

NEVER AGAIN?

THE FAILURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY
AND THE MEDIA DURING THE RWANDA GENOCIDE

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Abstract

Following the Holocaust, the international community vowed to “never again” stand by and witness the perpetration of genocide. This has since proved to be an empty promise, however, as since 1945 the world has stood by and watched several genocides happen without intervening. Nowhere is this so clear as in the case of Rwanda. The story of Rwanda is a tragedy on its own – 800,000 people were massacred in the space of 100 days – but it is made even more so by the fact that this genocide could have been prevented at several junctures. Even after the killing had commenced, even a small international commitment of troops and support could have saved more than half of the eventual victims. With its passivity, the Western world condemned hundreds of thousands of innocent people to death, and the guilt of that inaction will never fade.

The Western media played a vital role in facilitating that inaction. The lack of coverage in general made it easy for the West to ignore the situation, and when the media did cover the genocide, they framed the coverage in such a way as to tacitly support Western policies of non-intervention. Finally, once the media did grasp on to the tragedy of Rwanda, they continued to ignore the killing and focused instead on the more attractive story of the flood of refugees that left the country in the wake of the genocide.

The international community and the Western media together helped facilitate the extermination of 800,000 people. It was an atrocity that could have been averted.

"THE MOST ABUSED WORDS ARE 'NEVER AGAIN.'
WHEN THEY WERE SAYING THAT IN 1994,
IT WAS HAPPENING AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN.
SO 'NEVER AGAIN' TO ME IS NOT ENOUGH."¹

~Paul Rusesabagina, survivor of the Rwandan Genocide

Introduction

“Never again”² became an international catchphrase in the years following the Holocaust. After the Nazi government of Germany exterminated 12 million people, 6 million of whom were Jews, the world awoke to the horror of genocide and vowed to never again let a crime of such magnitude take place. In 1948, the newly-created United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defined genocide as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.³

¹ Paul Rusesabagina, quoted in “Why ‘Never Again’ Is Not Enough,” *BBC News Online*. January 27, 2005. Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4213179.stm>. Accessed January, 28 2008.

² Originally coined by the Jewish Defense League (Robert I. Friedman, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: From FBI Informant to Knesset Member*. (New York: Lawrence Hill & Co, 1990): 12), the phrase has since been used in the wake of many atrocities, from the Holocaust to Argentina’s Disappeared People, where it was in the title of the report “Nunca Mas (Never Again): The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared,” to swear that such atrocities will never be permitted to happen again.

³ “UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 2.” Accessed January 28, 2008. Available from <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>.

Since the adoption of the Convention only sixty years ago, recognized genocides have occurred in Ukraine, Burundi, Paraguay, Cambodia, Iran, and Rwanda,⁴ and today in the Darfur region of Sudan. For the most part, the global community did nothing to prevent these atrocities, even though several were committed over a period of years. The international community has frequently failed to respond appropriately to incidences of genocide and other significant human rights violations.

Media coverage of gross human rights violations is not a new phenomenon – images depicting emaciated concentration camp survivors⁵ were published in the wake of the Holocaust, and international newspapers⁶ covered the events of the Armenian genocide of 1914.⁷ As globalization has rendered the world smaller and far-away lands more accessible, however, the media has played an increasingly important role in determining of which topics and events the public is aware. According to Stanley Cohen, “the media do not tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about.”⁸ The media often miss and misinterpret important events, especially in areas of the world that face what Cohen has labeled “the Chad rule:” there is no demand for information or media coverage in countries that, like Chad, are geopolitically and economically insignificant.⁹

Several questions come to mind in light of these two factors. How is it possible that a world that once vowed to “never again” let genocide occur has seen such a

⁴ Benjamin Whitaker, *Revised and Updated Report on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. July 2, 1985. Accessed January 28, 2008. Available from <http://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G85/123/55/pdf/G8512355.pdf?OpenElement>: page 8.

⁵ See Appendix C for images from the Holocaust.

⁶ See Appendix B for images from the Armenian genocide.

⁷ Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response*. (New York: Perennial, 2003): 282-285.

⁸ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001): 169.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

collection of events take place in the years since? In this post-Holocaust age, what are the obligations of the international community to stopping genocide as it occurs? How do the political implications of intervention influence the willingness of the international community to acknowledge genocide as it happens? Some of the most pressing and most immediate questions today, however, pertain to the media.¹⁰ In an age of immediate and universal access to information, what role does the media play, and what role *should* the media play in raising awareness of genocide and other human rights issues? Does the media have an obligation to not only raise public awareness of atrocities, but to also try to influence policy-makers to take action to mitigate these crimes? And what is the nature of reporting on genocide and other atrocities? Does the media demonstrate a regional preference or bias when it comes to covering gross human rights abuses, and would such a bias constitute a failure on the part of the media, or is it merely reflective of the consumer subset they are serving?

This paper will examine the roles played by the international community and the media in cases of genocide and other gross human rights violations. It will explore the motivations behind the international community's decisions to intervene or to refrain from intervening in cases of mass atrocities. It will also analyze the correlation between lack of media coverage of such cases and the failure of the international community to respond in such a manner as to mitigate the outcome and save lives. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 will serve as a case study to examine how the international community responded, or failed to respond, to a situation of humanitarian crisis, and it will illuminate why the international community decided against

¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper, the media pertains to the major conventional sources of news in the Western world, namely newspapers, magazines, and television news programs.

intervention during the genocide. The Rwandan case will also expose the role the media plays in facilitating or mitigating the systematic violations of human rights in a time of conflict. Finally, Rwanda will be compared to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, which occurred at the same time as the Rwandan genocide, to explore the regional biases of the international media. This comparison will show how those biases affect public opinion and impact the creation of policy. This paper will find that the failure of the international community to respond to the Rwanda genocide – and to gross human rights violations in other parts of the developing world – is partly attributable to the nature of media coverage of mass atrocities and the media's preference for covering certain countries and certain areas of the world over others.

