

‘Rwanda and the Media’
Crisis States Research Centre and POLIS.
LSE

Charlie Beckett: My name is Charlie Beckett. I’m the Director of POLIS. Some of you might be familiar with it. It’s the new forum of for research and debate into journalism and society at the London School of Economics and the London College of Communication. I personally joined here in the summer, before that I was a journalist at the BBC and for seven years I was a programme editor at Channel 4 News, where I was the editor of the news from Africa season that we did where we presented the show live up from Rwanda in the week on the lead up to the G8.

I’m now the founding director of Polis. We’ve had a programme of public lectures this season which has included people like Yosri Fouda from Al Jazeera. We’ve had seminars and published report on issues like conflict reporting. And in March we’ve got a major conference looking at issues around media for development and transparency in governance with a special reference to Africa. We also have a programme of fellowships and research.

The reason why we’re delighted to have this event with the Crisis States Research Centre is mainly because POLIS, with its interest in international journalism and Africa particularly, but fundamentally because POLIS is about the way that journalism reports society and it’s also about the way that journalism is part of society. We believe in our interconnected world that usually that the newsreader is more important politically and socially than ever before. The possibilities of new technology in the media offers us remarkable opportunities to do good, however, of course the media can also do harm.

Some stories are so big and so awful it is difficult to recognise them as a reality. I remember sitting in my newsroom, like a lot of other journalists, on September 11th when the first wires came up about an aeroplane plane hitting the World Trade Centre. Of course I had my desk TV monitor on when the second plane hit the second tower and at that point it was very difficult to believe the evidence before my eyes. So think how hard it would be to comprehend what happened in 1994 in a very small African country that certainly isn’t covered by 24 hour news.

The Rwandan genocide wasn’t unprecedented. It is explicable. It was possibly preventable. But the idea of thousand of incidents of groups of people being butchered by their own fellow citizens across a whole country like that was almost beyond the imagination. I was lucky that my former colleague, Lindsey Hilsum, was one of the journalists who did bear witness to the genocide. And that experience gave her a sense of the possibility of horror in the world and of compulsion to report it fully that has never left her. That attitude was and still is an inspiration to me and to our work here at Polis so I’m delighted we’re able to address this piece of real history and media history today with such an impressive cast of experts. I’m now going to run away to the back of the room and hand over to our chair for the day, James Putzel who is head of the Crisis States Research Centre here at the LSE. Thank you very much for all coming today.

James Putzel: Thanks Charlie very much and thank everybody for coming. I'm not going to talk about the Crisis States Research Centre, other than to say that we are obviously organising this talk and this panel discussion because we're interested in the way and the role media plays in processes of state collapse and war and achieving peace and reconstruction. Of course these processes are very very complex. We're also very interested in Rwanda and are studying it as a central case study within our research centre. So we're delighted to be able to organise this together with POLIS today.

There is a report from a conference on this topic of 'media and crisis states', a workshop that we held together with Stanhope House Communications, Policy and Research Centre, where we worked with Monroe Price and Nicholas Stremlau, and in the house at the Development Studies Institute where our centre is based, Tim Allen is an expert on media and war. So there is a critical mass of interest here along with the Communications study and the Communications research and teaching programme here at the LSE.

It is really with a lot of pleasure that I had received word from Allan Thompson that he's coming through with his new book and we're so happy to have him. Allan is an assistant professor at Carleton University, and his book and you see some posters and I think there are some copies here for sale today, is on the 'The Media and the Rwandan Genocide'.

We're going to try to force Allen to speak for only about 20 minutes and then have very brief comment on what he has to say from Richard Dowden, who is the Director of the Royal African Society, Linda Melvern who is a journalist and an academic, and Mike Dottridge who is a human rights consultant.

I'm really going to try to be a forceful chair. So we have time for all of you to raise questions and reactions to this panel. So without further ado I'll hand you over to Allan, thank you very much for coming.

[Clapping]

Allan Thompson: Thanks for the invitation I can never have imagined that there wouldn't be any seats left in the room, so for all those who say that there is no interest in Rwanda, so there. There actually are. There is a chair here and one in the middle there, if anyone wants to come and try to sit down, you might as well do that.

It is a pleasure to be in the company of some of the contributors to the book, believe it or not some of them I haven't met, I knew them by reputation and that was good enough. I should point out that there are two other London based contributors who could not be here. Mark Doyle with the BBC is on assignment. Lars Waldorf who is now in London but was with Human Rights Watch in Rwanda at the time. Both have contributions in the book and very much wanted to be here but they are travelling. The book however is here. It is at the back of the room and Pluto Press has reminded me it has been discounted to £15 for today's event.

First let me explain what brings me to the podium. I am a career journalist, still undergoing something of a transformation to the world of academe. Before I started

teaching journalism at Carleton University in Ottawa I worked for 17 years with the Toronto Star newspaper, sort of Canada's Guardian I guess if I had to sum it up. So you could probably call me a journalist still somewhat in rehabilitation to academe.

The last 10 years that I worked for The Star I worked as a political reporter on Parliament Hill. I was supposed to be at the top of my craft. I was The Star's man for foreign affairs and defence policy and yet I came late to the Rwanda story. I didn't go to Rwanda in 1994. I have to confess that I was just about as oblivious as virtually everyone else with the exception of Richard and Linda and others and Mike who were paying a lot more attention than I was.

I discovered the Rwanda story later. I went there in 1996 when Canada was involved in a peacekeeping mission that in the end never happened in Eastern Zaire that was dealing with the situation of Hutu refugees who were in Congo at the time. In a way the experience in Zaire in 1996 was sort of an epiphany for me, and made me realise what I had missed and since then as a reporter and then more recently as an academic I've tried to give this story and this issue the attention that it deserves.

