

The Worrying Trend of Genocide Denialism

A slew of emboldened anti-Rwanda Western academics and journalists are involved in a sinister campaign to revise, deny, and cast doubt on one of the worst horrors of modern history, the genocide against Rwanda's Tutsis. They are aided by powerful Western governments, think tanks, universities, and media who continue to give them platforms.

Since the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994, every year Rwanda remembers victims of this harrowing evil. Yet the 25th anniversary last year on April 7 felt like no other, even for people who had observed the previous editions. President Paul Kagame led his country during this annual commemoration, known locally as Kwibuka, which means 'to remember.

"Someone once asked me why we keep burdening survivors with the responsibility for our healing. It was a painful question, but I realised the answer was obvious. Survivors are the only ones with something left to give: Their forgiveness," President Kagame said during one of the events.

At the commemoration at Kigali's Amahoro Stadium, the anguish of the survivors and their relatives was beyond description. A sporadic outburst of emotion hit the stadium with anguished victims, many of whom were tormented with memories every time speeches and acts during the solemn event touched on some of the most painful aspects of the brutal 100 days in 1994, wailing and fainting, lifted by ushers and taken away for comfort and counseling. Many suffer from the worst aspects of -post-traumatic stress disorders. It is incredible how these innocent people have managed to hold themselves together for 25 years. Some survived as infants and are now young adults. Memories are still fresh.

The sheer terror and anguish of the victims at the mere mention of a few details of what happened triggered a chain reaction across the stadium where many victims must have felt as if they were reliving the horror. How can one even begin to imagine the pain these poor souls have to go through every day? Some of the survivors were barely crawling infants 26 years ago and are now young adults. What is their life like? What is the current state of their mental health? Some were found at the sides of their parent's mutilated bodies. For many, they are the only surviving members of their entire extended and nuclear families. Many have no close relatives on this earth. They were wiped out. How do they afford to muster the courage to continue living? Where do they get the will? How do they not get consumed by the anger for those that brutally brought this misery to them, those that killed their relatives?

The miracle of Rwanda is not its economic turnaround since 1994. It is its recreation of a nation-state, a society that was able to forgive, and continue to exist, out of the ashes of 1994. The phoenix, as [I've called it before](#).

Like Hitler's 'Final Solution', the planners of the genocide against the Tutsis had wanted to incinerate a whole race of a people off the face of the earth, into oblivion. They couldn't have been more mistaken. Rwanda, in its courageous effort to rebuild not just the economy but the soul of its nation through unity and forgiveness, is something people who aren't from there will never comprehend. I am certain some of the victims themselves must have second-guessed the government's approach at first.

President Kagame's most moving commentary on his country isn't one of his many speeches as president to audiences at the UN, the AU, universities around the world, or his nationally broadcast speeches to his people, and there are numerous impressive ones of these. To me, one of the most searing words of the Rwandan president, words that left tormented by all

sorts of feelings, is the comment he gave to the American founder of 'Humans of New York,' a social media-based blog that captures random human-interest stories of ordinary people, initially on the streets of New York, but now expanded to the entire world.

The founder of the blog, Chicago native Brandon Stanton, has captured some of the most scintillating accounts of human frailty, triumph and quandary. When President Kagame sat with this blogger in October 2018, he expressed for millions of Rwandan genocide survivors what they are incapable of doing for themselves: Explaining the unexplainable. A crime with a little precedent in history, and the quandary its survivors faced and continue to face in healing. The question was, is: How do you rebuild a nation where survivors have to live side by side with those that, in an ogre of violence not seen in the country's history, brutally murdered their relatives?

Mr Kagame was at his absolute best, in dealing with the question millions have asked, and continue to ask.

"There was a huge puzzle after the genocide. How do you pursue justice when the crime is so great?" the President began.

"You can't lose one million people in one hundred days without an equal number of perpetrators. But we also can't imprison an entire nation. So forgiveness was the only path forward. Survivors were asked to forgive and forget. The death penalty was abolished. We focused our justice on the organizers of the genocide. Hundreds of thousands of perpetrators were rehabilitated and released back into their communities. These decisions were agonizing. I constantly questioned myself.

But each time I decided that Rwanda's future was more important than justice. It was a huge burden to place on the survivors. And perhaps the burden was too great. One day during a memorial service, I was approached by a survivor. He was very emotional. 'Why are you asking us to forgive?' he

asked me. 'Haven't we suffered enough? We weren't the cause of this problem. Why must we provide the solution?' These were very challenging questions. So, I paused for a long time. Then I told him: 'I'm very sorry. You are correct. I am asking too much of you. But I don't know what to ask the perpetrators. 'Sorry' won't bring back any lives. Only forgiveness can heal this nation. The burden rests with the survivors because they are the only ones with something to give.'"

Peace Vs. Justice

I have [written before](#) that one of the most difficult things to do to a people is to put them in a situation where they must make a choice between peace and justice. These two tenets of human existence should not be mutually exclusive. You can't have one without the other. In history's most famous legal and religious texts, from the American declaration of independence and the Bill of Rights, to the British Magna Carta, to the bible and the Koran, the words peace and justice almost always appear together, in the same sentence.

And yet, in less than 250 words, Mr Kagame explained, rather convincingly, why Rwanda's unique post-genocide position meant his people had to make such a huge concession for peace and harmony, and the very existence of the country.