The Rwandan Case

Background: Leading up to the Genocide

The 1994 Rwanda genocide has become a familiar story. In the space of 100 days, Hutu extremists massacred 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a killing spree that was even more efficient than what was seen during the Holocaust – in Rwanda, Tutsis were murdered at a rate five times faster than what was witnessed in Nazi Germany.¹¹ The roots of the animosity between the Tutsis and the Hutus were deep, and by most accounts, the Hutu extermination plans were years in the making.

In the years before colonization, the land that became Rwanda was home to three different social groups: the Hutu, who made up about 82% of the population, the Tutsi, who comprised around 17% of the population, and the Twa, who accounted for

¹¹ Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*. (London: Zed Books, 2000): 4.

less than 1% of the population.¹² Before the Europeans arrived, the boundaries between these groups were soft and permeable ones, so much so that to distinguish them as ethnic groups would be inaccurate. Intermarriage between groups was common, and they shared a common language and religion.¹³ While there is some disagreement between historians on the nature of Hutu-Tutsi relations before the arrival of Western colonizers, the majority agree that relations between the two were cordial, for the most part. While Tutsi kings did rule over the territory, there was a symbiotic element to the nature of the relationship between the groups.¹⁴

Under colonial rule, this relationship began to change, as first, the Germans and later, the Belgians used group identity to create a system of rule that used local people to enact colonial policies. The Tutsis were favored by the Belgians for their high pre-colonial standing and for their supposed racial superiority.¹⁵ Tutsis in power under the Belgians were seen as collaborating with the oppressors, especially by the Hutu majority. Over time, a more discordant relationship began to form, and group identities began to harden.¹⁶ These new identities became permanent in 1933, when the Belgian colonial administration issued identity cards to all native people, classifying each person as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa. These classifications were random and were based on physical or economic assets, often ignoring birth.¹⁷ During the era of Belgian rule, Hutus experienced systematic discrimination.

¹² Alan J. Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda*. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2001): 5.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: the Rwandan Genocide*. (London: Verso, 2004): 6.

In 1962, Rwanda formally achieved its independence, but this independence followed in the wake of the first significant violence between the Hutu and the Tutsi. In 1959, the Hutu armed themselves as a group and prepared to take power violently from the Tutsi. The Hutu were supported by Belgium, who had recently begun to realign themselves with the Hutu over the Tutsi. During the 1959 push for independence, Belgian troops handed power over to Hutu leaders,¹⁸ which led to the killing and displacement of thousands of Tutsis.¹⁹

At this time, the United Nations found that Hutu policies against the Tutsis were similar to ““Nazism against the Tutsi minorities.””²⁰ Rwanda’s new ethnic divides only continued to harden in the first years following independence. Parties in the newly-created Rwanda formed along ethnic lines, and Rwanda never experienced any of the nationalism that was seen in other emerging post-colonial states, as the population was focused on the intra-national divides.²¹

Rwanda’s first democratically elected president was Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu, who led a pro-Hutu, hard-line government known for their policies of Tutsi oppression. At the same time, Tutsi refugees who had fled during the violence of 1959 began to launch attacks from Uganda and Burundi, leading the government to name them as rebels and “*inyenzi*,” or “cockroaches.”²² This term would continue to be used by Hutu extremists to describe Tutsis and was one of the buzzwords of the genocide of 1994. Between 1959 and 1967, when the rebel attacks ended, 20,000 Tutsi had been

¹⁸ Kuperman, *The Limits* 7.

¹⁹ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 7.

²⁰ Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² Kuperman, *The Limits*, 7.

killed and 200,000 had fled Rwanda. After these losses, Tutsis went from comprising 17% of the population to comprising 9% of the population.²³

Kayibanda was deposed in a 1973 coup led by Juvénal Habyarimana, who turned Rwanda into a one-party authoritarian state. Under Habyarimana's rule, ethnic violence in Rwanda halted, and he fulfilled his promise to stabilize the country.²⁴ Habyarimana implemented strict one-party rule; there was widespread suppression of civil and political rights, and citizens – even babies – were compelled to join the Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) – the party of the government. But under Habyarimana's rule, Rwanda gained an reputation internationally for moderate foreign policy, good economic management, and the improvement of basic infrastructure within the country.²⁵ In fact, during Habyarimana's first fifteen years, Rwanda's economy grew more than that of any other state in the region.²⁶

A declining global economy and outside pressure towards democratization destabilized Rwanda in the late 1980s, however, and political opposition to Habyarimana's regime began to develop. Additionally, Tutsi refugees that had been living in such neighboring countries as Uganda since the early 1960s began to talk about invading Rwanda.²⁷ In October of 1990, as the Rwandan government began to institute reforms towards democracy and repatriation of refugees, the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces invaded from Uganda.²⁸

²³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 10-11.

²⁵ Ibid., 11.

²⁶ Kuperman, *The Limits*, 8.

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 13.

