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Book Review: *Intent to Deceive: Denying the Genocide of the Tutsi*

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Intent to Deceive: Denying the Genocide of the Tutsi

Linda Melvern

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Linda Melvern's *Intent to Deceive: Denying the Genocide of the Tutsi*,¹ is a historical and legal enquiry into a question that documentary coverage of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda fails to address: how do we understand the continued resurgence of the denial of this genocide, despite the existence of serious studies which attest to the multi-faceted reality of its occurrence?

Melvern approaches this question through an examination of the ways the planners and coordinators of the genocide against the Tutsi strategically deployed denialism across domestic and international platforms. She illustrates the ways these individuals convinced and mobilized international actors to support a negationist agenda. To begin, Melvern draws heavily on unpublished sources from within United Nations (UN) bodies called in to manage the Rwandan crisis. Through these sources she explores the success of genocide denial propaganda in an unexpected place, the UN Security Council, a body who has the mission of ensuring global peace and security.²

In the first part of her book, Melvern zeroes in on the structural problems and negligence that led to the immobilization of the Security Council including: conflicts of interest between major powers directly concerned with the Rwanda issue (France³ and the USA⁴), the representatives' lack of knowledge of the local context, and bias towards the genocidal government. Melvern focuses in particular on a representative of the genocidal government who served on the Security Council, Ambassador Jean-Damascène Bizimana.⁵ Bizimana exploited his understanding of the state of mind of the representatives and their lack of interest in the Rwandan case (unlike the situation in the Balkans that attracted more attention) to disseminate the negationist theses of the interim government and block/delay the necessary decisions. In doing so, the government that committed the genocide in Rwanda enjoyed an undisputed influence over UN bodies until Bizimana's expulsion on July 15, 1994.⁶

¹ Linda Melvern, *Intent to Deceive: Denying the Genocide of the Tutsi* (London: Verso Books, 2020).

² *Ibid.*, 182.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

In the latter half of the book, the author is right to focus on France as a country of diffusion of genocide denial. France's denialist campaign began in 1994,⁷ a time when the European nation saw the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) as a threat to France's interests in Central Africa. Outraged that no French official condemned the massacres of the Tutsi in 1994, some NGOs such as *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF),⁸ and the French media, led⁹ a campaign to publicize the true nature of the genocide against the Tutsi. Although the French government responded to this campaign with the ostensibly "humanitarian"¹⁰ intervention Operation Turquoise,¹¹ Melvern illustrates how this was in reality a "military"¹² operation which stopped the RPF's progress and gave the interim government a territorial basis to use in political negotiations, as noted in the 2021 Duclert Report¹³ and 2021 Muse Report.¹⁴ In the western part of Rwanda, the effects of the insecurity and genocide ideology implanted by Operation Turquoise have been felt to this day. France remains home to many individuals who participated in the planning of the genocide who live there without fear of being surrendered to Rwanda and prosecuted. Moreover, in France the denial of the genocide of the Tutsi has taken on an official character, maintained by French government and military officials.

Overall, *Intent to Deceive* offers a significant contribution to the literature on the process that led to the rise of current genocide denial. To do this, the book identifies the main spaces in which denialism develops, the actors and their methods, the content of their arguments, and their objectives. Specifically, the book offers insights into the tools of denialism and well-analyzed examples of how international bodies designed to combat genocide and mass violence perpetuated genocide denial themselves. For example, the book details the trial that French Judge Jean-Louis Bruguière¹⁵ brought against senior RPF officials in 2006. The methods used are mainly the manipulation of witnesses (former soldiers of the RPA), the use of false information or non-credible versions of events (such as that of the attack against the presidential plane that would have been committed by the RPF), and the use of partial eyewitness victims. A further example is seen in Judge Theodor Meron,¹⁶ who took over the leadership of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (MICT), which replaced the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 2012. The judge released a dozen genocidaires before the end of their sentence (for example, Ferdinand Nahimana),¹⁷ a decision that surprised and shocked the Rwandan government, the survivors of the genocide, and all those who fight genocide denial.

⁷ Laurence Binet et al., "Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi 1994," *MSF Speaking Out* (Médecins Sans Frontières, September 2003), accessed January 15, 2022, https://www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/2019-04/MSF%20Speaking%20Out%20Rwandan%20Tutsi%20Genocide%201994_0.pdf.

⁸ Jean-Hervé Bradol and Marc Le Pape, *Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings: The Rwandan Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

⁹ Jean-Hervé Bradol and Marc Le Pape, *Génocide et crimes de masse. L'expérience rwandaise de MSF (1982–1997)* (Paris: CNRS, 2017), 74–82.

¹⁰ Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2003).

¹¹ "Turquoise: Military Operation to the Rescue of the Genocidal Government and its Army," *Rwanda Broadcasting Agency* (RBA), June 22, 2020, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.rba.co.rw/post/Turquoise-Military-operation-to-the-rescue-of-the-genocidal-government-and-its-army>.

¹² Melvern, *Intent to Deceive*, 125. First mentioned in note 1.

¹³ Cecilia Pechmeze, "The Duclert Report and France's Responsibility in the Genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda," *Opinio Juris*, June 23, 2021, accessed January 15, 2022, <http://opiniojuris.org/2021/06/23/the-duclert-report-and-frances-responsibility-in-the-genocide-of-tutsis-in-rwanda/>.

¹⁴ Levy Firestone Muse LLP., *A Foreseeable Genocide: The Role of the French Government in Connection with the Genocide Against the Tutsi in Rwanda*, April 19, 2021, accessed on January 15, 2022, https://www.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/gov_user_upload/2021.04.19_MUSE_REPORT.pdf.

