Rwanda’s securitisation of genocide denial: A political mechanism for power or to combat ontological insecurity?

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the concept of genocide denial as a security threat within the case study of Rwanda. Rwanda experienced the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi when an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were butchered by extremists within a one-hundred-day period. Since the ending the genocide the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) continues to dominate the post-genocide nation’s political sphere. The remnants of genocide perpetrators initiated Rwanda to militarily and politically intervene in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Since the end of the Second Congo War in 2002, Rwanda’s security interests shifted from fearing the destruction of the state to ontological insecurities founded on a threat of genocide ideology. This research examines whether Rwandan President Paul Kagame and the RPF mobilise genocide denial through a securitisation framework as a method to legitimise its control over the nation’s political institutions and to deflect criticism. However, by examining the deficits within this discourse, it becomes possible to understand how Rwandans perceive genocide denial as part of a large threat that is a repetition of the genocide.

KEYWORDS
Securitisation; Rwanda; genocide; denial; revisionism; ontological security

Introduction

On the 6th April 1994, Rwanda plunged into a horrific genocide that resulted in the deaths of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus.¹ Despite an international presence in the form of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), the security force was unable to stop the genocidal killings.² Genocide perpetrators such as the Interahamwe, loosely translated as ‘those who fight together’, utilised decades of anti-Tutsi propaganda and ethnic hatred to justify using machetes, clubs and other crude weapons to commit genocide against their fellow Tutsi neighbours. The only military force existing within Rwanda to stop the massacres were the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and its military wing, the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA). Putting an end to the massacres, was the mostly Tutsi rebel force under the leadership of General Paul Kagame by invading and pushing the genocide forces into neighbouring countries, particularly the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).³ During the bloody First (1996–1997) and Second (1998–2003), military conflicts with Zaire and later the DRC were justified by the Rwandan government as continuing to combat genocide perpetrators. While the conflicts did not entirely wipe out these antagonising forces,
now known as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), military operations such as Umoja Wetu as well as by recent Congolese military forces, the Forces Armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) have concentrated on combating these forces, which subsequently resulted in its reduced security threat to Rwanda.

Since the end of the Second Congo War in 2002, Rwanda’s attention to security issues significantly shifted. No longer believing in the necessity to promote state survival, such as is found within Neoclassical Realist thought, the declared security threat now is combating ontological insecurities from the growing practice of minimalization and outright denial of the 1994 genocide by those either involved or sympathetic to the past Hutu extremist Juvénal Habyarimana regime (1973–1994). The perception held by many within the current government’s elite and society is how genocide denial and the promotion of genocide beliefs are the new threats to Rwandan society. However, Rwanda’s calls to combat genocide denial and belief could be perceived as the government’s attempt to securitise a non-threat in order to secure continued political power as the RPF continues to govern Rwanda. This article examines whether Rwanda’s government under the political domination of the RPF has securitised genocide denial or whether it should be understood as combatting ontological insecurity. The article will first provide context to Rwanda’s historical genocide experience and how it impacts Rwandan state security. Then the research reviews existing research of securitisation prior to applying it onto the case study of Rwanda. After establishing the Copenhagen School’s theoretical framework, the research will locate genocide denial within the securitisation theory, for it could be argued that the Rwandan government has securitised genocide denial to promote its political power and social reformation of ethnic identity. The final section utilises ontological security concepts to illustrate the deficits in applying the securitisation model in the case study of Rwanda and genocide denial.

**Research Methodology**

This research relies heavily on qualitative research that was conducted during multiple fieldwork periods between 2012 and 2020. Alongside the traditional review of existing scholarly material, the author used existing networks within the Rwandan government and other civil society organisations for this article while conducting research on Rwandan foreign policy. This engagement in long term research is the primary reason for why there are some year-long time gaps between interviews. A total of fifty informants were interviewed comprising actors working either as policy makers or enforces within various government ministries and institutions for this particular research on securitisation of genocide denial. In particular, the research heavily relies on semi-structure interviews conducted with Rwandan Defence Force officials, whose responsibility is to promote national security, who at the time of collecting the research were in high positions of military political influence in government security policies. Additionally, twenty interviews with civil society members within the genocide survivor’s community are used. These interviews typically lasted an hour and occurred within the Rwandan cities of Kigali, Musanze and Gisenyi. Questions focused on the role of genocide denial within Rwandan society, concepts of human security as part of national post-genocide identity and tangible as well as intangible perceived threats to Rwanda. Interpretivism found within constructivism was used to better understand the social meanings found within the collected data from semi-structured interviews. In addition, triangulation methods were used to verify if informants’ comments followed similarly to comments from other interviews. Informants had the option for their comments and
opinions to be identified with themselves or to be cited as an ‘unnamed’ informant. Analysing collected fieldwork data was then reviewed under a Constructivist theoretical framework to better uncover whether the Rwandan government’s engagement against genocide denial falls within the spectrum found in securitisation.

Genocide and denial

Origins of the genocide

Between the night of 6th April until 19th July 1994, the Genocide against the Tutsi, more commonly known as the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, inflicted devastation to Rwanda’s Tutsi population including non-extremists Hutus. Ethnic divisions between the majority Hutu (85% of the total population) and minority Tutsi (14% of the total population) existed since German and Belgium colonisation. However, since independence in 1962, ideology promoting Hutu ethnic supremacy became the institutional norm with Tutsis often facing pogroms and forced emigration to neighbouring states. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, several factors led to heightened extremism by the Hutu power elites under the auspices of former Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana. International pressure by France to open Rwanda’s political space hindered Habyarimana’s dominance of the political landscape. This allowed Hutu extremists to gain societal footholds by promoting its genocide ideology, which culminated in April 1994. Economic stagnation and decline of export revenue from tea and coffee fostered great economic hardships that trickled down to impact Rwandan society with higher unemployment rates and misplaced anger that Hutu extremists used against Tutsis. The last pressure facing the Habyarimana regime was the emergence of the Rwandan diaspora signalling for their return into Rwanda.