A couple of years ago, March 15th 2004, Carleton hosted a symposium on the role of the media in the Rwandan genocide and in a way it was sort of a first. It brought together the issue of hate media in Rwanda with which people were somewhat familiar and connected that intrinsically with the role of international media and the way the international media covered the Rwanda genocide. In a sense the central thrust of the book is really that those two things cannot be disentangled. As much as we don't necessarily want to relate western media with the hate media in Rwanda, I think the two things are in some way interwoven and I'll explain that a little bit.

Clearly, confronted by Rwanda's horrors, the western media for the most part turned away at the outset. Then muddled the story when then did pay attention. The role of hate media in Rwanda is almost self evident and yet I'm still not sure if people truly grasp the significance of the media role in the Rwanda genocide. The radio station RTLM station was created expressly to facilitate the genocide and it became a virtual soundtrack for the Rwanda genocide in 1994.

I'm here to address specifically to address the findings of this collection of 'The Media and the Rwanda Genocide'. I must credit in particular a Canadian organisation The International Development Research Centre, IDRC. This is a very innovative research organisation that provided the seed money for my university's Rwanda project and provided the finance the publication of this book. The photo on the cover is no accident. There are two sacks of human remains in that photo which was taken at a church in Rwanda in Unada not long after the genocide. In my view both hate media and Rwanda and the international media contributed to the Rwanda genocide.

Before I go on, and if this system works here, and I'm kind of adopting the microphone to the loudspeaker on my laptop, I want to play you about 7 to 8 minutes of some images about and from Rwanda because I think the reality is as much as journalists don't want to admit it, pictures are worth far more than a thousand words and if we don't see the images somehow we don't connect with the story.

I start with a brief clip from Hotel Rwanda. How many people saw the movie Hotel Rwanda? Which is ironically the way that most people now relate to Rwanda, once it permeates the popular culture. I follow that with about 3 to 4 minutes of actual footage from Rwanda taken by a British cameraman named Nick Hughes, who in retrospect it seems captured virtually the only images of a killing in Rwanda. And the astonishing thing is that with a million people killed, 10,000 per day for a 100 days, it would seem to me we have one existing media image of a killing. We saw acres of dead bodies, inanimate dead bodies, we did not see the act of genocide. I'll warn you, it is very disturbing this footage. I've seen it a lot of times and I now regard it with some distance. So I warn you it is disturbing and it should be. I follow that with a brief clip from ABC news, world news tonight from April 18th 1994. The same day as this remarkable footage was shot in Rwanda. If things work and I don't accidentally put on my photo album....

[Hotel Rwanda footage shown]

Allan Thomson: So that's the Hollywood version. That footage was actually a recreation of the actual news footage you're about to see which was shot by Nick Hughes. It is a bit grainy. It was taken from a rooftop of a building called the French School which is in central Kigali, this is the centre of the capital of the country. He was shooting with a long lens. You can see this is a street and a number of people have been dragged out and the focal point becomes a woman who is in the middle of others who have been killed or attacked. Presumably these are members of her family, her children. Throughout this painful... there's 3 or 4 minutes of video. Nick told me, you'll see there are some jump cuts in the video, he was stopping his camera because his battery was running out and he was worried he was going to miss this. So there are points where he stops and then returns to the image.

One thing that is very striking about this, look at the crowd of men over on this side, the killers. This is not rampaging angry mobs of one ethnic group amongst another. This is actually quite mundane, routine, matter of fact, to the point by which the little boy... see in the t-shirt, he walks by this woman and gives her a backward glance. This is not anything unusual at all for him. Later on there's a vehicle that drives through and the crew, essentially a work crew engaging in the genocide, passes by this woman and one of the men in the back of the truck gives her a wave.

[Footage continues]

Now at this point, April 18th 1994, by most estimates 100,000 people had already been killed by this point in the genocide. This image was captured. It was certainly the first such image to have been captured by news media. As far as I can tell this I don't think this image ever made the nightly news. It was shot for WTM. It was moved it was made available. As near as I can tell, and I have to admit I haven't been able to fully check this out, I don't think it made any nightly newscast. It resurfaced later and.... Sorry it's kind of horrible talking over this...

[Footage continues]

One million people and one bit of news footage that no one saw and yet everyone in this room saw Hotel Rwanda. What follows briefly is the news from 1994.

[News footage... 'As the Bosnian Serbs continue to terrorise the former UN.... we are on the edge of a major humanitarian disaster....']

What follows, just to spare you, is 6 minutes of Bosnia, Bill Clinton, Lord Owen, the Security Council, the entire world. 6 minutes on, what was deemed to be the most important news of the day from April 18th 1994 which was the ongoing crisis in Bosnia.

[News footage: 'And on this subject on credibility for the UN ...Some of the Belgian peacekeepers who returned from a mission in Rwanda.... Destroyed their UN berries. They were disgusted that all they could do was stand by and watch as massacres were committed right before their eyes... we'll have pictures from Rwanda...']

Ok, maybe we can turn the lights back on. I think this underlines the point that it is a bit hard to explain why these news images from Rwanda couldn't compete with what was happening in Bosnia at the time. As far as I can tell the Hughes footage did not make the nightly news. Eventually international media reports on Rwanda were replete with images of bloated corpses strewn at the roadside, choking the rivers, but because there were so few journalists on the ground at the height of the killing we didn't see the crime of genocide. And I suppose the unresolved research question is this; would the world have reacted differently if confronted daily by the images of people being slaughtered rather than the static disembodied figures of disfigured corpses? What difference would it have made if there had been an outside media presence?

I argue that journalists could have had an impact in Rwanda, a sort of Heisenberg effect, if there had been significant enough media presence to influence events. Now I'm not a scientist so I had to look this up. The Heisenberg effect was named from the German physicist Werner Heisenberg. It describes how the act of observing a particle actually changes the behaviour of that particle in its velocity and direction. Arguably, more comprehensive and accurate reporting of the Rwanda genocide could have changed the behaviour of the perpetrators, mitigating the slaughter. Instead, the lack of international media attention contributed to what I would call a sort of inverse Heisenberg affect. It is not that we had no impact but not being there, which is probably the way that western journalists would prefer to think of this. I think that through their absence and a failure to adequately observe and record events, journalists contributed and media organisations, probably is more fair than journalists, contributed to the behaviour of the perpetrators of the genocide who were encouraged by the world's apathy and acted with impunity.