¹⁵ Melvern, *Intent to Deceive*, 93–95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 197–198.

¹⁷ *Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana*, MICT-13-37-ES.1, 07-03-2016 (18-1/521bis), February 15, 2016, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://ucr.irmct.org/LegalRef/CMSDocStore/Public/English/Submission/NotIndexable/MICT-13-37/MSC9049R0000513020.pdf>.

Mirroring the total indifference the UN Security Council held with regard to the genocide against the Tutsi, Judge Meron furthered an official display of contempt for the suffering of the victims and an underestimation of the gravity of the crime of genocide.¹⁸

Melvern's observations concerning the development of the arguments of genocide denial and their authors, constitute a key contribution of this book to the literature on this theme. The author explores the defense strategy developed by genocide perpetrators in refugee camps with their lawyers and foreign experts, which centered on what she terms the "Hutu cause,"¹⁹ a story of an inter-ethnic war unleashed by the RPF. The other themes of this line of defense include the denial of the planning of the genocide against the Tutsi committed by the Hutu, the excesses committed by the "two sides"²⁰ (Rwandan Armed Forces and RPF), and the notion of "double genocide."²¹ This latter point was ostensibly supported in the Robert Gersony report,²² which concluded that the RPF systematically killed many Hutu (between 25,000 and 40,000 people). However, Melvern advances the debate on this subject by using sources from the secret services of France and the United States who doubted the credibility of the conclusions of the Gersony Report, as well as the report of the counter-expertise commission decided by the UN. Despite the corrections and the criticisms made to the Gersony report, the book highlights how surprising it is that the report has been cited extensively by various authors, especially at the ICTR by the defense under the pretext of promoting a so-called "balanced"²³ justice system that judges all parties to the conflict, not only the Hutu parties. In reality, the aim is to create confusion between the crime of genocide and the other crimes that the RPF allegedly committed.

Intent to Deceive is a well-researched contribution to studies of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. However, there are some areas of inquiry that the book overlooks that suggest further areas of study and exploration. First, the research of this book is on a general international level. No link is established with genocide denial at the local level, the one developed by domestic actors carrying out the genocide. However, we know that denialism began at the same time as the massacres locally. For example, on April 22, 1994, Prime Minister Jean Kambanda said on Rwandan Radio that "people were killing each other,"²⁴ giving the illusion that the killings were two-sided. Given this background, we can see that there are important links between local, regional, and international levels that merits further research and examination.

Second, Melvern could have done more to emphasize the failure of the ICTR to prove that the genocide was planned during the trial of a key genocidaire, Col. Théoneste Bagosora. In that trial,²⁵ the judges found that there was not sufficient evidence to support the charge that the genocide was premeditated. In a ruling that disappointed many, the judges determined that although some military or civilians may have had the intention to commit genocide, there was not credible evidence to support a conspiracy. The question that remains is why testimonies which evidenced the existence of a plan supported by Bagosora (given by Roméo Dallaire,²⁶

¹⁸ Melvern, *Intent to Deceive*, 207.

¹⁹ Thierry Cruvellier and Chari Voss, *Court of Remorse: Inside the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 34.

²⁰ Melvern, *Intent to Deceive*, 165.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²² Human Rights Watch, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front," accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno15-8-03.htm>.

²³ Melvern, *Intent to Deceive*, 194.

²⁴ *Prosecutor v. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko*, Case No.: ICTR-98-42-T, The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, February 27, 2005, <https://unictr.irmct.org/en/cases/ictr-98-42>.

²⁵ *Prosecutor v. Théoneste Bagosora*, Case No. ICTR-98-41-T, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, December 18, 2008, <https://unictr.irmct.org/en/cases/ictr-98-41>.

²⁶ United Nations, "Former UN Force Commander Testifies at Rwanda Genocide Trial," *UN News*, January 20, 2004, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2004/01/91492-former-un-force-commander-testifies-rwanda-genocide-trial>.

Jean Kambanda,²⁷ and others) were not considered. The outcome of Bagosora's planning trial encouraged many genocide deniers to revisit the history of the genocide against the Tutsi that turns victims into executioners and vice versa. Given the significance of this trial on processes of denialism, Melvern could have given it more attention.

Despite these minor remarks, there is a need to highlight the importance of Melvern's incisive critiques of genocide denialism. Moreover, it needs be noted that the evidence which Melvern puts forth has been ignored by many scholars. It could even be said that there is currently a stream of ideas and a group of authors (André Guichaoua, René Lemarchand, Filip Reyntjens,²⁸ Helen C. Epstein,²⁹ and others) who systematically refute the historical truths that Melvern explores. This is a deplorable situation which benefits denialists who will continue to have opportunities to spread their narratives without being contradicted by substantive research. This book has the merit of pointing out this danger and providing the public with high-quality information that meaningfully contributes to and improves our knowledge of the genocide against the Tutsi. Building upon and disseminating such knowledge is the only way to combat denialism.

²⁷ *Prosecutor v. Jean Kambanda*, Case No.: ICTR 97-23-S, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, December, September 8, 1998.

²⁸ André Guichaoua, *Rwanda: de la guerre au génocide, Les politiques criminelles au Rwanda (1990–1994)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010); Filip Reyntjens, *Le génocide des Tutsi au Rwanda* (Paris: Que Sais-Je, 2017); René Lemarchand, "Which genocide? Whose genocide?," *African Studies Review* 41, no. 1, 3–16.

²⁹ Helen C. Epstein, "America's Secret Role in the Rwandan Genocide," *Guardian*, September 12, 2017, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/sep/12/americas-secret-role-in-the-rwandan-genocide>.