

# **On the Nature of Genocidal Intent**



**Jason J. Campbell**

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# Preface

## *"The Fly"*

I begin with a story. Imagine that unbeknownst to Miriam, I have a deep seeded hatred for her. For all practical purposes, I entertain and charm her, I engage in general conversation and pleasantries, but beneath all the superficialities burns a strong desire to harm her. I know that if I strike her without skillfully disguising my intent, I will be held accountable for my actions. Thus, I begin the arduous process of cloaking my intention. My desire is to satisfy my urge to harm Miriam, by actually harming her, but I also wish to forgo punishment and accountability in actualizing my intent. Then, as if opportunity had crystallized before my very eyes, I noticed a fly buzzing about. The fly stumbled and buzzed and finally landed on Miriam's arm, she none the wiser. Now was my chance! I raised my hand with all the rage I could muster and struck Miriam, knowing that it would hurt her. She was initially terrified by my act. "Ouch!" she yelled in pain. Knowing that I had killed the fly, I skillfully pointed to its splattered remains on her sleeve. Her arm still throbbing in pain, she smiled at my good gesture. "Thanks, but next time not so hard." We both laughed.

\* \* \*

The intent to destroy human life precedes such action and thus the greatest threat to human existence is not the act of killing but the intent. The magnitude of this threat, however, is met by the greatest possibility for genocide prevention, which is an understanding of genocidal intent. This work, then, is ultimately an attempt to promote a greater understanding of genocide through a greater understanding of genocidal intent. In turn, a more rigorous analysis of genocidal intent facilitates a deeper understanding of genocide

prevention, since the intent to kill precedes the act of killing. Thus, an analysis of genocidal intent increases both the awareness and understanding of genocide prevention.

\* \* \*

#### Defining the Scope of the Analysis

Article II of the 1948 United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (UNGC) states:

In the present Convention, genocide means 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 a group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Throughout this analysis of genocidal intent, I will use the definition of genocide described in the UNGC. I will not entertain or discuss definitional problems of the UNGC's definition of genocide, as my analysis is not an account of the definition of genocide but an account of genocidal intent. I readily accept and understand that weakness in the UNGC's definition of genocide presuppose weaknesses in my account of genocidal intent. I further make no suggestions or claims that my eventual account of genocidal intent is in any sense exhaustive or totalizing. Rather, I have purposefully constructed this account of genocidal intent with an interdisciplinary, inter-professional community of scholars and students in mind. I hope that this account is but the first of many theoretical articulations of genocidal intent. I also hope that the conceptual framework I have constructed is applicable to cross and interdisciplinary fields, yet resourceful enough to withstand theoretical scrutiny.

With reference to theory, then, though I am professionally trained as a philosopher and while much of this analysis is informed by the analytic tradition of philosophy, especially action theory and intentionality, this book is not a philosophical account of intentionality. The same rules do not apply to this specific account of genocidal intent as do the logical forms of action sentences. I have constructed the notion of genocidal intent as a hybrid theoretical framework, which borrows primarily from philosophy, legal theory, political theory, social theory, and educational theory. This work is most properly defined, then, as an interdisciplinary theory of genocidal intent.

As is the case with any theoretical or conceptual analysis, the theory must conform with the facts rather than the facts conforming to the theory. It is within the context of both history and theory that this paradigm must ultimately be placed and judged. I will leave it to historians to determine the success or failure of the theory's historical applicability and genocide theorists will ultimately determine the theoretical usefulness of this account. My analysis of genocidal intent is primarily a theoretical account. Throughout the analysis, I will identify and define various facets of the evolving theoretical notion of genocidal intent. First and foremost, the discussion of genocidal intent is a theoretical discussion. The applicability of the theory will be most useful for theoreticians interested in understanding the conceptual framework of genocidal intentionality. While historical references will be used to demonstrate the theoretical applicability of the evolving concept, this book is not a historical account of genocide. The justification for the evolving structure of genocidal intent will be based in theoretical references and frameworks and will only tangentially reference historical events.

I am most interested in making this work accessible to non-specialists and students alike. I have taken great effort to simplify my examples and qualify, at length, technical jargon and concepts. Though the notion of genocidal intent will prove to be an exceedingly complex theoretical conception, it is my hope that one's accessibility to the theory will be facilitated by my conscious effort to speak frankly. The complexity of any theoretical study, especially one of this magnitude, almost requires simplicity. It is for this reason that I have consciously kept my audience in mind throughout the construction of this work.

Finally, the overarching motive for writing this book is the humble acknowledgment that peace is possible. I was driven to articulate the theoretical nature of genocidal intent to furnish a deeper understanding of genocide prevention. The epistemological nature of genocide prevention must be, as I will argue, rooted in an understanding of genocidal intent. My purpose for analyzing genocidal intent is to offer operative and practical suggestions for intervening on behalf of those targeted for extermination. Thus, this account of genocidal intent is an account of the fundamental basis for genocide prevention. It is through an explicit and methodical understanding of genocidal intent that peacekeepers and interventionists may hopefully incorporate this theoretical construct into their ever expanding toolkit.

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—Jason