Now, remarkably all these years later we have barely begun to learn the lessons of Rwanda. Indeed, are we any wiser? What has changed? And what have we learnt from what went wrong?

In part the answer lies in Darfur. The region in western Sudan widely acknowledged to be a humanitarian and human rights tragedy of the first order, and once again far away, hard to get to, hard to report from. Name for me the image that sticks in your mind that you have seen in the nightly news from Darfur. We're probably slightly

more aware of the events there but it still does not resonate. It has not managed somehow to capture our imagination, and I think that is a media failure.

For what it is worth, the international community has shown a measure of contrition with regard to the events in 1994. And in large part because of Rwanda a new paradigm emerged the Canadian inspired doctrine of 'the responsibility to protect'. It overturns the concept of absolute national sovereignty when it comes to massive violations of human rights and genocide marking the first time that state sovereignty and non interference in internal affairs have been qualified. And yet just as we were transfixed by OJ Simpson and the figure skater Tanya Harding at the height of the Rwanda events, we devote more space on Africa to Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie than we do to Darfur. Now, the shocking thing about these findings is that they no longer shock us. You've heard this before. This hasn't shocked us for a long time. In fact we now take this kind of news coverage for granted. Ironically, the 24 hour news cycle rather than leading to more in depth comprehensive reporting, has arguably driven coverage in the other direction towards episodic encounters with the events outside of our daily lives. Congo and Darfur have not been elevated to the level of 'cause celebre'. There is no tsunami affect. Nothing like the coverage of the famine in 1984. Perhaps at some level we draw a line between the victims of natural disaster and those who fall prey to disaster wrought by human beings. Frankly, I don't understand why we do this. That is part of the reason why I left the daily media a few years ago to join the faculty at Carleton, so I could spend some time trying to figure this out. To be honest, for now I have no answers.

Canada championed this doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect'. I know it may seem a bit naïve but I am still in my transformation from journalist to academic, I would argue that journalists and news organisations have a responsibility to report, to shed light and turn up the heat. We don't seem to have any reservations of doing this with domestic stories. My former employer The Toronto Star will overtly wage a campaign to shame the government into taking action on homelessness or the plight of the disadvantaged. We rarely apply the same standard to the coverage of international affairs. In my view it is up to journalists to crawl outside of their skin, to get beyond the domestic focus and to exercise their role fully. Just as nation states have begrudgingly accepted the responsibility to protect I think journalists as individuals must accept the responsibility to report.

I think my simple view is that whilst we've been lamenting for decades the failure of 'the media' to cover stories like Rwanda and Darfur, somehow I think we've all been mistaken by looking at the media from the top down. What is the media after all? A amorphous mass of organisations that do no work in concert. I think we would be best to look from the ground up at individual journalists and the role they can play. In addition to trying to act on these issues myself as a journalist I've tried to go a step further. Our university has established a media capacity building project in Rwanda called the Rwanda Initiative. We've sent a dozen journalism lecturers to Rwanda, as visiting lecturers, and another dozen journalism students who've worked as media interns to the New Times newspaper in Kigali, one of them sitting right here Brett Cupperwell. And we've only been doing this for a year in a country with a very hostile media environment. Frankly, it is very difficult to tell what kind of difference we've been able to make. But in my view, if only a handful of journalists with whom we've come in contact with in Rwanda emerge as a different kind of journalist at the

end. And if a handful of the Canadian journalists and journalism students who go to Rwanda are changed by this process, it is worth the investment.

I think that is 24 minutes and I will turn it over to my colleagues and other contributors to the book and hopefully we'll have time to have some questions later on.

James Putzel: Journalists are better than academics at sticking to time, well done....

Richard Dowden: My name is Richard Dowden, I'm the director of the Royal African Society now. I haven't seen Hotel Rwanda because I was there, and I've not done very much about Rwanda since for reasons that might become plain. I just want to say first of all I do resent any suggestion that the journalists who were there were somehow lazy, or cowardly, or anything, several of my friends were nearly killed there.

I just want to start by putting this in context in 1994. I was Africa Editor at The Independent. The Independent was losing money at that time. I don't think I went abroad at all in 1993, there was no money. Perhaps I should have sold my house and just gone off on my own as an individual, but as most people I had a wife and children to support and so I didn't do that, I stayed with the Independent even though I wasn't able to travel.

1994 was a bit better. But you put the daily news schedule into 4 quarters, the top quarter will hit the front page perhaps or the top of the inside page and you go down the bottom. I can probably count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that Africa got out of the bottom quarter, and it was a running joke because I was always saying 'oh this is a great story, this is a great story, this is a great story' and they would say, yeah what's happened 'Mobutu died? That's worth a couple of paragraphs'. It was a running joke. Africa was simply not important. It didn't sell newspapers. Newspapers have to make profits. So it wasn't important. But in 1994 it did become important.

I have covered 27 wars in Africa and the Middle East in which I've heard shots fired in anger. I've written the words 'hundreds of bodies' several times. I had seen massacres and in Uganda I've used the word 'genocide'. It made zero impact. What happened in Luwero triangle in the early 80's was genocide. Nobody cared.

The context of the Rwanda genocide was this. The previous year there had been a similar genocide in Burundi. Not a single staff journalist was there. I think the only person, the only journalist who is still around, was Mark Doyle. Mark went down there and it never made the top of the news. At the time there were figures of half a million people. I think in retrospect, when people turned it over it was a quarter of a million people, only a quarter of a million people. So that was the context in which the word genocide in Rwanda was being used, that was the feeling at the time. I'm not making any excuses, the media missed the story, but I'm trying to help you understand the context of what people felt and thought at the time.