One of the primary organised diasporic groups was the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU), founded in 1987, but later changed its name to the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). During it early incarnation, RANU crafted the Eight-Point Programme as its primary ideology of the movement. At its core was the ‘one Rwanda’ ideology to promote a singular national ethnic identity, which included all Rwandans. This significantly challenged the status quo of Rwandan society by promoting a non-tri-ethnic identity which threatened Hutu extremists. With the Rwandan Civil War (1990–1994) between the Habyarimana regime against the RPF, security threats posed by the rebels fostered greater instability in Rwanda that was seized by the Hutu extremists to promote the necessity for a genocide against the local Tutsi population. Within a one-hundred-day period, Hutu extremists organised the Interahamwe and butchered Tutsis. Despite UNAMIR’s presence and a tentative peace treaty, the 1993 Arusha Accords, the massacres only ended when the RPF completed a military invasion of Rwanda. While the genocidal killings officially ended on 21st August 1994, after the removal of French military forces operating in southwest Rwanda under a United Nations mandate known as Opération Turquoise, conflict between the RPF and genocide forces continued, and it resulted in the First Congo War (1996–1997) and the following Second Congo War (1998–2003). Former genocide perpetrators and collaborators who fled Rwanda at the end of the genocide into neighbouring countries were considered threats to the survival of the post-genocide Rwandan government. After the First Congo War, the former genocide forces organised and formed the FDLR. Its beliefs held the necessity of armed resistance against the new RPF-dominated Rwandan government and to disrupt the RPF’s attempt to foster a new social order without ethnic divisions. Since the Second Congo War, the military
The consequences of the genocide

Since the end of the military campaigns in the DRC in 2002, Rwandan leaders have transitioned state security concerns away from tangible threats to focus attention on ontological insecurities. Many within the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) expressed how the FDLR is no longer a tangible military threat to the survival of the state. Alongside the fostering of new social norms and identity and promoting the ‘one Rwanda’ ethnicity, security issues began to transition away from traditional state threats towards ontological insecurities issues such as genocide denial. Broadly defined for this research, ontological security theory within international politics provides insights of how individual or state actors are willing to compromise physical security or interests to promote security within an identity. Following the trauma of the genocide, Rwandan social development has focused on the ‘one Rwanda’ belief as a way to tackle ontological insecurity posed by former genocide perpetrators and their beliefs. The ideology of ethnic divisionism, alongside genocide denial, from extremists groups, including the FDLR, became the primary ontological insecurity threat against Rwanda’s development in terms of economic achievement and its move away from ethnic divisions.

Within Rwanda’s primary anti-genocide government agency, the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide’s (CNLG), concern of genocide denial is of paramount importance. Working within the agency between 2013–2014, officials were worried that genocide denial was the greatest threat posed against Rwanda, as it not only revises historical narratives of the genocide but also promotes ethnic divisionism. CNLG was established by Organic Law N° 09/2007 with the express intent to preserve the memory of the genocide and combat genocide denial and revisionism. Further Organic laws such as Organic Law N°18/2008, continues to promote government responsibility to combat genocide denial. CNLG’s definition of genocide denial stemmed from Gregory Stanton’s The Eight States of Genocide, which categorises denial as the final stage orchestrated by genocide perpetrators and their allies. Stanton alongside Bartrop are prevalent within the public description of the responsibilities and actions taken forward by the CNLG. As one leader within the CNLG commented, ‘They [genocide perpetrators and denialists] deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims.’ The quote provides context of how Rwandan officials within CNLG use similar language as Stanton’s description of genocide denial. Others were more explicit of the national role in combating genocide denial. Multiple experiences of the author illustrated the prevalence of Stanton’s description and how, as described later in this article, the perceived threat of genocide denial falls within the understandings of ontological insecurity. However, the vagueness of what constitutes genocide denial allows for criticism of the government or of historical narratives as being part of the Rwandan government securitising genocide denial.

Conceptualisation of securitisation by the ‘Copenhagen School’

The end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union along with their respective allies resulted in the traditional understandings of international relations and
security studies being challenged. The various incarnations of Realism, Liberalism and Dependency theories could not accurately describe how the Soviet Union, a superpower within the bipolar international realm, seemingly terminated. Constructivism, within the context of international relations theory, established itself to provide a new understanding of the international system through the works of Wendt, Finnemore, Newman, Adler, and other. The rise of Constructivism as a theoretical framework influenced beyond the realm of international relations theory to include understanding the security issues. Within the early 1990s, the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) began to challenge Realist understanding of how and why something was considered a security concern for a state. Buzan, Wæver and Wilde would lead what is often referred to as the Copenhagen School through numerous journal articles and the book, Security: A New Framework for Analysis.

These publications laid a new method for researchers to better understand the dynamics within security issues facing states that went beyond existing frameworks. Rather than security being an issue of the state in terms of traditional threats against either the government, territory and society, the Copenhagen School expanded security issues to include threats against: military, environmental, economic, societal and political interests. By expanding who the actors are and what constitutes a security threat, the Copenhagen School allows for greater systematic, comparative and coherent analysis of case studies. Dynamics within each category are fostered through the interaction of various actors. There are four predominant components found and all hold important roles in how an issue is securitised: (1) the securitising actor or agent; (2) the existential threat; (3) the referent object; and finally, the (4) the targeted audience.

Securitising actors and/or agents typically compose of politicians, bureaucrats, lobbyist, and civil society leaders who are responsible for choosing the existential threat and convincing the general population, i.e. audience, to believe that it is a serious security threat against a referent object. The referent object, whether a population such as Huysmans' discussion of immigration, or a non-human topic such as climate change, must be perceived as threatened by the existential threat. The audience—whether the national population or some other large group providing legitimacy or being ruled by the securitising actor or agent—must accept that the referent object is indeed threaten by the existential threat through successful speech acts by the securitising actor. The speech act is critical within establishing the existential threat against the referent object to the audience. The securitising actor or agent typically follows structures derived from conflict, war or some form of traumatic experience that spurs fears of survival and urgency of the threat that requires some sort of response, typically militarily. In the Romaniuk and Webb’s examination of the War on Terrorism, they discuss how former U.S. President George W Bush engaged the American population to support the War on Terrorism after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, despite it being vaguely defined as who was in fact the security threat to the United States.

