

# The Day Truth Trumped Propaganda: A Historic Ruling on Denialism

Tom Ndahiro

The New Times, December 11, 2024

**On December 9, 2024, the 17th Chamber of the Paris Criminal Court delivered a verdict that echoed like an expected thunderclap across the corridors of history: Charles Onana, self-styled historian and champion of the indefensible, was convicted alongside his publisher Damien Serieyx for denialism in his book, ‘Rwanda, the Truth About Operation Turquoise—When the Archives Speak’— a work as misnamed as it is misinformed.**



Bishop Sébastien-Joseph Muyengo Mulombe and Charles Onana, genocide deniers.

It was no ordinary day. It will be remembered as the day Onana’s defense crumbled faster than his arguments—coinciding with the anniversary of the 1948 United Nations adoption of the International Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, an irony that must have eluded Onana as he scrambled for intellectual cover.

His defeat marks not just a legal victory but a moral reckoning, as France reminded the world that its 1995 [sic] anti-denialism law—criminalizing genocide denial, gross minimization, and justification of this horrendous crime—remains a robust guardian of truth and memory.

This ruling doesn’t just rebuff Onana’s pseudo-academic contortions; it strikes a blow to all purveyors of denialism, exposing their narratives as the ideological garbage they truly are.

## A Victory for Justice and Memory

It is vital to know the deceptive mask of historical reinterpretation of events. Denialism, at its core, is the art of deflection and deceit, a sinister game played by those who wish to distort the facts of atrocities for ideological gain.

It is not merely the assertion of contrarian opinions but a deliberate attempt to undermine the evidence, twist history, and ultimately absolve perpetrators. In the case of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, denialism seeks to deny the irrefutable: over one million lives extinguished in one of the most brutal acts of human depravity.

The genocide against the Tutsi is not some contested historical footnote. It is documented through survivor testimonies, forensic evidence, UN archives, and court records. And yet, individuals like Charles Onana attempt to chip away at these truths, cloaking their propaganda as scholarship.

In Rwanda, the Truth About Operation Turquoise, Onana touts tired tropes that not only diminish the genocide but also insinuate that the victims and their saviors, particularly the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), are the real culprits.

The Paris court rightly saw through this smokescreen, ruling that Onana's book constitutes denialism and fails every standard of legitimate scholarly inquiry. It is not the voice of an impartial historian but the echo of a propagandist intent on manipulating public opinion.

France's 1995 [sic] anti-denialism law is more than a legal statute; it is a commitment to preserving historical truth and protecting the dignity of victims. The conviction of Charles Onana reinforces this commitment, sending a clear message to those who seek to rewrite history: there is no refuge in the courts for denialists.

Many thanks to the organizations and associations which took the case to court. They did it because they know the cost of silence and the value of vigilance. The danger of denialism lies not only in its immediate impact but in its long-term consequences. By distorting the past, denialists aim to influence the present, sow division, and erode the foundations of justice.

This is why the Paris court's decision is so significant—it is a reaffirmation that silence in the face of denialism is complicity, and vigilance against it is a moral imperative.

Educating future generations about the genocide against the Tutsi is vital. It is not enough to remember; we must actively confront attempts to rewrite history.

The conviction of Onana and his publisher is a reminder that justice can prevail when society takes a stand against the forces of distortion.

This ruling also serves as a symbolic repudiation of the forces that continue to enable denialism. The Paris-based publisher Source du Nil, notorious for rehabilitating genocidaires and their toxic ideologies, has now seen its mission discredited.

Likewise, this judgment should give pause to figures like Dr. Denis Mukwege, and Bishop Sébastien-Joseph Muyengo Mulombe

of the Catholic Diocese of Uvira who strongly lent their support to Onana's work. Such endorsements, whether motivated by ignorance or ulterior motives, only embolden the killers of memory.

One must perfectly conclude, this judgement is not just about punishment; it is about preserving memory, upholding dignity, and ensuring that the shadows of denialism do not darken the future.

## Onana and His Chorus of Enablers

This victory is not just about holding Onana accountable. It is about standing up to a broader network of distortionists, from Congolese politicians who champion Onana as a savior, to ideologues hiding behind the guise of intellectual freedom while peddling hatred.