The second big element was South Africa. South Africa's apartheid was over. There was going to be an election. That was going to be the great good news story, except

actually it wasn't. Because actually everyone thought there was going to be bloodshed, huge bloodshed, in the election in South Africa. If you remember Buthelezi and Inkatha were not going to take part. And what that meant was that their forces were not going to let anyone vote and would probably disrupt Soweto and other places. But journalists piled down to South Africa for this huge event not because it was going to be this great joyful event they thought it was but because they smelt blood. They were in the wrong place. I was packing to go to South Africa when the plane crashed. I was very torn. I talked to the Foreign Editor and he said 'watch Rwanda'. I went to South Africa. I did reports on the elections. The moment the polls closed I flew to Rwanda.

I think the second problem was getting there was. You couldn't fly into Kigali, so the idea of journalists just getting a plane ticket and going there, you couldn't get in. The only way in was with the RPF. This is when again I think history gets rewritten. The RPF were not particularly interested in the genocide at that stage. They wanted to show us how they were winning the war. I was lucky, I got a vehicle in Kampala and I drove down to the border. We had to go the long difficult road not the easy road because the easy road was being used for arm supplies from Uganda to the RPF. They kept me waiting a day and half just sitting doing nothing and then they took me to Kigali which they had surrounded and they wanted to show all their weapons around the city. It was only then that they took me down to the river and we began to see what we now all know happened. And I still think they hadn't quite picked up on the genocide themselves at this stage. But they were in complete control of all the journalists so although I had my own vehicle I had an RPF major in the car with me and he said where we could go and who I could talk to and everything else. So they were also in control.

The other thing that I think is history getting rewritten. I read the reports of the journalists who were there right from the beginning, among whom was Lindsey Hilsum. You look at those reports and they talk about ancient tribal hatreds and this sort of thing and I thought in the meantime what was happening in New York where General Dallaire has been supposed to have delivered these telegrams? He was also briefing the journalists everyday. So I asked the journalists who were there what was he telling you? He was saying 'end the civil war, that's what you've got to concentrate on, end the civil war, stop the fighting', not the genocidal stuff he was telling New York. So somebody here is rewriting history.

People did go in from the other side, some friends, and one group of journalists were nearly killed on three separate occasions. It was not as though people were going to be slicing up their victims and saying 'oh bring the cameras'. If you got anywhere near it, you were threatened. It was actually quite difficult to know what was going on.

Nick Hughes was extremely brave and he managed to stay there. I was given, 'right, in and out in 5 days and then you're back in London'. I said no I think I should go back in, they said, 'no come back to London'. What I did when I'd seen some of the sights I couldn't file from there. There weren't any mobile phones then. There weren't even satellite telex which was the only way you could file words from the bush. I had to get back from Rwanda and into Uganda and the RPF wouldn't take you

back in again once you'd been. So there were all sorts of things preventing you, to actually get out and tell the story you had to leave the country.

I remember doing what I usually do which is sit down, have a cigarette, and start writing. I just could, I just couldn't find the words. In the end I missed my deadline. I know I wrote the message as a message to the news editor, and it began 'sorry I can't tell you what I saw today'. Sorry, excuse me, it's sort of coming back...

I suddenly realised that was the beginning for the story but it still didn't make the front page. Perhaps if mobile phones had existed then it wouldn't have happened because communication was extremely difficult, finding out what was going on. I think a lot of people have claimed a great moral high-ground in having 20:20 vision in retrospect. It wasn't easy at the time. If it was the fault of the media, it certainly wasn't the fault of those journalists who were there at the time. Although you've all seen Hotel Rwanda, who has seen Nick Hughes's film which he made with his own money with Rwandan's very shortly afterwards acting the parts? Thanks Linda. Is it out? There you have it. We have a Hollywood version, we don't have Nick's own version, the man who saw it and actually used Rwandan's at the time.

Just to move on a little bit. Of course when the journalists thought 'oh yes this is a good story' it suddenly did move into the top quarter of the news. And it moved into the top quarter of the news when those amazing pictures from Goma, the great exodus moving into Goma in Congo happened, and all the cholera and all of that. That is when everyone went down there and that's where we saw not just the journalists, Goma was easy to get to in Eastern Congo, but also the NGOs competing daily on the death toll. I mean this is the sort of thing you...as a journalist maybe should have written more about. They were lined up. I could mention the names of them, but I think it would be a bit derogatory at this stage. But NGO one 'save the planet' and then followed by....and each one would give a higher death toll, because each one would knowing that the man with the highest death toll would get on the nine o'clock news that night, and being on the nine o'clock news meant you got money and that is how the NGOs were trying to manipulate the media in Goma. Of course, the huge tragedy was, the people in Goma were the genocidaires these were the people who had done the killing. Meanwhile in Rwanda a new government had come in and they had nothing, they were given nothing, they were ignored for months and months on end. The survivors who had actually been there were ignored. The people camped out in Goma were of course the people who had done the killing and they got far more media attention than the victims. So I think there's another lesson. And simply because the cameras had been able to get in there and get nice pictures and as we know the whole media is led by pictures now because if it's one TV it has to be in the newspaper. And so, that is how that happened.

I don't know whether it would happen now. I think probably blogs are going hopefully save the world from this sort of thing but there are still plenty of places in Africa where such a thing could happen and I think it could get ignored again. Thank you.

[Clapping]

Linda Melvern: I'm so pleased this book is published. It is extremely timely in what I consider to be an increasing interest in the circumstances of the genocide in Rwanda. I would like to thank you very much for asking me to share what is now 13 years investigative work on the circumstances of the genocide.

I too come from another age. I'm a casualty of Rupert Murdoch. I used to be on the Sunday Times inside team and I like to think that had the genocide happened some 20 - 25 years ago that a team of six at least would have been sent to try to understand how a planned political campaign to commit genocide was perpetrated. There were no sealed trains or secluded camps in Rwanda. The killing took place in broad daylight in plain view in schools, hospitals, clinics and churches. That the murder of this magnitude could unfold without the UK government of the day making a statement I consider to be one of the scandals of the last century. And almost 13 years research continues to this day.

