

Denial of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda

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Abstract

In a three months period from April to July 1994, more than one million Tutsi were killed in the genocide against the Tutsi. This genocide was systematically planned and executed by use of machetes, guns and other traditional tools. Today there is a strong denial of this genocide despite the tangible proof for its existence. The majority of genocide deniers claim to promote peace, human rights and true reconciliation. It is being denied in the speeches of conferences, in the media and academic debates and writings in the name of democracy, freedom of speech, academic freedom and reconciliation; which cruelly cut through the hearts of the survivors of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi and nation as whole. Denying this crime inflicts psychological torture on the victims, thereby delaying their healing or permanently impairing the process.

Key Words: Genocide, Denial, Tutsi, Hutu, Rwanda

1. Introduction

The denial of genocide occurs both during and following the perpetration of the act. In most cases, perpetrators generally attempt either to hide the genocidal actions or, if confronted about the atrocities, deny them. Existing literature on the global history of genocide has revealed that genocide denial is an integral and last stage of the genocide process (Gregory, S., 1998). Denial as the final stage of genocide is an attempt to falsify history and create a counterfeit universe for the survivors and the legacies. According to Deborah (2003), denial aims to reshape history in order to rehabilitate the perpetrators and demonize the victims. Denial conceals the horror of the crimes and exonerates those responsible for it.

Although the 1994 Tutsi genocide was already recognized officially by the United National Security Council in October 1994, it is still being denied today not only in Rwanda, African Great lakes region but also in some Western countries. In its October 3, 1994 report by the Commission of Experts of the UN Security Council, it was stated that the extermination of Tutsi minority by the former Rwandan government was done in a concerted, planned and in systematic way and affirmed that every provision laid out in Article III of the Genocide Convention has been violated since April

6, 1994 to July 15, 1994. Denial of the genocide against the Tutsi begun in April 1994 as the massacres spread. It was devised by the genocide perpetrators themselves. Twenty one years later, despite different reports by UN agencies, human rights organizations and books and articles by many journalists and scholars, this genocide is still battled by some politicians, academicians, churches and human rights organizations that have vested interest in doing so. This attitude is due to the role these individuals or institutions played prior or during genocide or to the sympathy they have for genocide architects. Their main purpose was and is to prove that there was no genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda arguing that the huge number of civilian deaths in Rwanda was due to fighting in a resumed civil war.

In the aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi, deniers of this genocide engage in very dangerous hate-filled propaganda campaign while claiming to be advocating for Human Rights and freedom of speech, True Reconciliation, Democracy and Peace. However these democratic values are not goals they are striving to achieve because such ideals cannot be achieved on bed of the used lies and falsehoods.

It should be recalled that the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi is the genocide of the twentieth century where more than one million Tutsis were killed in only three months from April to July 1994. This genocide was the fastest and most vicious genocide in human history.

2. What is genocide?

Raphael Lemkin was the first person to coin the term 'genocide' in 1944. To form the new term, Lemkin combined the Greek *genos* (race, tribe) and *cide* (Killing). Thus, Lemkin defined genocide as:

"...The 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. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, economic existence, of national groups and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group," (Totten and Parson, 2009, 3-4).

The definition has become more defined by Article II of the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group¹

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi would thus be classified as genocide by the United Nations in resolution S/RES/955 (1994) on November 8th, 1994. It indicated that genocide and other systematic, widespread and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law were committed in Rwanda. To put an end to such crimes and to take effective measures to bring about justice, the resolution established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) for the prosecution of persons responsible for perpetrating this genocide. This tribunal would contribute to ensuring that such violations were halted and effectively redressed by charging the individuals responsible for orchestrating the genocide. Nevertheless, the acts of the ICTR are not enough to prevent another genocide in Rwanda. It is in this regard that the Government of Rwanda has initiated different approaches in genocide prevention in Rwanda.

3. What is genocide denial?

Genocide denial is an attempt to deny or minimize statements of the scale and severity of an incidence of genocide. According to Gregory H. Stanton, formerly of the US State Department and the founder of Genocide Watch, he lists denial as the final stage of genocide development. He stated that:

‘Denial is the eighth stage that always follows a genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims’ (Samuel Totten, 2009, 129)

Denial as the final stage of genocide strives to reshape history in terms of demonizing the victims and rehabilitating the offender; denial kills the dignity of survivors and seeks to destroy the memory of the crime. As argues Peter Balakian (2009), “denial is the final stage of genocide, as it attempts to falsify history and create a counterfeit universe for the survivors and the legacies, and it must be studied and analyzed in order to be exposed for their ethical problems it creates”.

In general, planners and perpetrators of genocide, in principle do not end the genocide with slaughtering and killing of the victims. The final stage of genocide is its denial where deniers attempt to rewrite the past.

When deniers refer to denial of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, it is the assertion that the genocide did not occur or claim that there was double genocide. However, the genocide against the Tutsi is widely acknowledged by genocide scholars to have been one of the biggest modern genocides, as many sources point to the sheer scale of the death toll as evidence for a systematic, organized plan to eliminate the victims. Therefore, Denial of the genocide against the Tutsi is a

¹ The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9th, 1948 as General Assembly Resolution 260.