While the RPF invasion quickly failed, due in large part to the military support that France, Belgium, and Zaire gave to Habyarimana's Rwandan forces, the invasion inspired the first plans towards the eventual genocide. According to Linda Melvern, in the wake of the RPF invasion, "the idea that genocide of the Tutsi would solve all problems was spread in a series of secret meetings."²⁹ Hutu leaders also discussed the possibility of enacting a policy of "civilian self-defense," in which every civilian would be armed by the government to "protect the country from outside attack."³⁰

Throughout 1991 and 1992, the RPF continued its assault on Rwanda's borders, and the international community continued to pressure Habyarimana to liberalize and democratize his country. Political opposition to the President and the MRND continued to build, and by June of 1991, a new constitution that legalized the formation of opposition parties was enacted.³¹

In 1993, after three years of pressure, Habyarimana and the RPF met at the negotiation table in Arusha, Tanzania to discuss a power-sharing pluralist arrangement in Rwanda.³² At this point Habyarimana was not amenable to negotiation, but he had no other options, given the pressure that was being put on him by the RPF and the international community. In August of 1993, the RPF and Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords, which granted the RPF and opposition parties majorities in the cabinet and legislature before the elections were held. RPF forces would also be

²⁹ Ibid., 20.

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ Ibid., 25.

³² Kuperman, *The Limits*, 11.

integrated into the Rwandan army, with RPF soldiers holding at least half of the officer positions.³³

While on paper the Accords were a power-sharing arrangement, in reality many Rwandan Hutus viewed them as a form of surrender to the rebel forces and feared their implications.³⁴ As soon as the Accords were enacted, Hutus in positions of power in Rwanda began working to weaken the agreement. Hutu fears of Tutsi reprisals for years of discrimination led to an increased sense of paranoia infecting the population, especially as RPF forces continued to advance through the country, and during this time Hutu-led attacks on Tutsis increased.³⁵

Ethnic boundaries, which had begun to soften during the early years of Habyarimana's rule, began to harden again, as Hutus feared what would happen if Tutsi forces took over the country. Attitudes and relations between the two groups degenerated during these years. One Hutu genocide perpetrator testified during the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)³⁶ that

'Tutsis and Hutus know each other very well. One can easily identify a Tutsi by his attitude, his bearing, and a Tutsi can recognize a Hutu by his attitude, his bearing, and his physique...this hatred existed for a very long time, since 1959 in particular, until the time when the genocide took place in 1994.'³⁷

This solidification of the divides and the animosity between the two groups should have been a clear indicator of the trouble that was to come. In fact, such sentiments

³³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴ Ibid., 11.

³⁵ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 47.

³⁶ According to the website for the ICTR, the Tribunal was "established for the prosecution of persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of Rwanda between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994." It was also intended to "contribute to the process of national reconciliation in Rwanda and to the maintenance of peace in the region." Website available from: <http://69.94.11.53/default.htm>. Accessed January 28, 2008.

³⁷ Qtd. in Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 169.

continued to intensify in throughout the early 1990s, so much so that, according to Alan Kuperman, the power-holding Hutus

prepared their own ‘final solution’ to retain power and block what they perceived as a Tutsi attempt to reconquer Rwanda...these Hutu extremists apparently believed that by preparing to kill all of the Tutsi civilians in Rwanda they could prevent the country from being conquered by the rebels.³⁸

The *Interhamwe*, for example, was one such safeguard that formed during these years. Originally a MRND-sponsored youth group, the *Interhamwe* quickly became a place where Hutu youth could receive military training in using weapons and explosives and learn how to kill in the most efficient manner possible.³⁹ The *Interhamwe* quickly emerged as one of the scourges of Tutsis, and they began to take part in killings and violence directed at Tutsis. Eventually the *Interhamwe* would form one of the core groups of perpetrators during the 1994 genocide.

By 1994, all the pieces of the genocide were in place – the armed population, the civilian self-defense forces, and the fearful and aggressive government were primed to protect themselves through the mass extermination of Tutsis across the country.

The Genocide

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana, along with eleven others including the Hutu president of Burundi, was killed when his plane was shot down over Kigali.⁴⁰ The incident was viewed as a signal to Hutu extremists, who mobilized around the

³⁸ Kuperman, *The Limits*, 12.

³⁹ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 26.

⁴⁰ Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *The International Dimension of Genocide in Rwanda*. (New York: NYU Press, 1998): 41.

death of the president. Violence began the next day, on April 7, as an extremist privately-owned media company, Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), supported by the government-controlled Radio Rwanda, began to broadcast messages inciting Hutus to “avenge the death of the Rwandese President.”⁴¹ The broadcasts made such inflammatory statements as ““You cockroaches [Tutsis] must know you are made of flesh! We won’t let you kill! We will kill you!””⁴² and ““The graves are not yet quite full. Who is going to do the good work and help us fill them completely?””⁴³ At the same time, moderate Hutus were targeted; in fact, eleven of the first twelve targeted political victims of the genocide were moderate Hutus guilty of such crimes as negotiating at Arusha.⁴⁴

Militias also helped incite violence, as the groups led Hutus in attacks against their Tutsi neighbors, which caused the Tutsi to gather together in such communal places as schools and churches for defense.⁴⁵ While at first the Hutu militias, armed only with various kinds of knives and machetes, were unable and unwilling to attack these large groups, various Hutu armed forces groups (Presidential Guard, police, regular army, etc.) eventually reinforced the attackers and supplied them with more sophisticated weaponry.⁴⁶ These reinforced militias were made up primarily of young males, included members of other militia groups such as the *Interhamwe*, and soon numbered around 30,000.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Frank Chalk, “Hate Radio in Rwanda,” in Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, ed., *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999): 98.

