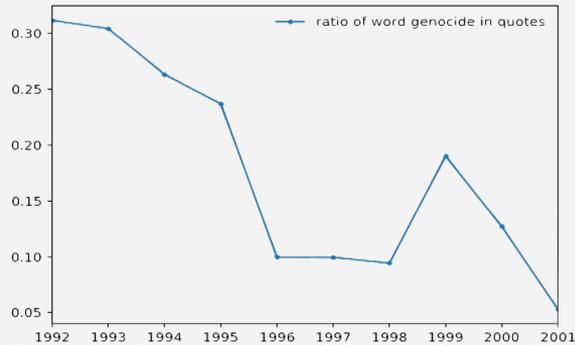
Data Pipeline



Rwanda and Bosnia as a Case Study

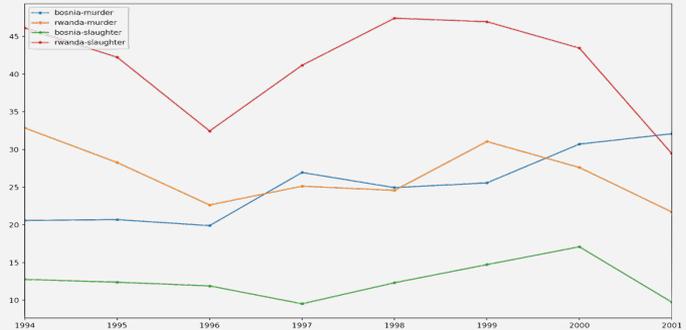
Because they occurred nearly simultaneously, we believe that the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides provide us with an opportunity to compare reporting on different instances of genocide. This is because the time-specific confounding factors that might limit such comparison between other non-contemporaneous events—global context, manner of speaking etc.—are less potent in this context. Using specified queries, we extracted articles from print media outlets from the ProQuest database published during and after both genocides. Our investigation then proceeded in two ways. First, we examined the contexts in which the terms genocide and ethnic cleansing were used in articles discussing each event. Our primary method of carrying out this inquiry was to compare the rates at which both terms were used within quotation as opposed to without. Next, we made comparisons of the rate of use of specific terms and images in reporting. This process included comparing rate of use of terminology representing blood, references to other historical genocides and mention of women and children.

Genocide vs. “Genocide”



We charted the ratio of occurrences of the word genocide within quotes and without by year on the graph above. The decrease annually from 1992-1994 and dramatic decline after the Srebrenica Massacre in 1995 indicates to us that reporters are reluctant to invoke the term genocide in a given context until they are entirely certain it is appropriate. The fact that a similar pattern emerged when we carried out the procedure on the Rwanda dataset further suggests this conclusion.

Comparative Language Use

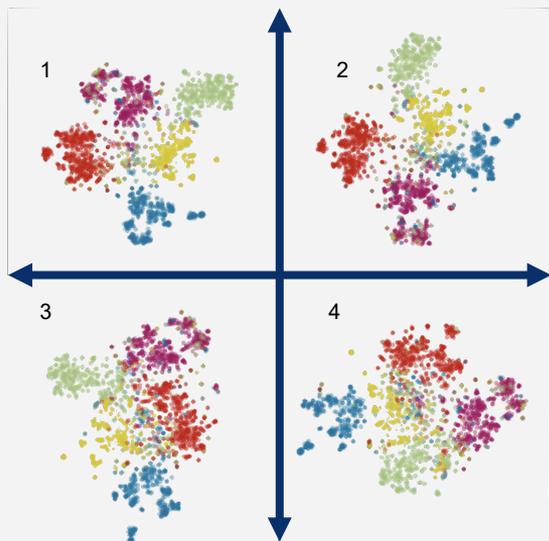


One inquiry that we made to illustrate the terminological differences between reporting on the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides was to find the proportion of articles that use the word slaughter and murder in each context. Both words describe killing, but “slaughter” carries a greater connotation of brutality and savagery than murder does. While “slaughter” exceeds “murder” in discussion of Rwanda, for Bosnia the inverse is true. This distinction may reflect cultural biases among reporters and the public.

Global Scope

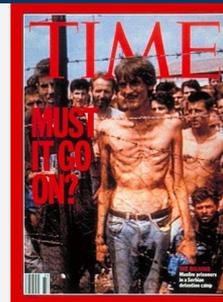
The purpose of this section was to determine if there is descriptive language unique to each instance of genocide by comparing entire corpora of newspaper articles covering multiple events. The tSNE plots show similarity between these bodies of texts. When the documents are plotted without editing the texts, each genocide has a visibly discrete cluster. As batches of proper nouns are removed from the corpora, the clusters begin to smear. However, even after the majority of these terms are removed, there is still some semblance of clustering. We hypothesize that these clusters exist because there are terms or phrases local to specific genocide events. These results are seemingly concurrent with the trends identified in the Bosnian and Rwandan study in that they indicate a significant discrepancy in verbage used by reporters between genocides.

Document-Level Analysis



- Text Corpora Differences
1. No words removed
 2. Perpetrators and Victims removed
 3. Locations removed
 4. All removed

Further Discussion



We found that in addition to there being descriptive terms specific to each genocide, there are also styles of visualization specific to each genocide. The Time Magazine cover above discussing Bosnia (left) contains an image that is comparable to those of the Holocaust and an indirect plea for mediation. The cover about Rwanda (right) portrays chaos and devastation with no plea for intervention, depicting the conflict as a lost cause. Violence in African countries is often portrayed as decades-old tribal conflict in the media, and this makes it difficult to distinguish genocides and ethnic cleansings that need foreign intervention from other conflicts.