The Convention entered into force on January 12th, 1951.

crime in Rwandan Law (Law N° 84/2013 of 11/09/2013, art5). The law states that “Negation of genocide shall be any deliberate act, committed in public aiming at: 1° stating or explaining that genocide is not genocide, 2° deliberately misconstruing the facts about genocide for the purpose of misleading the public; 3° supporting a double genocide theory for Rwanda; 4° stating or explaining that genocide committed against the Tutsi was not planned.

Any person who commits an act provided for by the preceding paragraph commits an offence of negation of genocide.

4. Denying the genocide against the Tutsi in a claim of individual Human rights and freedom of speech

The denial or distortion of genocide history is an assault on truth and understanding. Comprehension and memory of the past are crucial to how we understand ourselves, our society, and our goals for the future. Intentionally denying or distorting the historical record threatens communal understanding of how to safeguard democracy and individual rights.

Some deniers of the genocide against the Tutsi claim to be promoter of human Rights. Taking an example of Leo Mugesera who was one of elites in the ruling MRND party, is alleged to have played a key role in planning and organizing the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, he would like to persuade judges that his speech of 22 November, 1992, at Kabaya during the CDR/MRND meeting falls under a universal right to a political freedom of speech. He is now trying to convince the court that his speech has nothing to do with the genocide which exterminated the Tutsi in April 1994. His arguments are full of erroneous facts and historical distortions which make his speech seem like it was grossly exaggerated for political reasons.

In addition, Mugesera and many other officials of the genocidal regime, who believe in what the government they served, did, deny the genocide against the Tutsi by shifting blame for what happened to the people who overthrew the genocidal regime. In the case of Mugesera, he confidently attempts to justify that his speech had no direct link to the genocide and however he insisted on the clash of the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana [on 6 April 1994], which Mugesera claims to be the sole cause of genocide. The claim that the downing of the former president Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was the cause of the genocide, this is wrong. According to Wizeye (2011), there are well documented facts that by 1992 and 1993, targeted extermination of the Tutsis in different parts of Rwanda like Bugesera, Kigali and Bigogwe was widespread. By 1993, Hutu militia were being trained and armed in preparation for what Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, the chief architect of the genocide, called the apocalypse. The shooting down of Habyarimana's plane was only a trigger. The continuous act of linking the 1994 genocide against Tutsi to the plane crash is a fabrication intended to deny. Genocide deniers say that the 1994 Tutsi genocide have been a natural spontaneous violent reaction of Hutus triggered by the mysterious crash of their "beloved president"! To them, the mysterious plane crash which killed both the president of Rwanda and Burundi, both Hutus, was masterminded by the Rwandan Patriotic Front. Genocide was not a spontaneous reaction as some have claimed. Because, Habyarimana, however, who was supposed to be the President of all Rwandans not just Hutu was not the only beloved leader of the century, who has been assassinated. The victims of political assassinations include the

Kennedy brothers, the Gandhi's, mother and son, both prime ministers of India, Polome the prime minister of Sweden; the attempted assassination of Pope Jean-Paul II and the US president, Ronald Reagan. The respective governments did not bother the families and relatives of the murderers because they did not have any responsibility in the killings. Only individual killers were apprehended. Africa itself has had many popular leaders murdered and this didn't result in the mass-killings of people related to the murderers. We have the mysterious death of King Charles Mutara III Rudahigwa in Rwanda , the assassination of Prince Louis Rwagasore in Burundi, the assassination of the Congolese Premier Patrice Lumumba, the mysterious plane crash of Mozambique's president Samora Machel, the assassination of Thomas Sankara, the young Pan-Africanist president of Burkina Faso, the Congolese president Mariam Ngouabi, the Nigerian president Murtala Muhamad, the Guinea Bissau president Amilcar Cabral, the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, etc.

Some other deniers in this category reject the very existence of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and relegates to the civil war. Calling the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda civil war is really belittling it and therefore a deliberate refusal to condemn the perpetrators. The Tutsi genocide was one-way killing where defenseless civilians (men, women, children, etc.) in non-combat zones were brutally and savagely slaughtered because of their ethnicity.

5. Genocide against the Tutsi, a crime recognized but denied for true reconciliation

Twenty years later after the genocide against the Tutsi, they are an increase of speeches and writings that deny it. These speeches, writings (documents) from different parts of the World are intended to write an entire new history of genocide while denying its reality. Some genocide deniers claim that there was no genocide rather; it was a civil or tribal conflict in which there were deaths on both sides (Hutu and Tutsi) while some others maintain calling the genocide against the Tutsi massacres in order to advance their lies saying that both Hutu and Tutsi were target of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Such deniers argue that there should be a joint commemoration for both Hutu and Tutsi victims so as to achieve the so-called, true reconciliation. According to them, for Rwandans to achieve reconciliation, they should first accept to deny the 1994 genocide against Tutsi saying that there was animosity between Hutus and Tutsis; Tutsis and Hutus killed each other rather than the genocide against the Tutsis. In so doing, they justify their theory of double genocide, accusing the Tutsi of engaging in a counter-genocide against Hutu.