How securitisation differs from more traditional understandings of security rests within the range of security threats can be rather than Realist notions of survival or security of the nation being from opposing nations and/or militaries. The elevation of the possible threat from the political to the securitised realm can only exist if it is deemed to be either too important for regular political manoeuvres or if the existing political sphere is unable to properly combat the threat. An example is of Crick’s description of the War on Drugs or Romaniuk’s and Webb’s description of the use of drones within the War on Terrorism. The movement of an object from that of a non-politicised issue to that of securitised one can be placed
within a spectrum with the addition of a politicised understanding of government actions. If the securitising actor is successful in convincing the audience of the intersubjective security threat, it can foster measures that help empower and legitimise greater military and security agencies.

While the Copenhagen School is often credited for fostering a greater understanding of non-traditional methods to understand security issues and politics, it does have its critics. One criticism is the description of the language between the general audience and the securitising actor. Stritzel critiqued how the Copenhagen School underdeveloped its explanation of the speech act. Fundamentally, the speech act between the actor responsible for securitising the object and the audience is fundamentally important, for without the audience’s acceptance of the securitised object, the issue will remain either non-politicised, or politicised. Balzacq also notes the lack of emphasis by the Copenhagen School on the speech act despite it being a critical component within the theory. Hansen writes how the theory does not incorporate the non-verbal acts such as the use of silence by political leaders. Wilkinson builds upon this criticism of how securitisation focuses too heavily on verbal speech rather than other means of expression that a securitising actor or agent might use. Beyond critiques of the speech act, others such as McDonald’s question the extent to which securitisation seemingly dismisses the importance of security issues within the ‘normal’ political realm by seemingly ignoring how it is contested. Within a methodological focus, there is the problem of selection and confirmation biases of particular case studies.

Another criticism found within the Copenhagen School is the focus on the Global North or more commonly referred to as the ‘West’ in case studies. Typically, securitisation focuses on understanding the security processes within the Global North, which Buzan and Wæver do attest for in their examination of macrosecuritisation. Some critics discuss this problem, such as Wilkinson who criticises how securitisation often falls within the ‘Westphalian strait-jacket’ of classification of political institutions. However, other researchers do not just see the absence of the Global South as a case of neglect and structural margination. Others such as Howell and Richter-Montpetit describe securitisation’s theoretical, conceptual and methodological deficits as inherently racist rather than simply Eurocentrism. While their research does discuss the absence of Africa within the theory, it does not sufficiently aid in this research as its focus is more to attack the creators of securitisation of racism with selective readings from Buzan and Wæver’s 2003 book, Regions and Powers. The book is not explicitly attempting to develop the already established foundations of securitisation theory, it is nevertheless used to describe how the creation of securitisation attempts to promote racist attitudes of Africans. Buzan and Wæver responded harshly with the accusations of poor research and analytical quality by Howell and Richter-Montpetit. This research does not accuse the theory as racist, but instead it attempts to use securitisation as a theoretical framework to understand the case study of Rwanda’s engagement against genocide denial. Despite these problems with the Copenhagen School, securitisation can provide a valuable analytical and conceptual framework to better understand non-traditional security concerns and how states respond to them.

**Invoking securitisation to combat genocide denial**

The last section established the theoretical framework of securitisation, which is applied in this section on genocide denial and revisionism. Adopting the Copenhagen School’s four primary components for this case study on genocide denial can provide insights into Rwanda’s
political dynamics. The securitising actor is the Rwandan government, more specifically the RPF, as it holds the most political, economic and military power. While this research previously discussed the role of CNLG in terms with genocide denial, applying a broader examination of how Rwandan government elites, i.e. the securitising actors, position genocide denial as an existential threat to not only Tutsis, but also the new social identity of ‘Rwandan’. To provide context to the securitising actor, the RPF has governed Rwanda in what many consider as an authoritarian dictatorship.61 Human rights groups criticise the RPF for enacting policies which are meant to crack down on genocide denial and divisionism but instead violates Rwandans’ human rights.62 Within Rwanda’s political realm is the RPF’s domination of nearly all branches and levels of government. The RPF holds both chambers of the Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, composes a majority within the Supreme Court, and holds the Presidency under Paul Kagame. While there are two oppositional parties, the Social Party Imberakuri under the leadership of Christine Mukabunani63 and the Democratic Green Party under the leadership of Frank Habineza,64 they hold insignificant political power or influence. President Kagame’s leadership within the RPF is unquestioned despite a generational divide between early RPF members, who experienced the formation of the Eight Points and fought during the genocide and the new generation of post-genocide members. Nevertheless, it is important to note how generalisation of the Rwandan government misrepresents power dynamics within the political institution. Critics would dismiss the notion that the government is more than just the RPF under President Kagame.65

