



## **Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide...and Why It Matters** By Barbara Coloroso

*It is a short walk* from bullying to hate crimes to genocide—genocide is the most extreme form of bullying—a far too common *system* of behaviours that is learned in childhood and rooted in *contempt* for another human being who has been deemed by the bully and his or her accomplices, to be worthless, inferior, and undeserving of respect.

- **Genocide** is not an unimaginable horror. Every genocide throughout human history has been thoroughly imagined, meticulously planned, and brutally executed. The pain of a “moral world turned on its head” does not begin with the machete cuts of the Hutu Power, the gas chambers of the Nazis, the death marches of the Young Turks.
- The tragedy of genocide has many rehearsals that weaken moral inhibitions against violence, publicity that spreads bigotry and intolerance, a backdrop that establishes the climate, ominous sounds that signal the beginning and the end, scripts that heighten the tension and fuel the contempt, six scenes that seal the victims’ fate, a slew of character actors, and an international audience that either fails to hinder or actually helps to energize the performance of extraordinary evil by ordinary people.

***A crime without a name:*** Polish Jewish scholar, author, and lawyer Raphaël Lemkin coined the term *genocide* in 1943 in his book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. That book was a continuation of Lemkin’s 1933 Madrid Proposal. Lemkin argued that if it could happen in the Ottoman Empire it could happen anywhere. It happened once; it can happen again. Genocide would have to be codified as an international crime that could be punished anywhere. Up to that point, no international convention existed to cover crimes perpetrated by a state (or party in power) against its own people.

- On December 9, 1948 Resolution 260 (III) A: The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the UN General Assembly. The Convention entered into force on January 12, 1951. In 1945, the Allies convened the International Military Tribunal at Nürnberg. None of the Nazi war criminals were found guilty of genocide.
- September 2, 1998 at the UN Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, Judge Laity Kama pronounced the first ever verdict in a UN Tribunal for the crime of genocide. “The accused, Jean-Paul Akayesu, you are declared guilty of genocide.” (In late January of 1997, at a genocide trial conducted in Rwanda, the highest ranking *genocidaire* in Rwandan custody, Froduald Karamira, was convicted of genocide and sentenced to death.)

***Anatomy of Extraordinary Evil:*** Each genocide has its own story line, setting, and characters, but all have a common theme, common formula, and tragic outcome. Each have its unique aspects, and yet there are startling parallels and connecting threads from each one of them to the others.

***Gorilla in Our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events*** (1999 research project conducted by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris.) War and Genocide are almost always connected. It is in the interests of any genocidal regime to create a context that distracts attention from the true nature of its goals and behaviors, and the rhetoric of war and conflict lends itself to this effort. Eliminationist campaigns are the unexpected objects to which “outsiders” aren’t paying attention.

***Conflict vs. Bullying.*** In peacekeeping one must remain neutral, impartial, and act with the consent of both parties. In the genocide of the Tutsi, Roméo Dallaire had no peace to keep; the gorilla was not just pounding its chest, it was leaving in its wake a trail of blood; and the world stood by, stricken by inattentional blindness.

- The moral imperative for intervention trumps the peacekeeping mandate—a mandate that is totally inappropriate and counterproductive in the face of such a beast. Trying to stop a genocide by using tools that are effective in stopping armed conflicts is futile, naïve, and dangerous.
- The “gorilla in our midst” is not party to any form of conflict resolution—be it negotiation, truce, disarmament, or reason. Both genocide’s inception and its solution lie elsewhere. Armed conflict can be *resolved* through some form of conflict resolution – often with third party participation or intervention. Genocide must be *stopped* by a third party, perpetrators brought to justice, reparation made, and the community healed through restorative justice. If healing is not yet possible, people must be able to coexist in community.

***Rewriting the script:*** Can we create new roles, change the plot, reset the stage, and scrap the tragic ending? The actors can’t do it alone. As an international community, we must get out of our seats—we can’t afford to be passive, inattentive, bored, alarmed, or merely deeply saddened. We can’t walk out and close the show, and send it somewhere else. We can’t merely banish the bullies and mourn those targeted for extermination.

- The roles are what must be abandoned—and the international community (on a global and local scale) must become an active participant in a total rewrite. Those who can guide us are the ones who in the face of other genocides were witnesses, resisters, and defenders, those who jumped onto the stage as the scripts were being written and sounded the alarm we refused to hear; the ones who refused to abandon those who were targeted; those who defied the *genocidaires*; and those who survived genocide and denied the *genocidaires* their victory.

Excerpts from *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide...and Why It Matters*

Barbara Coloroso, 2007

Illustrations Joseph Coloroso, 2007