I was UN Secretariat building in April 1994. I'd left the Sunday Times and was writing non-fiction books and I had completed a fifty year history of the UN which was being filmed for a Channel 4 series called The UN Blues. My first interviews about the genocide in Rwanda took place with non permanent ambassadors sitting in the Security Council. Eventually, I was leaked an account of what was said in those secret Security Council meetings to decide policy towards Rwanda. From that document we learnt that it was the UK government that first called for a withdrawal of the peacekeepers on April 21st 1994.

In June 1994, lieutenant General Dallaire, who had stayed behind with a volunteer force of peacekeepers in Rwanda flew to Nairobi, where at a press conference he told international journalists that they had dropped the ball. They were allowing fence sitting politicians off the hook for the Rwandan genocide. There was no outcry of genocide in the press and no choices were being given and no risks had been taken. This failure by the press bolstered the line from UK diplomats and politicians who kept insisting that only a massive and dramatic intervention would succeed and that this of course was out the question in the midst of civil war.

This country then offered lieutenant General Dallaire and his peacekeepers the only offer in the midst of three months of genocide was fifty flatbed trucks with no drivers, and no spare parts and no means to get them to Rwanda. I have read every single Dallaire memo from the field and every single response back to Dallaire. My second book on the genocide 'Conspiracy to Murder', Kofi Anan allowed me into the paper trail. The current government in Rwanda allowed me access to some of the documents that were abandoned when the genocider fled so my second book 'Conspiracy to Murder' details the planning of the genocide.

The genocide in Rwanda occurred in the year in which we wept through Steven Spielberg's 'Schindlers List' and while western leaders walked along D-day beeches and celebrated the defeat of fascism. It was left to UN peacekeepers to get the blame for Rwanda. The 1948 Convention on the prevention and punishment on the crime of genocide was the world's first truly universal, comprehensive and codified protection of human rights and it stood for a fundamental and important principle, that whatever evil may befall any group, nation, or people, it was a matter of concern not just for those people but for the entire human family. The UN was founded on commitment

to the rule of international law and a rules based international society. The erosion of this law and its abuse by democratic politicians and should be of utmost concern to us all. I do believe still, and although journalism has changed a great deal, I do believe that it is still the job of journalists ensure that governments do not evade their responsibility under international law and that they are held accountable for their actions. I am trying to ensure that they do so for the genocide in Rwanda. Thank you.

Mike Dottridge: My name is Mike Dottridge. I'm not a journalist. For your possible interest today I guess what is relevant is that from 1979 till 1997 I was Amnesty International's desk officer dealing with Central Africa, including Rwanda. 1997 until 1994 I was their director of their work on Africa so that covered both the genocide and a whole lot of other disasters. I'll say just a few words to supplement Allan's thesis that the absence media in Rwanda facilitated the genocide. I'm going to concentrate on the period not only before the genocide but even before the Rwandese Patriotic Front launched its attack on Rwandese soil in October 1990. Amidst many counties in post colonial Africa where the government kept a tight hold on the media I think Rwanda was nevertheless unique. ORINFOR, it's Ministry of Information, its information machine up until 1990 was unique in the sense that it was operating primarily in a national language that non Rwandese couldn't understand but because it was permanently engaged in a propaganda battle to persuade the majority population of the country to hate the minority and to look out for fifth colonists. Although I started investigating human rights abuses in Rwanda in 1980 it wasn't until 1986 that I made my first visit and I guess that had we convened a meeting here on my return from London and called it Human Rights situation in Rwanda the room would have been empty.

There was no interest. The only interest when we began to document not only the political trials and political presidents but also the murder of 70 supporters of the government that President Habyarimana overthrew in 1973, the only interest was in Belgium and the interest was from supporters of the Kigali regime. And at this point it is perhaps worth sharing with you the notes from my diary when I came back from Rwanda in 1986 which said there are two powers in Rwanda. The one I hadn't realised was that the Catholic Church has virtually colonised Rwanda. There were two powers and in a sense they were both totalitarian, and they were both very pleased to have an orderly population that believed the information that was coming at them. That was the other big difference that I detected on my various visits to Rwanda in the 1980's compared to other countries I visited in Africa where people had a healthy cynicism. That seemed to be missing in Rwanda, disastrously missing. So the information machine controlled people in a way I didn't experience elsewhere even though in other countries that awful message about fifth colonists, driving out patriots that was something that occurred quite frequently.

ORINFOR was operating in Rwandese so it wasn't been scrutinised by anyone of the westerners, the Europeans, the non Rwandese present in Rwanda. The same of course Radio Min Kabin afterwards. If there is a single message, and it's not just for the media, is that we all need to learn a foreign language because allowing the media to operate with its messages of hate and for those to go completely unnoticed not only by the outside world, but the people sitting in Kigali, that is criminal negligence. Yet when I began with translators to read the weekly government newspaper in the 1980's

I discovered far more information about political events, about political trials in Rwanda than virtually that any other newspaper published in Africa about political dissidence in their own country. So it was not that the information was not there, it was that nobody bothered to consult it.

It's not only journalists that need holding to account it is a whole set of NGOs, both those who were making money by serving food to Interhamwe murderers in Goma. And the organisation that I was working for Amnesty International that generally no-one has dared to criticise because it vaguely closer to the angels than to the devil. But it made huge mistakes over the years not only on Rwanda on plenty of other countries. For a start before the RPF invasion, we had the first arrests of journalists in Rwanda. And the human rights agency based in London had a natural predisposition to believing that journalists who were being arrested were being punished for exercising their freedom of expression. And the first journalist I remember being arrested, March 1990 a chap called Hussan Ingesi who I'm pleased to report has been locked away by the International Criminal Court. There was a predisposition to believe that they were prisoners of conscience. That predisposition was understandable because the government under President Habyarimana would invariably use nasty techniques, whether it was unfair trials or confessions under torture to convict people, so there is every good reason to suspect that people who were being condemned by this government were innocent even though they weren't.