However, it should be understood that since 1994, reports by UN experts have established that the qualification of the genocide must already be accepted with regard to Tutsi. This is different when it comes to the killings of the Hutu. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) confirmed these reports and established the existence of this genocide right from its first judgment rendered on 2 September 1998 against **Jean-Paul Akayesu**. Paragraph 18 of this judgment asserts firmly:

“It then appears clearly that the massacres committed in Rwanda in 1994 had a specific target: to exterminate Tutsi, selected specifically because they belonged to the Tutsi ethnic group and

not because they were RPF fighters (...)”. In this regard, such statement shows that transpired in Rwanda in 1994 was genocide against the Tutsi as a group”.

6. Legitimising Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda

Upon arrival in Democratic Republic of Congo after being defeated by the Rwandan Patriotic Army, former government soldiers and *Interahamwe* militias remained active in criminal acts after transforming themselves from Rwandan Liberation Army (ALIR= Armée de Libération du Rwanda), which later became the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). FDLR has been officially recognized as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union, and its members have been blacklisted. The group’s hate ideology has never for one day relented with their political beliefs similar to those from old Rwanda, over twenty one years ago.

The genocide ideology which was the main tool for the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi has been cultivated and intensified with the rank and file of these militiamen. In addition, they shield suspects of genocide in their ranks – some of them top political and military leaders – from domestic and international justice. They are advancing lies and fabricated stories on the reality of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

However, any politician, academic, lawyers and religious groups who chooses to continue supporting the FDLR, is by default a promoter of the genocide against the Tutsi. Their hate propaganda network is composed of deniers of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in the Great Lakes African Region, Europe and in America. They are talented with skills in advance of wrong story and lies on the truth behind the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. In this regards, genocide denial should be fought from African great lakes region to the whole world, being in mind that an individual, state or group of people with an intention of legitimizing FDLR should be very careful to avoid falling into trap of the lies by genocide deniers.

7. Genocide denial in African Great Lakes Region

It is an established fact that for time genocide is committed, it is always followed by its denial². With regard to the genocide against the Tutsi, since the extremist Hutus who perpetrated the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda fled in face of the advance of Rwandese Patriotic Front troops, the extremist Hutu government, supported by their allies from the region and the rest of the world, denied the systematic events and the causes or circumstances that led to the genocide. Instead, they argued that mass killings were a result of the war they (the Hutus) engaged in by fighting with the RPF.

² See the numerous publications of Professor Yves TERNON, one of today’s best knowledgeable experts in the history of genocide. Prof. Yves TERNON is a doctor and historian

In post genocide Rwanda, deniers continue to water down the facts of the genocide against the Tutsi. They have created a network and formed the group of the friends of evil who deliberately intend to falsify the history of genocide in Rwanda. One of their intentions is, of course, to discourage the survivors of the genocide as well as the government that stopped it.

In African great lakes region, deniers of the genocide against the Tutsi are also active. Their work intends to undermine its memory. They deliberately tend to write an entirely new history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi while denying its reality. Despite all, behind all deception, they actually know the truth.

Today, it seems that the deniers in the African Great Lakes region are getting support from western academics, politicians and journalists who, together, are sending hatred messages through the websites, media and hence increase poisonous messages to regional member states and their people. Among others, the American lawyer Peter Erlinder, who was Lead Defense Counsel for the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, questions the planning of the killing, and so concludes that the slaughter of the Tutsi should not be called genocide. Also the BBC aired the documentary *Rwanda, the Untold Story*, which included interviews with American researchers who claim that most of the victims may have been Hutus.

It is in this line of reasoning that genocide denial has been stopped by European countries by making it illegal. Many countries have broader laws that criminalize genocide denial. The European Union has issued a directive to combat racism and xenophobia, which makes provision for member states criminalizing Holocaust denial. In Germany, France and Scandinavian countries, among others; denial generally has legal systems that limit speech in other ways, such as banning hate speech.

So, then why not have this in Africa and, more specifically in the African Great Lakes Region? Twenty years after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the regional member states should establish mechanisms preventing and punishing the denial of the genocide.

Conclusion

The denial of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi is in a way a continuation of genocide but using different weapons. Where in 1994, it was genocide carried out by machetes, guns and other physical traditional tools, today it is speeches and writings that cruelly cut through the hearts of survivors of the 1994 genocide and the entire nation of Rwanda.

Those who deny the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda do it deliberately, with intent of destroying the truth. However, it should be recalled that denial is not something new in history of genocide, and strategies to deny it has been the same starting with Holocaust to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The African Great Lakes states member should initiate forums for combating acts of genocide denial and crimes against humanity. It is of paramount importance that combating denial of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi be the region's moral obligation.

The genocide was committed in broad daylight and often under the direct view of international humanitarian organisations and UN peacekeepers. Independent observers, including General Romeo Dallaire, who was on the ground in Rwanda before and during the carnage, have given detailed accounts of its planning and execution. In fact, Jean Kambanda, then prime minister, confessed before the UN International Tribunal for Rwanda and accepted responsibility for the genocide.

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