In part, due to its political domination of the government, the RPF has been able to implant its vision for development. Its economic policies and utilisation of foreign aid is often praised as an example for other developing nations.66 Stemming from its historical roots and trauma related to the genocide,67 the RPF institutionalised its social beliefs, specifically instituting a unified ethnic identity over that of the previous Hutu, Tutsi and Twa ethnicities. The internal political power structures within Rwanda allows for the RPF’s commitment to formulate new social norms of a unified ethnic identity which is threatened, alongside genocide survivors, by genocide denial and revisionism. In promoting this social policy, the government, the securitising actor, faces great uncertainty from beliefs, such as those held by former Hutu extremists, who wish to continue ethnic divisionism and even ethnic cleaning such as in 1994 by disrupting the history of the genocide itself. By disrupting historical truths of the genocide, such as Tutsis being the targeted victims and the RPF ending the massacres, genocide deniers create space to question the RPF’s legitimacy to rule over the state. The shifting of historical narratives of the genocide follows closely with Subotić’s research of how eastern European nations are changing historical narratives and focus away from Jewish Holocaust victims to fit within current political accounts that are often against Communist Soviet rule. Perhaps even more significant, genocide denial and revision attempt to invalidate the RPF’s promotion of new societal norms of a unified ethnic identity by justifying continued Hutu ethnic supremacy by minimising its disastrous affects in 1994. So, while the referent object might be perceived as Tutsis or Tutsi genocide survivors needing protection, it instead is the new social identity being fostered by the RPF. It is here that genocide denial closely impacts the government as any form of genocide denial questions the reasons for which the RPF holds political power. Thus, to remain in power, the primary securitising actor is not the Rwandan government per se but the RPF who are threatened the most by genocide denial and revisionism. The Rwandan government’s organic laws combating genocide denial and revisionism are comparable as an extraordinary means in the name of security similar to the creation of the 2001 Patriot Act shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks.68
Scholars such as Reyntjens, Thomson, Longman, and Waldorf examine how the RPF have utilise historical narratives as the victors of the Rwandan Civil War (1990–1994) and liberators of the 1994 genocide to continue to secure political power. Questioning the RPF’s involvement in combating the genocide or its promotion of a new social order are often reduced to genocide denial or revisionism of the nation’s history. They even question the legality that is often associated with the RPF’s criminalisation of genocide denial in Organic Law N°18/2008 being a non-verbal speech act. This research argues that the Organic Law N°18/2008 and the criminalisation of genocide denial and revisionism is an extraordinary means to curtail certain speech based on historical descriptions of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Criminalisation is often within procedures by the securitising actor to set up institutional guidelines in combating the existential threat. Found in these researchers’ analysis are the threads that this research will expand on to illustrate how the Rwandan government securitises genocide denial. During the author’s prior research experience, non-Rwandan researchers were often perceived with hesitation by Rwandans, as concerns of whether they would be critics of the RPF, and thus, seen as possibly trying to disrupt the social order established by the government.

The last component in applying genocide denial and revisionism within the securitisation framework is defining the audience. Perhaps most challenging is identifying whether the audience is truly accepting the securitising of genocide denial, as there is an overlap between the referent object, which are the new ethnic social norms within the Rwandan population. Ideally, the audience are Rwandans who need to be persuaded that genocide denial can harm the referent object of not only Tutsis but also those who have accepted the RPF’s beliefs of a unified ethnic identity. By examining the speech acts between the securitising actor of the Rwandan government with Rwandans, it can be possible to clarify who exactly is the audience, and in fact whether they are the referent object.

The responsibility of the speech act is for the securitising actor, the Rwandan government, to convince the audience of the existential threat, defined within Stanton’s description of the final process of genocide, denial and revisionism as well as ethnic unity. To engage the speech act, the Rwandan government officials rely on forms of traditional and new social media. One of Rwanda’s primary English newspaper, The New Times, a quasi-independent news source often touted by the Rwandan government, as it provides favourable news coverage and analysis, is often a conduit for the speech act. Multiple news and editorial articles within the newspaper provide the space for the securitising actor to engage in speech acts directed towards Rwandans on the significant danger of genocide denial to the safety and progress of the nation. A case study presented here is of the response by the Rwandan government against the 2014 BBC documentary, Rwanda, the Untold Story. As Reyntjens writes, the Rwandan government used for The New Times through the publication of articles and editorials accusing the BBC of genocide denial and threatening the referent object, which was Rwanda’s post-genocide social development. In an article heavily quoting President Kagame’s response to the documentary, we can better see the securitisation of genocide denial. Specially, the speech act directed towards the audience, Rwandans, of how genocide denial, the existential threat, impacts the referent object of Rwanda’s new ethnic identity. Using The New Times for the speech act, President Kagame spoke to Rwandans, the audience, in a televised Parliamentary session on how the documentary was part of a larger existential threat against Rwanda. Illustrating the securitisation of genocide denial in this case study we can read President Kagame’s quotes.
They [BBC and genocide denial] chose to tarnish Rwandans, to dehumanise them, and deny the very genocide they reported on.

Here we see President Kagame illustrating the relationship between the BBC documentary with genocide denial. It is not described as tarnishing the RPF but rather against Rwandans themselves. It is important to note here how it illustrates the referential object is not the Tutsis but rather ‘Rwandans’ following within the constructs of the new social ethnic norms of a unified ethnic identity.

‘They [the BBC] selected all those who have been discredited for very obvious reasons [promoting genocide denial and revisionism] to be the ones to tell the story that should be believed about all of us.

Here, President Kagame describes how the existential threat poses a threat to the memory of the genocide. It is interesting to note that he is once again not referring to the Tutsis but a generalised audience composing of Rwandans. Additionally, the ‘story’ which President Kagame accuses of being revised includes the RPF’s role in stopping the genocide.

Let our challenges be the motivation to do more, to get more progress and move faster to develop our nation.

Let’s make sure every Rwandan has security and freedom.

The progress described in the first quote is not just of economic development but rather the progress that the RPF has implemented in social reconstruction of a mono-ethnic society from the previous tri-ethnic one. Within these two quotes President Kagame is influencing the audience not only to be wary of the existential threat against the referent object of ‘Rwandan’ but also to push the RPF imposed public polices in society. On 24th October 2014, the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency (RURA), a regulatory government agency, placed a temporary ban on the BBC within Rwanda, specifically its local channel BBC Gahuzamiryango. At the time of the announcement in Rwanda, the author was with a military official who defended the ban by stating, ‘the documentary was a threat to Rwanda as it promoted genocide denial.’