⁴² Qtd. in Ibid., 98.

⁴³ Qtd. in Ibid., 98.

⁴⁴ Klinghoffer, 43.

⁴⁵ Kuperman, *The Limits*, 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷ Klinghoffer, 45.

The killing during the first weeks of the genocide was extremely efficient. During the early days, as Tutsis congregated at communal gathering sites for defensive purposes, the reinforced Hutu militias began to attack these compounds.⁴⁸ According to Kuperman, these Tutsi gathering sites, at which almost half of the genocide victims died, had almost all been destroyed by the militias before April 21 – only two weeks after the genocide began. In those fourteen days, approximately 250,000 Tutsis were murdered, which gives Rwanda the dubious distinction of being the most efficient and fastest genocide seen in modern history.⁴⁹

Gisenyi, a city near the border with Zaire, was one of the first places to experience this efficient violence following the onset of the genocide. The killing there was “systematic and well-organized with soldiers and militia taking part.”⁵⁰ Entire families were targeted and killed, and those that tried to escape to Zaire were shot. According to one survivor,⁵¹ the *Interhamwe* took anyone with a Tutsi ID card and anyone that even “looked Tutsi.”⁵² The genocide at Gisenyi was well-coordinated and efficiently managed; one militia leader testified to the ICTR that the six militia groups operating in the city would reconvene each night to tally the number each unit had killed. Between April 7 and April 10, it is estimated that the militias killed tens of thousands of Tutsis.⁵³

The genocide continued to spread from the cities into rural areas across the country. The perpetrators of the genocide made no allowances for children, the elderly,

⁴⁸ Kuperman, 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 167.

⁵¹ Interviewed in Ibid., 168.

⁵² Qtd. in Ibid., 168.

⁵³ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 170.

or women. The International Committee of the Red Cross described the situation in a statement issued on April 29, 1994:

Whole families are exterminated, babies, children, old people, women are massacred in the most atrocious conditions, often cut with a machete or a knife, or blown apart by grenades, or burned or buried alive. The cruelty knows no limits.⁵⁴

By July 18, 1994, only 100 days after President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, the RPF effectively finished off the *Interhamwe* and government forces. By this point, 800,000 moderate Hutus and Tutsis had been murdered⁵⁵ – 84% of Rwanda's Tutsi population had been exterminated.⁵⁶

International Responses and Failures in Rwanda

It is generally agreed that the international community failed in its responsibility to intervene in the genocide in Rwanda. In an interview with Jared Cohen, Kenneth Kaunda, the former President of Zambia said, "I do not know how we could have sunken to that situation with the rest of the world watching and doing nothing about it. I think it is unforgivable. I do not know how we can ever explain that."⁵⁷ According to Jared Cohen, the United States, France, Belgium, Germany, and the United Nations in particular deserve censure for standing by despite having significant knowledge of what was occurring inside Rwanda.⁵⁸ What facilitated this

⁵⁴ Qtd. in Ibid, 225.

⁵⁵ "Timeline: 100 Days of Genocide," *BBCOnline*. Available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3580247.stm>. Accessed January 28, 2008.

⁵⁶ Jared Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence: America and the Rwanda Genocide*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007): 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

lack of response by Western governments who could have easily impacted the events in Rwanda?

Legally, there was no obligation for intervention, as the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide does not provide a specific mechanism for intervention in situations of genocide. Article 8 of the Convention does state, however, that “any Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide.”⁵⁹ While this does not provide a firm legal obligation to intervene in situations of genocide, it nonetheless indicates that when genocide occurs, states party to the convention should take action to prevent and suppress it.

The United Nations was perhaps best equipped to intervene in Rwanda. Indeed, throughout 1993, recommendations were made to the Security Council to send a peacekeeping force to the country. Even UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued in favor of sending a peacekeeping force,⁶⁰ as Rwanda was seen as being on fragile ground during the negotiation of and the immediate aftermath of the Arusha Accords. On October 5, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 872, but it was an inadequate response to the deteriorating situation on the ground in Rwanda.⁶¹

Resolution 872 established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). It established the peacekeeping force’s mandate to, among other duties, “contribute to the security of the *city of Kigali* [emphasis mine] inter alia within a

⁵⁹ “UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 8.” Accessed January 28, 2008. Available from <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html>.

⁶⁰ Melvern, *A People*, 79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

weapons-secure area established by the parties in and around the city”⁶² and to “*monitor* [emphasis mine] the security situation.”⁶³ The mandate established was extremely limited in scope, both in terms of geography and actions. The peacekeeping force only had the mandate to operate in the capital city of Kigali, and they were only permitted to monitor. Importantly, they did *not* have the mandate to intervene.

The Arusha Accords also had provisions for a UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, and the Accords recommended establishing a much wider mandate than what Resolution 872 eventually provided. The monitoring provision, for example, was included at the urging of the United States, who argued against a wider mandate recommended by Arusha. The Accords recommending granting the peacekeeping force the power to track and seize arms caches around the country in order to work for the “neutralization of armed gangs throughout the country.”⁶⁴ The UN Resolution, however, did not provide this power to the force; according to the United States, the mission was peacekeeping: “peacekeepers observe, they mediate. They do not seize weapons.”⁶⁵ Arusha also recommended giving the peacekeeping force the ability to assist and secure any refugees traveling home; Resolution 872 permitted the force to “*monitor* [emphasis mine] the process of repatriation of Rwandese refugees.”⁶⁶ Again, the use of the word “monitor” is vital – the peacekeeping force did *not* have the mandate to intervene.