I won't go into a great deal of detail about what happened next because most of it is known. I went to Rwanda again in 1991 accompanied by a board member of Amnesty to investigate some of the killings, what had been happening in the disastrous 6 months after the RPF invasion. It wasn't until the following year that we published a report entitled 'Rwanda: Persecution of Tutsi minority and repression of government critics'. I think it achieved zero publicity. It was probably partly Amnesty's fault because they had of course the usual western bias to giving attention to other parts of the world and undoubtedly partly the media's responsibility. The same person who accompanied me and had seen the problems first hand in 1991, was back there in 1993 as the special reporter for the UN on extrajudicial executions put together a very fine report in which he detailed the evidence of government complicity in some 2000 murders and in 1993 this report too was buried. So there were plenty of alarm calls. The world chose not to listen to them and I guess that helicopters falling out of the skies in Somalia had something to do with that.

Let me just say a final word about the responsibilities of the international press. Because some of the problems we experienced in Rwanda had gone right back, as Richard Dowden was mentioning to the genocide in the Luwero triangle 10 years earlier, the genocide that wasn't recognised either in this country or elsewhere and at that point there was a very influential journalist here, born in South Africa who was influencing not only the media but other journalists and saying look the government in power in Uganda is really the best bet 'lets support Obote'. Now that journalist had a responsibility for suppressing information and facilitating murder in Uganda. And we've had that same phenomenon repeatedly in Britain of journalists who after all are in a minority if they take an interest in African affairs while their based in London having enormous influence, but sometimes a very politicised partisan position that either their editors or their audience don't fully understand and they too can poison our minds. It's not only genocidal maniacs in Kigali. Thank you.

James Putzel: Ok, we don't have a lot of time and so I would like to make sure that the audience has a chance to raise questions. So if you can keep your question or brief comment very brief indeed that will give us time to return to all the speakers. You can raise a question related to the entire panel or to a specific member of the panel.

Question: There were some French journalists that were critical of the French government line that the conflict wasn't ethnic and it wasn't a genocide, so even though the French government was trying to keep the decision making very close to home and prevent the journalists from getting access to information, genocide better informed coverage of France for closer linkages with France...and if these journalists maybe have access to additional information which...and since then, have there been any attempts to find this information?

Question: No one has mentioned Congo where 5 million people are supposed to have died. The International Rescue Committee came up with that figure. Admittedly that wasn't a genocidal policy but Rwanda was very instrumental in invading Congo and looting it. Everyone seems too scared to criticise Rwanda and a bit concerned that the guilt that the west feels about the genocide is actually hindering us at the moment at pointing the finger at Rwanda and saying look you guys have been out of line.

Question: ... I read a report in the Sunday Times which was an expose criticising each role as the head of peacekeeping at the time from General Dallaire to Kofi Anan. I just was interested to hear the panels thoughts or whether it was slander against Kofi Anan or whether there was grounds for accusations of negligence?

Question: I'm interested in the opinion of the panel about the coverage of the consequences of the situation in Rwanda, mainly of the activities of the International Criminal Tribunal in Rwanda established by the UN. The point was made that these activities were overlooked and there wasn't enough competent coverage, it was lacking resources and what it has done is tremendous in the post genocide particular history and so on and therefore they're opinion about the coverage of the tribunals?

Question: Do you think that the nature media coverage would be altered had the terminology connected with the genocide been employed earlier than it was?

Question: I just wanted to ask the panel whether the optimism that had there been more international media coverage it would have actually changed western policy. Do you think the international media actually has that kind of an impact on foreign policy within western countries or should the media be a little more pessimistic about the impact of the media in that respect?

Question: I think an underlying issue that Richard touched upon was that media organisations are commercial entities and what they need to do is to sell papers, but at the same time there is a responsibility to report. I'd be really interested to hear Richard and the panel's thoughts on bridging this divide.

Question: Two questions... I was wondering if there is any documentation or current research on the genocide looking at non western responses to genocide, if there

was going to be a follow up on what you do call genocide.... Rwanda has kind of got general public attention since but if there's a follow up on that story.... and what has happened on that in regard to Rwanda?

James Putzel: Ok, I'm going to go the panel now and if there's time we'll come back for another round from the audience.

Allan Thompson: There is obviously another collection to be written in answer to all these questions. Quickly, I just want to say, I think that Richard made a very very important point. The word journalist is not synonymous with 'the media' and in a way the crux of this conundrum of the media and the Rwandan genocide is how could this have happened? Why is it that the media did not more accurately and comprehensively report the events in Rwanda in 1994? I know that Richard, Mark Doyle, Lindsey Hilsum, and a number of others individual journalists who all have papers in this collection did remarkable work as journalists. Somehow the remarkable work of some individual journalists does not translate into comprehensive media coverage, so one of the unresolved research questions is where is the disconnect? Is it with the gatekeepers? Is it with the media system at large? So I think that was a very important point and needed to be underlined.

I'm going to run down some of this really quickly. The things I don't know anything about I'll probably just jump over. French journalists? I'm sorry I can't answer, maybe someone else can wade in on that.

In a sense Congo and Burundi I'd kind of answer in the same respect. It is kind of ironic that a decade later we are somewhat familiar albeit far too late with what happened in Rwanda. This room is full. If the poster were about Burundi it probably would not be full. Somehow it has permeated our consciousness maybe partly through popular culture rather than media. I think the same conundrum that resulted in Rwanda being under-covered from especially 1994, obviously that same formula still exists in relation to Burundi and Congo. We're just oblivious, they're far away, they're dangerous, it's difficult, the resources, you bring it up in a new meeting and it's what is happening down the street? So that is not an answer it is just another question.

Western guilt hindering our criticism of Rwanda? That is probably exactly right. There are other countries in the world I think as well that have been the victims of horrific human rights violations in this century and the last one that then get away with atrocities later on and I'm not saying that Rwanda necessarily is in that category but they've probably had a bit of a 'bi' in the terms of some coverage of post genocide Rwanda and what is going on there. Partly that's a fall back to the complete utter ignorance once the events were over in 1994 and 1996 we went right back to ignoring Rwanda again. No major news agency has anyone based in Rwanda now. So chances are there won't be anyone to cover what's going on.