Beyond the case example of the BBC’s document, the former Defence Minister James Kabarebe, whom The New Times reported his speech, claimed that the damaging threat of genocide denial, not only to the genocide’s history, but the progress of Rwanda in terms of economic and social development. Kabarebe illustrates the seriousness within genocide denial, ‘We have reached the step of Genocide denial and conspiracy against Rwanda. We are ready to keep the fight to protect the dignity we have already achieved.’ The fostering of a new singular ethnic identity within the post-1994 social order is perhaps most threatened by actors who object to existing historical narratives of the perpetrators, victims and liberators of the genocide. Similar to President Kagame’s response to the BBC documentary, Kabarebe describes genocide denial as an existential threat to not specifically the Tutsis but to the referent object of Rwandans akin to the RPF’s perception of society as a unified ethnic identity.

Political leaders often frame public policy within the context of the genocide, typically on how the government has helped society progress since 1994. These narratives also contain the constant reminders of the threat of genocide denial, often from ‘enemies’ outside of the country. On social media, cyber-attacks on critics of the Rwandan government often result within the confines of accusations of genocide denial.
Netherlands, Olivier Nduhungirehe often uses the social media platform of Twitter to promote the Rwandan government’s agenda in securitising genocide denial as a threat towards Rwandans. In an 11th February 2021 tweet, Ambassador Nduhungirehe continued the government’s securitisation of genocide denial. He wrote:

Denial and minimisation of the #genocide against the Tutsi are an attempt to erase part of the history of humanity, to absolve perpetrators, to torment victims, to hinder unity and reconciliation and to bring back genocide to #Rwanda.85

Ambassador Nduhungirehe addresses the existential threat of genocide denial against the nation’s development, reconciliation and unity. Despite being a member of a non-RPF political party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD),86 he nevertheless holds similar beliefs akin to the RPF’s statement of unity: composing of ethnic unity. His public comment, both in English and the native Kinyarwanda language, is aimed at Rwandans, the audience, of the dangers posed by genocide denial to the referent object, ethnic unity and the genocide history that is favourable towards the RPF.

Whether Rwandans supports the government’s speech act of genocide denial that composes a substantial security threat, it is difficult to ascertain. For the genocide survivor’s community, it is clearly an issue dear to them after experiencing the horrors of the genocide first-hand. Following Stanton’s description of the process of genocide, denial is believed to be the final act that threatens them. Defining a singular speech act is problematic as Stritzel87 comments but it is easier to define mechanisms within the process of the government securitising genocide denial. Wilkinson88 description of non-verbal communication can be beneficial in understanding the speech act. Within Rwandan society, reminders of the genocide are at the very least prevalent. Whether they are in the form of the annual genocide commemorations, called Kwibuka, translated as ‘to remember’, in April until July, posters and banners are visibly placed at the entrances of towns, government and public facilities for all to read. These should be included as speech acts as they are enacted by the securitising actor, the Rwandan government and particularly the previously discussed CNLG. There are years when Kwibuka does focus solely on genocide denial such as the 2016 theme composing on combating genocide ideology, which included the necessity of confronting genocide denial.89 Even outside Rwanda, the diaspora is often reminded of how threatening genocide denial is to Rwanda’s security. Annual genocide commemorations are held at St Marylebone Parish Church in London, the United Kingdom often have the theme of combating genocide denial.90 Even beyond commemorations, the genocide is often discussed within society.

But whether Rwandans, who were either not affected by the genocide, were perpetrators themselves, or born after 1994, categorised as the audience have accepted the government’s securitisation is difficult to ascertain with certainty. Thomson argues how the fear of police and/or military reprisals influences many Rwandans to just support the government’s narratives.91 Reyntjens echoes this description by commenting how tightly controlled the public space is by the RPF that it is nearly impossible to truly gain a clear understanding of whether Rwandans truly support the securitising of genocide denial.92 Fundamentally, the necessity of the audience accepting the speech act might be unnecessary; the RPF and military elites already dominate the public agenda. However, this description of public space within Rwandan society is problematic, for it relies on a reductionist understanding of Rwandan culture and existing concerns between Rwandans and foreign researchers.
The ontological insecurity posed by genocide denial

While the previous section demonstrated applying securitisation to genocide denial, it introduces shortcomings and even insights into the perceptions of genocide denial by the Rwandan government elites as well as Rwandans as a whole. Applying securitisation to better understand Rwanda’s response towards genocide denial is problematic, since it provides an incomplete description and minimises the genuine fear that Rwandans hold towards a repetition of the genocide. Here, we can fully examine how the ontological insecurity posed by genocide denial to Rwandan society is significant enough that the application of the Copenhagen School is problematic. As briefly discussed, ontological security is defined here within the same descriptions as provided by Mitzen as security concerns for the individual and the state which goes beyond just physical threats.93 Akin to Jervis description of misconceptions within international politics, the physiological effects of perceived and real security threats greatly impact a nation’s foreign engagement.94 For those within the Rwandan government, while the primary security threat of tangible military combat has declined, the ideology within those threats remain and threaten the new Rwandan unified ethnic identity. One could use Mitzen’s examination of the security dilemma and how it continues to impact security seekers through continuing to combat threats that no longer exist or have shifted.95 For so long, the RPF has spent combating genocide perpetrators that it knows little else in terms of security threats, and it continues to display an aggressive attitude towards combating anything resembling or relating to the genocide such as denial and revisions.

As Innes and Steele describe memory and trauma influence state security behaviours by establishing the need for predictable environments to prevent vulnerability in future ruptures. An additional consequence is how national identities are fostered to re-create ontological security.96 This benefits the RPF and its government to push its social ethnic norms of an unified ethnic identity, thus it prevents ethnic divisions such as in the past such as within the Organic Law N° 29/2004.97 The Rwandan government’s promotion of ontological security not only reinforces the new national identity of a united ethnic group of ‘Rwandans’, but also helps create security from genocide ideology, which devastated the nation in 1994. However, while genocide denial and revisionism might be perceived as political threats to the securitis-ing actor of the Rwandan government’s legitimacy in power, it minimises the traumatic event, the genocide, that greatly impacts from state public policy to local engagement between Rwandans.