⁶² “UN Security Council Resolution 872,” 3.a, passed October 5, 1993. Available from <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1993/scres93.htm>. Accessed January 28, 2008.

⁶³ Resolution 872, 3.c.

⁶⁴ Qtd. in Melvern, *A People*, 80.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁶ Resolution 872, 3.f.

Brigadier-General Roméo A. Dallaire, a Canadian citizen, was named commander of the roughly 2500 peacekeepers from Belgium, Bangladesh, and Ghana that made up the force.⁶⁷ Dallaire arrived in Kigali on October 22, 1993, one day after the assassination of neighboring Burundi's first Hutu president, sparking violence across that country.⁶⁸ This event served to intensify the animosity between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, as the country was flooded with 300,000 refugees.⁶⁹

Dallaire and UNAMIR lacked the resources and capabilities to handle this situation from the outset. Dallaire, in his original assessment of the mission, stated that he would need at *least* 4500 soldiers, but he was given about 2500 instead due to budgetary concerns. He also lacked the proper supplies – he was given no helicopters out of the eight he requested. He received eight armored personnel carriers out of the 22 requested, and those that arrived lacked spare parts and came with insufficient ammunition; they soon broke down.⁷⁰

Despite the deficient supplies and inadequate troops, Dallaire and UNAMIR continued to maintain vigilance and to monitor the situation as it slowly deteriorated. While his exhortations did nothing to cause the Security Council to reassess UNAMIR's mandate, Dallaire nevertheless proved to have a keen understanding of the tensions and possibilities for violence in Rwanda. On January 11, 1994, ten weeks after UNAMIR arrived in Rwanda and ten weeks before the onset of the genocide, General Dallaire sent what became known as the "Genocide Fax" to Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's military advisor, General Maurice Baril. In the fax, he related

⁶⁷ Melvern, *A People*, 84.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 85.

information given to him by a Hutu informant who occupied a high-level post in the *Interhamwe*. The informant described, among other details, the capacity of the *Interhamwe* to carry out a fully-formed Tutsi extermination plan; according to the informant, the *Interhamwe* had the capability to kill 1000 people every 20 minutes.⁷¹ He relayed additional plans to rid Rwanda of Belgian peacekeepers,⁷² and he stated he could take UNAMIR forces to the locations of caches of weapons that were being stored for the extermination effort.⁷³ In exchange for this information and service, he asked for protection for his family and himself.

In his fax, Dallaire asked for guidance on how to best protect the informant and requested permission to use UNAMIR forces to raid the weapons cache.⁷⁴ The Secretary-General's responding cable denied his request to seize the weapons and reiterated that the extent of UNAMIR's mandate in Rwanda was to monitor and observe and to not intervene in any way.⁷⁵

Once the killing began on April 7, UNAMIR forces fulfilled their mandate of monitoring and observing. Lieutenant-Colonel J. Dewez, Belgian officer in UNAMIR, explained his perception of UNAMIR's role in Rwanda: "I had not come to Rwanda as a para-commando to fight but as a blue helmet, a symbolic presence to help the Rwandans...My perception of classic UN operations was that the UN does not fight."⁷⁶ By April 12, this attitude was leading to tangible results – the Belgian government informed the Secretary-General that all Belgian peacekeeping forces

⁷¹ Jared Cohen, 33.

⁷² Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 96.

⁷³ Jared Cohen, 33.

⁷⁴ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 96.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁷⁶ Qtd. in Melvern, *A People*, 126.

would be pulled out of Rwanda, and it recommended that the rest of UNAMIR should also be withdrawn.⁷⁷

On April 12, the UN was aware that massive killings were taking place across the country, and while the word “genocide” had not yet been applied to the situation, peacekeepers in Rwanda knew “the withdrawal of troops would mean that thousands upon thousands of Rwandans would die,”⁷⁸ a fact of which the Belgian government was well aware at the time it withdrew Belgian forces.

April 13, 1994 marked the first time the word “genocide” was applied to the Rwandan situation in an official capacity. The RPF, who were watching the situation unfold from across the border, sent a letter to Ambassador Colin Keating, then President of the UN Security Council. The letter said:

A crime of genocide has been committed against the Rwandese people in the presence of a UN international force, and the international community has stood by and only watched. Efforts have been mobilized to rescue foreign nationals from the horrifying events in Rwanda, but there has been no concrete action on the part of the international community to protect innocent Rwandese children, women and men who have been crying for help.⁷⁹

The following day, the Belgian government publicly announced the withdrawal of its forces from Rwanda,⁸⁰ a decision that was fully supported by the United States.⁸¹ According to the Belgian government, if the peacekeeping force in Rwanda were maintained, the troops would be massacred along with Rwandans; thus the UN forces should be evacuated immediately.⁸²

⁷⁷ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 200.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 200.

⁷⁹ Qtd. in Ibid., 202. Melvern’s source is a copy of the letter.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 344.

⁸¹ Jared Cohen, 82.

⁸² Ibid., 219.

Belgian forces began to leave on April 19, and two days later, on April 21, the Security Council voted to withdraw all forces except for a symbolic force of 270.⁸³ Even this small contingent was viewed as a compromise by the United States, who pressed for total withdrawal. By April 25, the withdrawal was complete, and a contingent of 503 troops were left in the country under General Dallaire.