The victims in a way continue to face multiple burdens. They have to mourn and remember their dead, and yet continue to live with those that orchestrated their deaths, because without forgiveness, the country was going to disappear. This is the quandary expressed in the anguish heard in the wails of those people in Amahoro stadium in April 2019.

Genocide denialism picks up pace

And yet, in a highly coordinated conspiracy, an emboldened group of anti-Rwanda Western academics, scholars, journalists and 'human rights activists' continue to sow doubts regarding

the events of 1994, dealing a blow to hapless victims and survivors of one of history's most gruesome crimes to another injustice.

These genocide deniers, revisionists and provocateurs have powerful allies in Western institutions, in the media, think tanks, governments, publishing industries, and universities, that continue to aid and abet their crime. They do it cleverly: through false equivalences, creating alternative facts, and hiding behind 'human rights' and democracy advocacy. They hide behind a façade of the academia to cast aspersions on Rwandan leaders. All this is part of a well-orchestrated conspiracy by Western neoliberal ideologues (which, by the way, [I have written about before](#)) to delegitimize post-genocide Rwanda which, by all accounts, has been a runaway success both in its post-conflict statecraft and development.

There is Filip Reyntjens, the University of Antwerp professor who has made it his life's mission to cast doubt on the true intent, purpose and scale of the Rwanda genocide, and who its true victims really were. Mr Reyntjens enjoys the attention he gets from creating, in his numerous books, a cause célèbre of alternative facts around the genocide against the Tutsis.

Then there is the Canadian journalist Judi Rever who in her book, 'In Praise of Blood' claims, remarkably, that the RPF and not the genocidaire regime at that time, was the one that committed the genocide in order to politically and otherwise, profit from it later!

A BBC documentary in 2014 made similar claims as Judi Rever makes in her book.

Every time a Western academic or journalist denies these victims' history, he or she is rubbing another machete through the wounds these victims, whose plight I describe above, still carry. Every revisionist, denialist, conspiracy theorist that

propagates these falsehoods is committing another crime against humanity, because he or she is denying the victims and the survivors of the genocide against Tutsis their humanity.

Like it was for the holocaust, denying the genocide against the Tutsis should be considered one of the world's despicable crimes, and should be litigated and punished as such. Because remember, it is through denialism that history's worst crimes have been repeated.

The fact that prominent Western institutions, academic and legal, continue to give platforms to genocide deniers defies logic. Why, you must ask yourself, do these printing presses, universities, think tanks continue to give audience to these purveyors of conspiracies against Rwanda and its people? We know that Holocaust denial, distortion and revisionism is, rightly, universally condemned across the civilized world. Why is it that these principles are not extended to the deniers of the genocide against the Tutsis of Rwanda? Serious questions must be asked of these academic and institutional titans who continue to give voice and platform to these conspiracy theorists.

Like [I have written before](#), Rwanda's post-genocide runaway success has hit lots of these naysayers with envy and shame. The country has nearly broken all the usual Western Afro-pessimist prognoses of Africa's fate: Nearly doubling life expectancy in just 25 years, halving the poverty rate, giving near-universal healthcare to its people, and being one of the least corrupt countries in the world, Rwanda defies these Western institutions' logic for failing to be a failed state just like their development models predict for every African country. No wonder folks at such aptly named institutions like the International Crisis Group, The 'Human Rights Watch' etc, are very disappointed!

The Judi Revers and the Filip Reyntjens of this world, if they have any souls, that is, need to realize the pain they are

causing these poor survivors of Africa's worst crime against humanity. They owe it to these victims and their children to use their privileged positions to inform the world of what befell their parents and grandparents so that this crime is never repeated anywhere, rather than parroting in vainglorious conspiracies under the guise of 'human rights' and 'democracy' advocacy.

You would think that these conspiracy theorists would listen to people like the Canadian Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, who, as Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) in 1993-1994 witnessed the genocide against the Tutsis firsthand and has written compellingly about what he saw. Gen Dallaire, in [a recent article in a Canadian newspaper](#) reviewing journalist Linda Melvern's book against these denialists, puts it succinctly:

"For survivors of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, for their descendants and the descendants of the million people massacred, for all of us who witnessed the horror and continue to live with it 25 years on, there is nothing more abhorrent than denial. And yet, morally repugnant and politically motivated revisionism of the facts continues....Truth and lies have found new buzzwords recently, such as "gaslighting," "fake news," "deflection" and "blame on both sides." Melvern clearly demonstrates how these exact strategies have been (and continue to be) critical components of political deception around the genocide against the Tutsis. She reminds us that the official stages of a genocide include the final stage: denial. And that final stage does not end. It goes on forever. Its purpose: "to destroy truth and memory."

Linda Melvern is a British investigative journalist and author whose forthcoming book "Intent to Deceive. Denying the Genocide of the Tutsis" with devastating accuracy examines the conspiracy to deny this despicable crime. Gen. Dallaire in his review of the book adds: "With cringeworthy accuracy, Melvern also exposes willful deception – on the part of

countries and individuals with everything to lose – to manipulate the next generation into revisionists and genocide deniers. These duped academics, journalists and other “experts” continue to propagate self-serving lies onto the victims, aiming to wreak damage as repugnant as that of the earliest colonialists.”

This is the mission of deniers and revisionists of the genocide against Rwanda’s Tutsis in 1994. They need to be exposed for who and what they are.