If we control for the typical critiques of securitisation such as the normative agenda,98 defining the speech act,99 the focus on case studies from the Global North, and confirmation biases,100 we still encounter problems in utilising this analytical framework to better understand genocide denial within the Rwandan society. There are three primary components which do not follow any typical securitisation case studies. Defining the audience, referent object and securitising actor, illustrates the problems of applying the Copenhagen School to better understand the Rwandan perceptions of genocide denial. Defining the audience from the referent object is difficult since the speech acts directed towards Rwandans refer to genocide denial being a threat to themselves rather than just Tutsis. The lack of audience engagement in previous ethnic divisions of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, seems to be replaced with accepting, whether forcibly or not, the unified ethnic identity of Rwandans which classifies them as the referent object. It is not the Tutsis who are threatened by genocide denial and need protection, but rather the Rwandans in their new ethnic unified
identity. Similar to Subotić’s description of the historical narratives of the Holocaust being set by political agendas against the Soviet Union and Communist atrocities, the RPF’s historical narratives of the genocide include a societal breakdown that impacts all Rwandans rather than just those who suffered. Thus, it is difficult to separate the audience from the referent object.

Despite Wilkinson’s description of the unspoken speech acts performed by a securitising actor, it is problematic to illustrate the Rwandan government actively attempting to convince the audience, the Rwandan population, of the existential threat of genocide denial. The ontological insecurities of a return to the genocide are held not only by genocide survivors and the RPF, but also the Hutu community at large. It is not uncommon for Rwandan genocide survivors to have emotional and mental breakdowns after visiting the genocide memorials. During a 2013 visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial by the author, around twenty-five Rwandan survivors visited to pay their respects to the mass graves, containing an estimated 250,000 bodies at the memorial. Three had emotional breakdowns and panic attacks requiring the attention of psychological support. The Kigali Genocide Memorial has in its disposal multiple foam mattresses for visitors requiring a rest after the emotional experience. One employee at the Memorial commented to me, ‘We use these mattresses all the time as survivors have emotional collapses all the time. This place is important to them as many have family buried here, but the wounds are still so fresh for them and all survivors.’ It is important to stress here how ingrained the genocide is to survivors, and how the genocide is part of their everyday lives. While genocide denial does not cause the same type of physical violence, it nevertheless still is perceived as part of the genocide process. For genocide survivors, the memories are still fresh with the fear of a possible return to the killings. Survivor organisations such as Association Des Etudiants Et Eleves Rescapes Du Genocide (AERG) hold Stanton’s description of the final process of genocide, its denial, as the last segment of the 1994 genocide. One AERG member commented, ‘We are fighting denial and need to fight it as much as the RPF fought against the perpetrators as they are part of the same belief.’

While Tutsi genocide survivors are ideally categorised as the referent object, the dangers posed by the existential threat are not reinforced by the RPF as the securitising actor for it has already been internalised by a large part of the population due to the trauma of the genocide.

The ontological insecurity within the collected memory of the genocide impacts the shared non-survivor community. During the 2012 closing ceremonies of Rwanda’s reconciliation process, Gacaca, the author had the ability to meet and interview with several former genocide perpetrators. They had participated in the mass killings and later went through the gacaca process. They expressed their fear of a return to the genocide and the destruction of Rwanda’s current economic and social development, which is a result from the RPF’s public policies, including the unified ‘Rwandan’ ethnic identity. Again, it illustrates the similarities between the existential threat of genocide denial as disrupting the referential object, no longer just Tutsis or genocide survivors, but of ethnic unity and existing historical narratives of the genocide, which is nearly indistinguishable from the beliefs held by the Rwandan audience. Interviews conducted in the northwest city of Gisenyi, a former powerhouse of the Hutu extremists, many Rwandans commented that despite some problems they hold with the RPF, many were overall happy with the nation’s progress and feared any return to 1994. The RPF fosters ontological security through the formation and reinforcement of a continued self-identity formulated not only by the RPF’s push for new social identity norms but also the effects of collective
memory and trauma, which reinforces the support of the unified ethnicity. This ontological security was felt by other informants in the cities of Musanse, Gitarama, Butare, and Kigali.\textsuperscript{110} Despite the research conducted by Thomson,\textsuperscript{111} Longman,\textsuperscript{112} and Waldorf,\textsuperscript{113} the author’s experience in Rwanda illustrates a population fearful of a return to the nation’s genocidal past that includes a concern of how denial can help provide opportunity for its destabilisation.

Thus, the necessary speech act, whether as vocal or non-vocal,\textsuperscript{114} within securitisation never officially began as the genocide ideology existed prior to the RPF’s control over Rwanda. Perhaps even the RPF’s combativeness towards genocide denial might be a symptom of Mitzen’s description of rigid attachment to routine followed by states.\textsuperscript{115} After combating genocide perpetrators, the RPF is compelled to continue similar security policies against the last formation of the genocide: which based on Stanton is denial. The RPF combatted the other stages through the establishment of their social order of a unified ethnic identity, formation of self-dignity within the constructs of agaciro,\textsuperscript{116} combating genocide forces, and now fighting genocide denial.

Lastly, it is important to examine the motives and beliefs of the securitising actor, the Rwandan government. Many elites responsible for creating and enacting public policy, including combating genocide denial, believe how genocide denial within the context of Rwanda’s genocidal history promotes ontological insecurity for Rwandans. Public policy cannot be easily separated from the genocide’s affect as elites try to prevent, through government policy a repetition of the horrors. Fundamentally, combating the genocide, whether in terms of social, economic means and even denial, is not a political or even a securitised issue within the Copenhagen School’s framework. Rather, it is a constant issue within Rwanda’s consciousness that Rwandans believe-the genocide-can be repeated, despite its minimal risk. Notwithstanding the Rwandan government admitting to the decline of the FDLR and any physical military threats against the state, many hold the belief that the ideology is nevertheless just as much as a threat to Rwanda’s post-genocide development.\textsuperscript{117}