One Rwandan observer of the actual withdrawal recalled that people were yelling for the UN to not abandon them, and that they would be killed if the UN left. In one of the only occurrences in which UNAMIR soldiers fired their guns during the genocide, soldiers shot into the air to clear the way for the troops. The RPF famously questioned ““why [the UN] would not shoot in the air to make the *Interhamwe* run away, but they would shoot in the air to make the victims run away.””⁸⁴

In early May, General Dallaire, observing that the massacres were continuing unabated, asked for reinforcements. He put together a plan asking for 4000 soldiers to combat the *Interhamwe* and work to undermine them through such projects as seizing weapons. The United States did everything in its power to ensure that this surge would never be approved by the Security Council through various stalling tactics. Four years after the genocide, military experts undertook to assess how effective Dallaire’s plan would have been. They determined that 5000 UN troops working with full logistical support could have saved 500,000 people.⁸⁵

It is important to address the use of the word “genocide” throughout the duration of the violence in Rwanda, as the word itself is inherently political and

⁸³ Jared Cohen, 86.

⁸⁴ Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁵ Scott R. Feil, *Preventing Genocide: How the Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda*, (New York: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1998.)

comes, as argued above, with moral – if not legal – obligations. As previously noted, the word “genocide” was first applied to the situation in Rwanda by the RPF on April 13 – just six days after the onset of violence. Rwanda was not named a “genocide” to the public, however, until fifteen days later, on April 28. On that day, the humanitarian organization Oxfam issued a press release stating “Oxfam fears genocide is happening in Rwanda;”⁸⁶ internally Oxfam had used the word “genocide” since April 24, when an Oxfam worker in Rwanda used the term to describe the situation to agency leadership.⁸⁷

For individuals inside the country, however, it was difficult to understand the scope of the violence that was occurring. General Dallaire, who was among the best informed of Westerners on the state of affairs in Rwanda, has said that even he did not recognize the situation as being “genocide” in those early days.⁸⁸ Dallaire has also said, however, that “ethnic cleansing” did not seem to be an accurate description of the killings that were occurring within Rwanda; something different was happening there.⁸⁹

During the last days of April, the Security Council debated whether “genocide” was an appropriate word to describe the situation in Rwanda. Security Council President Colin Keating argued that it was accurate to use the word, and as such, the United Nations had an obligation to intervene under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. While he was supported by Argentina, Spain, and the Czech Republic, several other states, including the United States, France, and the

⁸⁶ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 223.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 345.

⁸⁸ Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: the Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, (Canada: Random House, 2003): 306

⁸⁹ Melvern, *Conspiracy*, 219.

United Kingdom argued vehemently against the use of the word. In the end, a compromise was struck – a resolution using language from the Genocide Convention was passed, but it did not use the actual word “genocide” to describe Rwanda.⁹⁰

The United States took even longer to acknowledge that genocide was occurring in Rwanda. The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) used the word on May 9, but two weeks later the State Department was still unwilling to call the Rwanda situation “genocide.”⁹¹ Finally, on July 13 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution naming the killings in Rwanda as “acts of genocide.” This resolution was passed more than two months after the onset of violence and five days before the genocide ended with the RPF defeating the *Interhamwe* and government troops who had been the perpetrators of the violence.

Throughout the buildup to and course of the Rwanda genocide, the United States clearly demonstrated a reluctance to not only involve itself in an intervention but to support the involvement of other states as well. The United States was at the time party to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide; it had supported interventions in other crisis situations, and at the time of the Rwanda genocide it was operating as part of NATO forces in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. What, then, led to this reluctance in Rwanda?

American unwillingness to involve itself in Rwanda contradicted the humanitarian intervention policy established by President Bill Clinton in 1993, at the beginning of his first term. During that first year in office, President Clinton’s staff drafted Presidential Review Decision 13 (PRD-13), which said that American ‘national

⁹⁰ Ibid., 223-224.

⁹¹ Jared Cohen, 198-90.

interest' would be best protected by confronting humanitarian crises abroad, as such crises 'constitute[d] a threat to international peace and security.'"⁹² Jared Cohen categorizes PRD-13 as defining the Clinton administration's attitudes towards peacekeeping as "interventionist" at this point in time.⁹³ This quickly changed, however.

American reluctance to intervene in Rwanda, and America's general attitude shift towards intervention in humanitarian crises, was due in large part to the United States' experience intervening in the humanitarian crisis in Somalia in 1993. Famine hit the country in 1992, causing the deaths of nearly 300,000 Somali citizens.⁹⁴ The United States sent a several thousand soldiers and Marines as part of a multi-lateral task force whose mission was to bring food relief to Somalia. In June, however, two dozen UN peacekeepers were killed by one of the several militias operating in the country, which led the Security Council, which had strong American support, to declare that "all necessary measures [should] be used to apprehend and punish those responsible for the attacks."⁹⁵

On October 3, 1992, when American troops attempted to capture the leaders responsible for the killings, Somali militias shot down two Black Hawk helicopters. Eighteen American soldiers were killed, and 78 were injured. Images of an American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were shown on news programs and published in newspapers.⁹⁶ It is not an accident that this incident occurred two

⁹² Michael McKinnon, *The Evolution of U.S. Peacekeeping Policy Under Clinton*, (London: Frank Cass, 2000): 20.

⁹³ Jared Cohen, 49.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 47

⁹⁵ Qtd. in Ibid., 49.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 50.

days before Security Council passed Resolution 872, establishing UNAMIR, but giving it an extremely limited scope and mandate.

