

# The Slippery Slope Of Genocide Denial

It is well established that denial is a key step in the stages of genocide. Fighting it is essential in the never again campaign because it reflects the potential for the recurrence of genocide: when genocide deniers have an upper hand, their ideologies thrive. It means that impunity has triumphed because key lessons were not learned and therefore the threat – previous basis – for uprooting people remains.

It is rare to find reasonable people who find genocide denial as acceptable. Even most ardent defenders of freedom of speech agree that genocide denial represents an assault on the memory of victims, mocks survivors, and is a threat in the fight against the recurrence of genocide.

However, genocide denial can – and often is – reproduced by the very reasonable people. This is done unwittingly due to negligence and at times failure to see the entire set of consequences for treating the subject of genocide casually.

Even countries do this. Up until 2006 the government of Rwanda was using the term “Rwandan genocide.” Clearly, it’s intent was not to deny the genocide. However, the significance of the terminology had perhaps not been well appreciated then.

For one thing, the concept of “Rwandan genocide” wasn’t pointing at any targeted group, as the United Nations definition of genocide warrants.

Secondly, whereas Hutus and Tutsis do not fit the precise definition of ethnic groups and are indeed Rwandans per definition, the fact that the victims were “targeted as such,” meaning that the perpetrators targeted them because they perceived them to constitute an ethnic group is sufficient to establish the two groups as ethnic groups.

Third, once this reality is established then it remains unintelligible to refer to the "Rwandan genocide." This is inconsistent with the definition of genocide. A Rwandan genocide is only possible as an interstate phenomenon. Yet, it would also defeat the very essence of state control over the annihilation of its population "in part or in whole," as the definition in the Genocide Convention states.

Hence, the moment the concept genocide is deployed, then it is the genocide against the Tutsi and not the Rwandan genocide.

Similarly, this recognition locks out any other group as victims of genocide. It is equally unintelligible to refer to "moderate" in view of the genocide. It must be obvious to everyone that the term "moderate" does only one thing: it dilutes the extreme of anything.

Clearly, it is not possible to dilute one's ethnicity. As long as a Tutsi could not moderate being so in order to escape being targeted for killing, then the moderation of a Hutu on the same lines is equally not possible.

This establishes that Tutsis were targeted as a group and Hutus were targeted as individuals. Secondly, since the Tutsis could not moderate their ethnicity then they were killed for "being" as opposed to Hutus, who had something to moderate and in so doing could afford the opportunity to escape death: they were killed for "believing."

The two concepts of being and believing establish a moral difference, especially in the idea that the former is locked in for death whereas the latter is afforded the option to denounce their belief in order to be spared. This difference is captured in the statement of a seven year old victim who attempted to "moderate" his ethnicity in order to be spared, "Sinzogera kuba Umututsi," he pleaded with his killers. (If you spare me, I promise I will not be a Tutsi anymore!).

This moral difference is what separates genocide from other

crime and makes it “a crime of crimes,” as Raphael Lemkin, a key architect of the Genocide Convention put it. It is what makes genocide the only crime that’s committed against the entire humanity.

### **Belittling genocide**

Conflating genocide with other crimes – regardless of their scale and magnitude- defeats the very essence why the concept “genocide” was coined.

The precision of the term genocide is intended to isolate it from other crimes as a way of underscoring its profound brutality – due to this very inability to escape it (being).

It’s not the intention that other crimes might not have been committed during the course of genocide. However, it is to differentiate them from being crimes of genocide.

Those targeted for their beliefs were victims of a crime that is not genocide. However, this does not diminish in any way that they were courageous individuals whose conviction(s) were the exact opposite of those of perpetrators. They exhibited possibility the greatest degree of courage and humanity – equal to the degree of inhumanity of their killers – in the face of death and they did not relent on their beliefs.

### **Slippery terrain of genocide minimization**

Genocide denial and genocide minimization are two sides of the same coin. It appears that the difference is in the intent.

At any rate, in Rwanda those who were targeted for their being (Tutsis) and those targeted for believing (Hutu moderates) are remembered during the activities of genocide commemoration.

This inclusiveness is important for reconciliation. However, it also predisposes people to the kind of conflation that the term genocide meant to avoid. It’s akin to the inclusiveness (and reconciliatory value) in the concept of “Rwandan

genocide.”

This is what makes genocide denial – and minimization – a slippery terrain. Anyone can do it at any time. However, the entire range of knowledge on the concept of genocide is intended to nurture consciousness that recognizes the affront to humanity that undertaking a project to uproot a group of people from the face of the earth requires.

Most importantly, in most instances someone who perpetuates genocide denial and/or minimization will not be held legally accountable. However, it’s always an insult beneath decorum in civilized community.