We can conclude how the securitisation model within the Copenhagen School cannot be properly applied to this case study, despite it being a useful mechanism to reinforce critical views on the government’s authoritarian nature. The genocide is not a singular time or event, but rather a broad spectrum of multiple events. For many Rwandans, this follows closely with Stanton’s processes. Thus, the genocide is an object to be securitised never began with the RPF taking power. Rather, it has been an historical constant since the end of colonisation in 1962 and with the rise of Hutu ethnic extremism. Since the killings ended in 1994, the genocide remains as an existential concern and threat for the nation. It was never a non-political issue that had at some later moment been politicised and securitised within Rwanda. Rather, the genocide has remained an issue of state security and during the early years after the genocide, threaten to its survival.\textsuperscript{118} Fundamentally, the criticisms of speech acts and their effectiveness in the Copenhagen School face great difficulties in the case study of Rwanda; genocide denial as there is a lack of necessity for the Rwandan government to speak out against genocide denial. There is no denying the government has described genocide denial as an existential threat to the nation’s post-genocide progress, but it has already been independently accepted by Rwandans who witnessed, suffered, or participated in the massacres. While the process of the genocide might not be over, many do not want any of the worst aspects of the process, the genocidal killings, to begin again.
Conclusion

Despite securitisation and the Copenhagen School often being perceived as Eurocentric and American-centric,119 the analytical framework can be applied with caveats to case studies within the Global South. Perhaps an ideal example would be how the Rwandan government, as the securitising actor, securitises the existential threat of genocide denial. The referent object which at the surface is composed of Tutsis but also should include the unified ethnic ‘Rwandan’ identity is being promoted by the RPF. Lastly, the Rwandan population, the audience, can be described as the referent object. It would appear that the Rwandan government securitises genocide denial solely as it challenges their political dominance within the political and societal spheres. The RPF’s social progress in a unified ethnic identity, ‘Rwandan’, rather than Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa are threatened by external actors who question the RPF’s legitimacy, ending the genocidal massacres, and pose a significant threat to their beliefs and causes. Additionally, a more poignant question is: how any form of the questioning of the genocide’s history should be considered a threat to the RPF’s political dominance over the government. Researchers, lawyers and human rights activists are often perceived as promoters of genocide denial and carriers of the threat. Thus, it is reasonable to speculate how the RPF securitises any form of historical revisionism and genocide denial as a threat to the existence of Rwanda. This is despite no tangible military threats, such as the now diminished FDLR, which could considerably threaten the RPF or the RDF security of the country. Either because they are unable to express their true opinions or not, many Rwandans seem to accept the government’s narratives that genocide denial is an existential threat not only to genocide survivors but to the country’s progress as a whole.

Despite it appearing that the Rwandan government has successfully securitised genocide denial, there are problems fitting the theoretical framework to this case study. And although the genocide ended just over twenty-seven years ago, the scars are still vivid in the minds of Rwandans. The collected memory of the genocide and the trauma it produced not only against its Tutsi and moderate Hutu victims but also the nation fostered significant ontological insecurity. Promoting, under the ideological ethnic identity norms of the RPF, a collective identity helps alleviate this insecurity. If the Rwandan government decided not to have any speech acts on genocide denial, the population would still perceive genocide denial and revision as a significant threat, since it follows closely with Stanton’s description of the process of genocide: denial is the final process. Many, including former perpetrators, do not want a return to the massacres and are optimistic of the country’s stability, development and progress with the long-term aspirations of greater political openness. Untangling the genocide, including denial, from the government and civil society is unlikely as its effects can still be felt throughout the country. This problematises using the Copenhagen School to better understand Rwandan perceptions of genocide denial. Even without a securitising actor, Rwandans would still perceive denial as the last form of a dangerous period of their history: the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsis. More study is needed to better understand Rwandan security concerns and threats. Additionally, with the increase of decolonisation studies within academia, the Copenhagen School should attempt to look at the Global South to provide analytical support or problems within the securitisation framework. Nevertheless, this case study should be included in our understanding of securitisation in order to generate the application of more case studies from the Global South.
Notes

1. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 143, 213–298.
2. Dallaire, *Shake Hands*, 221–510.
3. Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills*, 172–178, 199–211.
4. Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory*, 173–86.
5. Schulman and Rusagara, ‘Umoja Wetu’, 90–97.
6. Beloff, *Foreign Policy in Post-genocide Rwanda*, 52–75.
7. Ibid., 97–111.
8. Ibid., 15–26.
9. Ibid., 12–14.
10. Lamont, *Research Methods*, 15–9, 169.
11. Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, *Key Themes in Qualitative Research*.
12. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 1–22.
13. Wallis, *Stepped in Blood*, 213–4.
14. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 84–9, 127–9, 159–60.
15. Waugh, *Paul Kagame and Rwanda*, 23–4, 43–5.
16. Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills*, 48–52.
17. Beloff and Lakin, ‘Peace and Compromise’, 129–147.
18. Beloff, *Foreign Policy*, 52–75.
19. Ibid., 97–108.
20. Schulman and Rusagara, ‘Umoja Wetu’, 90–97.
21. Prunier, *Africa’s World War*, 105.
22. Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security’, 342; Ejdus, ‘Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions’, 883–5.
23. Innes and Steele, ‘Memory, Trauma and Ontological Security’, 20.
24. Government of Rwanda, *LAW N° 09/2007 of 16/02/2007*.
25. Government of Rwanda, *LAW N°18/2008 of 23/07/2008*.
26. Stanton, *The Eight Stages*.
27. The National Commission for the Fight against Genocide, ‘Background of the Genocide’.
28. Unnamed Rwandan, Conversation at the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide with the author, October 2014.
29. Beloff, *Foreign Policy in Post-genocide*, 108.
30. Alexander, ‘Anarchy is What States’, 391–425; ‘Constructing International Politics’, 71–81.
31. Finnemore, *National Interests*.
32. Newman, ‘Human Security and Constructivism’, 239–251.
33. Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground’, 319–363.
34. Weldes, ‘Constructing National Interests’, 275–318.
35. Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 52.
36. The author will refer it as just the Copenhagen School for the rest of the article.
37. Buzan, *People, States & Fear; Buzan, Waever and Wild, Security: A New Framework for Analysis; Waever, ‘Politics, Security, Theory’, 465–80.*
38. Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*.
39. Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 51–5.
40. Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*.
41. Barnett, ‘Security and Climate Change’, 7–15; Scott, ‘The Securitization of Climate’, 220–230; Trombetta, ‘Environmental Security and Climate Change’, 585–602.
42. Innes and Steele, ‘Memory, Trauma and Ontological’, 15–29.
43. Buzan and Waever, ‘Macrosecuritisation and Security’, 253–4; Romaniuk and Webb, ‘Extraordinary Measures’, 228–32.
44. Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 21–9, 100–1; Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 53–5; Romaniuk and Webb, ‘Extraordinary Measures: Drone Warfare’, 226.
45. Crick, ‘Drugs as an Existential Threat’, 407–414.
46. Romaniuk and Webb, ‘Extraordinary Measures’, 221–245.
47. Buzan, Waever and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 21–9, 100–1; Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 53–5.
48. Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 267, 296, 327–31, 336; Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*, 58.
49. Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory’, 357–383.
50. Ibid., 359–64, 377.
51. Balzacq, ‘The Three Faces of Securitization’, 171–201.
52. Hansen, ‘Gender, Nation, Rape’, 55–75.
53. Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School’, 12.
54. McDonald, ‘Securitization and the Construction’, 582.
55. Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 61.
56. Buzan and Wæver, ‘Macrosecuritisation and Security’, 257.
57. Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School’, 10–13.
58. Howell and Richter-Montpetit, ‘Is Securitization Theory Racist?’
59. Ibid., 14.
60. Buzan and Wæver, ‘Racism and Responsibilities’, 386–394.
61. Human Rights Watch, ‘Rwanda: 25 Years on’; Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda, ten years on’, 177–210.
62. Waldorf, ‘Revisiting Hotel Rwanda’, 107–112; Reyntjens, *Political Governance*, 187–209.
63. Republic of Rwanda, ‘Members of Parliament [Christine Mukabunani]’.
64. ‘Democratic Green Party of Rwanda’.
65. Reyntjens, *Political Governance*, 57–97.
66. Crisafulli and Redmond, *Rwanda, Inc*.
67. Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills*, 230–236.
68. Roe, ‘Is Securitization a ‘Negative’ Concept?’ 251–252.
69. Reyntjens, *Political Governance in Post-Genocide*.
70. Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power*.
71. Longman, *Memory and Justice*.
72. Waldorf, ‘Revisiting Hotel Rwanda’, 101–125.
73. Government of Rwanda, *LAW N°18/2008 of 23/07/2008*.
74. Barnnett and Adger, ‘Clime Change, Human Security’, 651.
75. Beloff, ‘The Limitations of Research Space’, 48–60.
76. Reyntjens, ‘The Struggle Over Truth’.
77. Ruhumuliza, ‘The Fourth Estate’.
78. Reyntjens, ‘The Struggle Over Truth’, 639.
79. Musoni, ‘Kagame Speaks Out’.
80. ‘Rwanda Suspends BBC’.
81. Unnamed Rwandan military official, interviewed by the Author, October 2014.
82. Kalimba, ‘Genocide Denial a Threat’.
83. Republic of Rwanda, ‘Parliamentarians Dedicated to Keep’.
84. ‘Rwanda’s Paul Kagame – Visionary or Tyrant?’.
85. Nduhungirehe, ‘Denial and Minimisation’.
86. Beloff, *Foreign Policy in Post-genocide*, 88–9.
87. Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory’, 377.
88. Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School’, 12–15.
89. Kwibuka, ‘Rwanda: Kwibuka22 to Focus’.
90. New Times Reporter, ‘New Friends in the Fight’.
91. Thomson, ‘Peasant Perspective on National Unity’, 96–110.
92. Reyntjens, *Political Governance*, 57–97.
93. Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World’, 342–3.
94. Jervis, ‘Hypotheses on Misperception’, 454–479.
95. Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World’, 357–358.
96. Innes and Steel, ‘Memory, Trauma and Ontological’, 17–24.
97. Government of Rwanda, *Organic Law N° 29/2004*.
98. McDonald, ‘Securitization’; Hansen, ‘Gender, Nation, Rape’.
99. Balzacq, ‘The Three Faces’, 184; 2011; Hansen, ‘Gender, Nation, Rape’, 55–70; Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory’, 357–383.
100. Balzacq, ‘The Three Faces’; Nyman, ‘Securitization Theory’, 61.
101. Subotić, Yellow Star, Red Star.
102. Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School on Tour’, 12.
103. Kigali Genocide Memorial, ‘Kigali Genocide Memorial’.
104. Unnamed Rwandan, Conversation at the Kigali Genocide Memorial with the author, April 9, 2013.
105. AERG members, Meeting at the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide, January 1, 2013.
106. Ejdus, ‘Critical Situations’, 883–908; Innes and Steele, ‘Memory, Trauma and Ontological’, 17–20; Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics’, 344–347.
107. ‘Rwanda closes ‘gacaca’ genocide court’.
108. Unnamed Rwandan [total of fifteen], interview by the author, July 2012.
109. Unnamed Rwandans [total of twenty-five], interview by the author, February 8–18, 2019, August 1, 2019–October 1, 2019.
110. Unnamed Rwandans [total of fifty], interview by the author, August 2016, August 1, 2019–October 1, 2019.
111. Thomson, ‘Peasant Perspective’, 96–110.
112. Longman, Memory and Justice.
113. Waldorf, ‘Revisiting Hotel Rwanda’.
114. Balzacq, ‘The Three Faces’, 184; 2011; Hansen, ‘Gender, Nation, Rape’, 55–70; Stritzel, ‘Towards a Theory’, 357–383; Wilkinson, ‘The Copenhagen School on Tour’, 12.
115. Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World’, 363.
116. Beloff, Foreign Policy, 10–11.
117. Ibid., 109.
118. Ibid., 52–76
119. Roe, ‘Is Securitization a “Negative” Concept?’ 251.

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