Following Somalia, the United States showed great reluctance to support and stage interventions abroad, a position that was echoed by American public opinion.⁹⁷ In the wake of the Somalia incident President Clinton's approval numbers for his foreign policy dropped from 52 to 32 percent. Public opinion polling demonstrated an increase in the number of Americans that wanted to pull out of Somalia as well; between October 2 and October 5, 1993, the percentage of Americans in favor of "pulling troops out of Somalia" jumped by six points.⁹⁸

In the wake of these numbers, President Clinton reversed PRD-13 and issued instead Presidential Directive Decision 25 (PDD-25). PDD-25 reassessed PRD-13's expansive approach to international intervention and outlined a policy that would be "far more selective and restrictive."⁹⁹ National Security Advisor Anthony Lake declared that PDD-25 was not, in fact, an isolationist policy,¹⁰⁰ but the text of the document definitively limits U.S. commitment to peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions abroad. PDD-25 states that "peacekeeping can be a useful tool for advancing U.S. national security interests in *some* circumstances, but both U.S. and UN involvement in peacekeeping must be *selective* and more effective [italics mine.]"¹⁰¹ It also says that the United States "cannot be the world's policeman."¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁸ Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, "American Public Support for U.S. Military Operations from Mogadishu to Baghdad," prepared for the RAND Arroyo Center. (Santa Monica: Rand, 2005): 33.

⁹⁹ Jared Cohen, 51.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰¹ Presidential Decision Directive 25. Published May 6, 1994. Available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd25.htm>. Accessed March 7, 2008.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Although these are reasonable statements, taken within the context of the geopolitical climate of the day, they indicate a turn away from President Clinton's previous interventionist approach to humanitarian crises. This new attitude had drastic consequences, as it contributed greatly to unwillingness of the United States to get involved at all in interceding in the Rwanda genocide.

President Clinton demonstrated, however, that his government was, in fact, very responsive to public opinion. Had the American public clamored for intervention in the genocide in Rwanda, perhaps the government would have changed its position on intervening. But the American public never made the noise necessary to influence the government's policy towards Rwanda. This was due in large part to a general lack of knowledge about the subject that stemmed from a general lack of coverage of Africa in general and Rwanda in particular by the media until it was far too late.

The Genocide and the Western Media

Introduction

Media coverage of human rights issues is something of a delicate subject. There is an inherent tension between spotlighting the importance of such issues and capitalizing on the pain of other human beings. It is all too easy to view human suffering as "a commodity to be worked on and recast,"¹⁰³ as Stanley Cohen notes. At the same time, however, Cohen notes that the media "tell us what to think about;"¹⁰⁴ the media has the power to raise public awareness of issues and problems that are happening outside of the Western world's backyard. In democratic countries, where

¹⁰³ Stanley Cohen, 169.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 169.

the government is beholden to the people, public opinion does influence what issues receive attention from the government, a fact that gives the media ever increasing power. This new power of the media to influence the development of policy is known as the CNN Effect.¹⁰⁵

Questions remain, however, as to whether the CNN Effect actually exists in the developing world; how much influence does the media have when it comes to those regions of the globe that offer no strategic value, especially when it comes to coverage of humanitarian disasters? Mel McNulty analyzes the relationship between media coverage and intervention policies in Africa: “the volume of Western coverage of recent African crises is almost always in direct proportion to the scale of direct Western involvement, or to the degree of clamor for such interventions...Mass murder far from the Western lens is small news.”¹⁰⁶ Gen. Dallaire agreed about the importance of the role that the media could play during the Rwandan genocide. He wrote, “one good journalist on the ground was worth a battalion of troops, because I realized they could bring pressure to bear.”¹⁰⁷

But what stories are covered, then? And why are those stories chosen over others? Is the news a commodity in a market like any other, where the media should supply what is demanded by the consumer, or should greater and larger motivations determine what issues and events receive coverage? Unfortunately, the media seems

¹⁰⁵ Steven Livingston, “Limited Vision: How Both the American Media and Government Failed in Rwanda,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

¹⁰⁶ Mel McNulty, “Media Ethnicization and the International Response to War and Genocide in Rwanda,” in *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence*, ed. Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (London: Zed Books, 1999): 269.

¹⁰⁷ Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire, “The Media Dichotomy,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

to be beholden to the demands of the public. According to Stanley Cohen's "Chad Rule," in the West there is little demand for media coverage of stories that take place in geopolitically and economically insignificant countries, no matter how monumental or horrendous they may be. Accordingly, issues pertaining to "human rights, aid, development, or 'Third World' subjects are usually vaguely classified as 'foreign' or 'international' news: things that happen elsewhere,"¹⁰⁸ and thus receive comparatively little coverage in the Western press. Stanley Cohen characterizes coverage of these issues as "depressingly formulaic...[with] the soothing and repetitive chronologies, the sensationalized language, the Americanized metaphors."¹⁰⁹ It would seem that the Western media's coverage of human rights issues falls far short of what it should be.

Did this hold true in the case of the Rwandan genocide? What role, if any, did journalists and the media play in facilitating the international inaction that tacitly permitted the slaughter of almost one million people? According to Ann Chaon, a French journalist who covered the Rwanda genocide from France and Zaire, the media definitely failed in Rwanda. However, the journalists covering the story, she cautions, did not.¹¹⁰ This is an important distinction to make, as the inaccurate framing of the genocide happened almost exclusively in the West and not in Rwanda itself. The Western media outlets frequently misinterpreted the reports coming from the journalists inside the country. Alan Kuperman agrees, arguing that "the media must share blame for not immediately recognizing the extent of the carnage [in Rwanda]

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 169.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 193.