Media and the G word genocide. Mark Doyle speaks to this in his paper in the book. He was there more consistently than anyone through 1994. We went back through his scripts trying to find at what point did he use the word 'genocide'? And it is interesting looking at the way his reporting evolved because he was sort of as good as it got on the ground in Rwanda. He admits, and Richard spoke to this as well, that

this was the fog of war. When you're actually there in the middle of it you don't know what the hell is going on. You're not even sure who is killing who. You only know what you see in front of you. It can get quite a while to put the pieces together. In Mark's case he really only began to discern the pattern, the systematic nature of the killings, only after a week or two and he doesn't think that he used the word genocide until the end of April early May when it came into more common usage. Ultimately, frankly, I wish it didn't matter what we called it because what was happening to that woman in those images I don't think you need to call that genocide in order to figure out that there is something that needs to be done about that. I should stop.

Oh, the one question about non western media, we do tend to being white centric focused we think media has to be about London, Paris, Washington and New York. We did in this collection try to at least have one paper that would examine about the way that African media reported on the genocide and amazing there is no literature on that. All the focus has been on the way the international media had failed to cover the story. An academic in the US did a paper for me looking at the coverage in the Guardian in Lagos and the Nation in Kenya and looked at 100 days of the genocide and compared the two and found a very interesting pattern. Some of the same 'not in my back yard' phenomena that would exist with western media. The Guardian in Lagos because it's a bit further away and it's 'not in my back yard' their coverage in the end was not as comprehensive and as in depth as the Nation in Kenya and so I think that says something interesting more than about the media than about African journalists. Anyway, I'll be quiet.

Richard Dowden: I'll try and be quick. French journalists, I didn't see them there at the time. There were quite a lot in South Africa so I'm not sure. Linda will know more about that than I do.

Rwandan guilt? Yes, I've got a lot of problems with that. Because the Tutsi's were victims and you now have a Tutsi government in Rwanda it is given a lot of free reign and never criticised even when its opponents disappear or it marches into Congo where something like 3 million people have died, we don't know the exact figures. It is not as if it is a second genocide I would not say that but affect has been genocidal and they've had no criticism whatsoever.

Kofi Anan, yeah, again Linda knows more about this than I do. I think, knowing what he did. His deputy as well, they were receiving the telegrams and didn't push them. Maybe a resignation might be in order.

I went back to the tribunal for Rwanda when it was starting up it was totally chaotic. Because it was outside the country it just couldn't relate to the country. Millions and millions was wasted flying backwards and forwards, I think it was a huge mistake to have it in Arusha which didn't have the capacity to sustain something like that and it really took so long to get started that it didn't have an impact on Rwanda itself and I think this is the biggest lesson for the ICC. It just didn't feed back to Rwanda. My feelings were very much like Gerard Prunier and he wrote his book that he wrote English in protest to French policy, but he just said was my solution he said, was the get the top twenty guys and put them against a wall and kill them in public and show it again and again on television in Rwanda, this is our justice and I do think that

would have had a far greater impact than the ICC. But that is a very emotional reaction.

Will it change anything? I think it could. Again, I'm looking forward to Linda's answer on this. What Douglas Herd and Linda Chalker who were responsible for British African policy at the time have said or not said recently except 'we didn't know', I'd be fascinated to know, anyway, I will leave that to her.

And Burundi has had some terrible atrocities verging on the genocidal. Now the last of the And it is the extraordinary thing is that in cold political terms, the Tutsi minority has continued to rule in both countries but now in Burundi you now have a more democratic system and the last group of Hutu rebels have finally have been chalked in so maybe if Eastern Congo stays peaceful you will get peace in Burundi as well as Rwanda, but I think Rwanda itself I don't consider it to be a very democratic country, it is ruled by a very small elite and they do what they need to do to stay in power.

Linda Melvern: There was one question before I begin that got lost there. What did the other countries offer? What did other non-western countries offer? The following African countries offered troops to Dallaire's volunteer force, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Senegal, Malawi, Congo, Mali, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, all offered troops to go to Rwanda. What they needed was airlifts they needed airlift. They needed airlift and protective vehicles and of course no offers were made at all to get them to Rwanda.

On the French, the French government I think we have to be correct in that it was the line of Francois Mitterrand. The entire French policy towards Rwanda, be it security services, DGSEs, Ministry of Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs was directed by the Elise Paris and there was no political oversight whatsoever including shadowy elements, the mercenaries, who did have quite a role in what happened in Rwanda, and it will be unravelling that and the support for the ideology of Hutu power.... It will be unravelling that plot which still needs to be done.

On Kofi Anan. For 'A people betrayed' my first book on the genocide I was to discover that Boutros Boutros Ghali, the then Egyptian Secretary General of the UN, insisted when he became Secretary General on controlling the flow of information to the Security Council. Only someone with Boutros Boutros Ghali's permission could address the Security Council and this included all the meetings on former Yugoslavia and the civil war and Rwanda, and it turned out, I was to discover, that it was Boutros Boutros Ghali in 1990 facilitated the first arms deal between Rwanda and Egypt, so he as Secretary General, there is no doubt about that on that he had a determining role in the UN Secretariat, and particularly the Security Council. The buck stops in the Security Council, it does not stop with individual international civil servants. Had Kofi Anan not become the Secretary General I doubt any member of the press would be interested in his role at all.