But the real thing lies not in the conviction itself but in the motley crew of defenders who showed up to in the courtroom to champion Onana's cause—a parade of misplaced egos, delusional ideologues, and self-styled experts who managed to embarrass themselves as much as Onana and Serieyx.

From retired French generals and admirals desperate to launder France's reprehensible role in the Genocide Against the Tutsi, to Belgian diplomats and military men nostalgic for colonial power, to Rwandan genocide ideologues like Joseph Matata, the courtroom became a veritable theater of absurdity.

Perhaps they thought their credentials would overshadow the illogicality of their

claims. Instead, they only highlighted their complicity in defending the indefensible.

Onana's defense was bolstered by an ensemble of characters better suited for satire than serious legal proceedings. Among them were French Retired General Didier Tauzin, whose attempts to defend the actions of Operation Turquoise resembled more of a historical reenactment of denial than a credible argument.

Joining him were Belgian military retirees like Colonel Luc Marchal, infamous for his ineffectiveness during the 1994 genocide, now trying to recast himself as a martyr for misunderstood history.

Not to be outdone, former Belgian Ambassador Johan Swinnen—well-known for his disparaging remarks about the Rwandan Patriotic Front, and supporter of genocidal tendencies—also took the stand. Swinnen's testimony was a masterclass in selective amnesia, conveniently forgetting that his words and actions during the genocide era were often indistinguishable from tacit complicity.

Then there was the ever-reliable Joseph Matata, a longtime denier of the Genocide Against the Tutsi, who arrived to defend Onana with his usual mix of fabricated narratives and venomous rhetoric.

Matata's presence was less a surprise than a confirmation of the ideological underpinnings of Onana's defense—a nexus of revisionists united not by facts but by their shared disdain for truth and accountability.

This trial and judgement demonstrated a visible collective failure of conscience. These defenders did not merely fail Onana; they failed the memory of the victims of the geno-

cide. By aligning themselves with a man convicted of denialism, they exposed their own biases and tarnished their reputations.

Their testimonies were not just unconvincing; they were emblematic of a broader effort to rewrite history in the service of personal and political agendas.

The Paris court saw through this charade, ruling decisively against Onana and his enablers. By doing so, it reaffirmed the importance of combating denialism—not just as a matter of historical accuracy but as a defense of human dignity.

## Onana’s Defense Team, the Hall of Shame

As the dust settles, one cannot help but wonder what Charles Onana and his illustrious defense team will do next. Perhaps General Tauzin will finally write a memoir titled ‘How to Lose a Case and Your Credibility in One Courtroom.’

Johan Swinnen might host a podcast, ‘Revisionists Anonymous’, where his special guest Joseph Matata or Semus Ntawuhiganayo formerly known as Sixbert Musangamfura can amuse listeners with tales of alternative realities. And Colonel Luc Marchal? He might take up acting—his performance in court was already a work of fiction.

This ruling is a cautionary tale for all who stood by Onana. To retired generals, diplomats, and ideologues alike: your defense of denialism has not only failed but has also

cemented your legacy as apologists for falsehoods. History will remember this moment not as a triumph of intellect but as an exhibition of shame and not fame.

For Charles Onana himself, let this serve as a bitter pill: when you surround yourself with ideologues and opportunists, you lose not just the case but also the dignity to stand by your convictions. In the end, truth prevailed, and denialism was dealt a blow it elaborately deserved.

As Onana contemplates his defeat, one can only imagine his next career move. Perhaps he’ll pivot to fiction, where his talents for imaginative storytelling may find a more appropriate audience. Or maybe he’ll take up teaching—courses like “How to Lose a Lawsuit While Pretending to Be an Academic” could be a hit in denialist circles.

The rest of us, meanwhile, can take solace in knowing that justice has spoken loud and clear. Truth, though often under siege, can triumph. The memory of the genocide against the Tutsi remains untarnished, and no amount of revisionist antics can erase the truth.

December 9, 2024, will go down as a day when the dignity of genocide victims prevailed over the arrogance of denialists. The judgement and this day will forever stand as a reminder that while denialists may find supporters, they will never find refuge in the court of justice—or the court of history.

And for Onana, let this serve as a lesson: history is not a buffet where you can pick and choose your truths.