ICTR, I have one comment on that. I agree with everything that Richard said on that not being in Rwanda. On my first list of those responsible, a list that I collected in July 1994, there are 240 Rwandans directly responsible for the genocide, for planning it, for financing it and for perpetrating it. The ICTR has perhaps 60 I think at the last count defendants; this will mean that when the ICTR closes down, unless Western

governments are really active, that the majority of the people who have planned, financed and perpetrated the 1994 genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda will escape. On genocide terminology I would like to know who in the legal department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office under Sir Franklin Berman who will not talk to me, I would like to ask when genocide was determined in Rwanda I would like to know why the UK ambassador to the UN, Lord David Hannay who told fellow ambassadors on April 29th that if they called the genocide in Rwanda a genocide they would be a laughing stock, he said this on our behalf. I'd like to unravel the decision making in the FCO that lead to this. I would also like to know why it was the UK that first called for a withdrawal of our staff on April 1st that it was clear at least to Oxfam that a genocide was underway and these questions and more still need to be answered.

[Clapping]

Mike Dottridge: I've got very little to offer because I think you've got answers to most of your questions. Unlike Linda, I wouldn't minimise the role of Kofi Anan, I was writing to him in 1993 about Somalia, when the UN was already a cause of problems, either not stopping abuse occurring or facilitating abuse occurring, but I'll leave that aside.

The G word preoccupied the organisation that I worked for in April 1994, Amnesty International because it had an unwritten policy of not using the word genocide. In effect it didn't want to get hung up on the legal implications of using that word, rather I suppose than denouncing that, I'd say there were lots of problems with the labels, the wording that has been used in relation to all sorts of killings where various ethnic groups have been targeted, not necessarily with the prime purpose of destroying an entire ethnic group, but nevertheless targeting that ethnic group and right through the 1980's I was reporting on cases of that sort in various in African countries.

Yes, I think that the legal implications of the word meant that the scale of the atrocity was not being recognised in not only the Foreign Office in this country but many other organisations as well as governments. The absurd trepidation of crossing the line and calling it genocide I suspect cost many lives. It was a false problem at the time.

Richard Dowden: Can I just ask a question? When Colin Powell used it about Darfur and then nothing happened does that mean that whole legal obligation to act has fallen into disrepute, because it won't work anymore.

Mike Dottridge: Certainly a lot of pronouncements by Colin Powell and his allies about various tough words mean that they no longer have much impact on us. No I think it's rather that the Rwandese experience built up the word in a certain way. I think the Darfur situation is a different one, the lack of unanimity on whether the word is appropriate and how to deal with Sudan just shows once again that the international community is a bunch of bumpkins.

Allan Thomson: I think this also links us back to another question that we didn't answer, when can media coverage impact policy? So I don't think it will be the use of the word genocide or not that moves the decision makers, I actually think that people move the decision makers and one mistake we make is thinking the news media is

primarily a source of information. It is a source of information but Romeo Dallaire makes a pretty convincing argument with Rwanda that the French, the Belgians, the British and the Americans particularly knew precisely what was going on in Rwanda, they did not need the news media as the source of their information. So while it is primarily a source of information the connection between the flow of news information and actions by political decision makers, I think that is not just about information, that is about the magnitude of the reporting, the impact that images can have, the momentum that can be gained by a huge story that simply cannot be overlooked by decision makers, and that did not happen with Rwanda. It has not yet happened with Darfur. I don't know what the recipe is for that. For example in Somalia, a single media image, a photograph taken by a colleague of mine at the Toronto Star, of an American pilot being dragged through the streets. That single media image drove the United States out of Somalia. That impacted policy directly. Of course that was because it was a white pilot, it wasn't a Somali victim who'd been killed and there were all the other parts of the formula. That single image changed policy. A year later the absence of images from Rwanda I think helped those who didn't want to be pushed to take action in Rwanda, who didn't want to use the word genocide, who didn't want the obligation at the Security Council. The existence of images directed policy the absence of images I think also influenced policy but in the reverse.

James Putzel: Allan, there was one question about the implications of the commercial nature of the ownership of media?

Allan Thomson: This ties back to Richard's point too. There is a historical legacy. For the most part our media organisations are commercial enterprises. They have to package a product that will earn enough revenue to regenerate the operation. I worked with the Toronto Star, which is a big rich, centre left progressive news organisation, which still had to be convinced it was worth committing resources to this story, or would we be better opening a new bureau in the city or somewhere in Canada and in the end they closed the bureau in Africa and they closed their bureau in Latin America, because they made a determination if we're going to disperse our resources on news gathering, there is more return if we use resources at home domestically. I'm still not convinced; I don't know how they do this, I don't know if they do this through focus groups or how they make these commercial decisions, I'm still not convinced that they are right. This room is full. My personal experience is that whenever I write about Rwanda, people like Romeo Dallaire, I get a tremendous response from Canadians; and it's not from angry student agitators, it is from the middle section of people who news rooms wouldn't think would be interested in Africa or the developing world. So I think they make a mistake. That's where I come to this if we can't change it from above, no I don't think you have to sell your house and go to Rwanda. But I think individual journalists bit by bit can cumulatively have an impact then if they're the one who captures that image that moves policy then they will have a tremendous impact.

James Putzel: I would like to add in answer to some of what was raised about Rwanda, that as we demand critical scrutiny of what was going on in Rwanda, we should also understand that they marched into Congo in relationship to an existing impact force of the Interhamwe former Rwandan government who were poised to destabilise their country. We're going to be doing ongoing research and work

including seminars, as well as the many issues raised at the Crisis Research Centre. Unfortunately, we have to tie this up now. I want to thank Allan and the entire panel for a very stimulating, disturbing, ongoing and very current and important issues that should be concerning us all. I urge you to take a copy of the book, take a copy of the media report....

Allan Thompson: This is not a marketing ploy. There are a lot of you here, if anyone here has a question they would like to put to us or pass on I've created a vanity site for the promotion of this book but it's the easiest way to make contact allanthompson.ca there is an email link there, anything that you'd like to ask. By all means get in touch if you'd like to, I have a lot of emails from students who are doing research in this area and there are a lot of resources there that people can access. By all means get in touch if you'd like to...

James Putzel: For those of you who are invited to the The Old Building, I'm sorry that is by invitation only..... Lets thank the panel

[Clapping]

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