¹¹⁰ Anne Chaon, "Who Failed in Rwanda, Journalists or the Media?" in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

and mobilizing world attention to it.”¹¹¹ Although individual journalists in Rwanda cannot be faulted for their coverage of the genocide, the media in general failed at calling the world’s attention to what was occurring. The lack of coverage of the genocide facilitated the slow response of the international community to the atrocities that were occurring. Additionally, the way the story was framed once it began to be told only served to exacerbate Western reluctance to intervene in Rwanda.

Before April 6, 1994, Rwanda was a small, relatively unknown country in a geopolitically insignificant region of the world. The country was neither rich nor powerful, and their post-colonial history was fairly indistinguishable from that of several other African nations. As such, it did not warrant much press coverage, and few Western journalists were posted in the country. After the April 6 plane crash, several reporters stationed in Nairobi traveled to Rwanda in myriad ways to report on the developing story from inside the country. The international press, however, were “neophytes when it came to Rwanda,”¹¹² according to Gen. Dallaire, a fact that greatly influenced the nature of the coverage, especially in the early days of the genocide.

How Rwanda Was Framed

Western assumptions about Africa fully impacted how the Rwandan genocide was depicted in the media. From the outset, the media inaccurately represented the genocide in Rwanda through the use of outdated and erroneous frames. Mark Doyle, who served as the BBC East Africa Correspondent during the days of the Rwanda genocide, describes this:

¹¹¹ Alan J. Kuperman, “How the Media Missed Rwandan Genocide,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson. (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

¹¹² Lt.-Gen. Roméo Dallaire, “The Media Dichotomy.”

There is a general tendency to portray Africa as chaotic, the Dark Continent, and so on. Sometimes indeed, it is very dark. It was in Rwanda in 1994. But Rwanda was not, after a while, chaotic or impenetrable. It was, as we now know, a very well planned political and ethnic genocide. That didn't really fit the media image of chaotic Africa and various things flowed from that.¹¹³

Doyle's assessment summarizes many of the Western portrayals of and attitudes towards the Rwandan genocide, which are characteristic of Western portrayals of the developing world in general. Stanley Cohen argues that, in order for a story to "fit" into the "required template" for reporting humanitarian disasters, "the causes and solutions [of the disaster] must be simplified; and the language of a morality play must be used."¹¹⁴ When stories like Rwanda come along that do not fit into the required format of reporting, American news agencies are apt to either ignore the story altogether or to manipulate it until it fits into a familiar frame, even if doing so simplifies or twists the story until it is stripped of truth or accuracy.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous frame that the Western media used to portray the violence in Rwanda was that of violence stemming from tribal enmity rooted in thousands of years of mutual hatred. Stephen Livingston and Todd Eachus, who undertook to analyze news stories pertaining to the Rwanda genocide, characterize this frame as depicting "ethnic conflicts" that lead to a "resurgence of ancient ethnic hatreds."¹¹⁵ This primordialist view is problematic for many reasons. First of all, it completely discounts any role that Western nations might have had in creating and solidifying the borders between the Hutu and the Tutsi identity groups and the

¹¹³ Mark Doyle, "Reporting the Genocide," in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

¹¹⁴ Stanley Cohen, 176.

¹¹⁵ Stephen Livingston and Todd Eachus, "Rwanda: U.S. Policy and Television Coverage," in Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, ed., *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999): 215.

animosity between them. Second, the genocide that occurred in Rwanda was different from the violence that was usually seen in situations of ethnic cleansing. While it was lead by the militias and *Interhamwe*, people of all parts of society participated. Civilians, women, and clergy, to name a few, all actively contributed to the slaughter. Violence on this scale is atypical in most cases of ethnically-related violence. While the victims are generally of all societal groups, the perpetrators are, for the most part, militarized men. In Rwanda this just was not the case.

This frame was widely utilized in the Western media – even in some of the most respected publications – throughout the duration of the genocide. Marguerite Michaels, a correspondent for *Time Magazine*, wrote an article in the April 18, 1994 edition of the magazine describing politics in Rwanda as being “dominated by the ancient rivalry between the predominant Hutu and minority Tutsi tribes.” Further, she characterized the motivation for the “bloodshed” as being “pure tribal enmity.”¹¹⁶ In the following week’s edition of the magazine, Michaels continued to utilize this frame, using the phrase “tribal carnage” to describe the situation in Kigali, the capital city.

Such characterizations were inaccurate; they ignored the years of history that ended in genocide, and they completely discounted any role that the Western colonial policies played in creating a situation that bred so much enmity and animosity. James MacGuire described this phenomenon: “the massacre in Rwanda was...the culmination of years of trouble, which the press for the most part did not cover.”¹¹⁷ The Western media did not take the time to learn and understand the complicated history of Rwanda, especially the relations between the Hutus and Tutsis and the role that the

¹¹⁶ Marguerite Michaels, “Descent into Mayhem,” *Time Magazine*, April 18, 1994. Available from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,980551,00.html>. Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹¹⁷ James MacGuire, “Rwanda Before the Massacre,” *Forbes Media Critic*, Fall 1994.

European colonial forces played in creating these two rigid identity groups. This frame also tacitly supports non-intervention; if a conflict has existed between two groups for thousands of years, then what solution could possibly be found today to mitigate the violence? To attribute Rwanda to this sort of ancient hatred is to affirm that the international community could not play a role in bringing peace to the country. Thus, the media found the simplicity of citing “tribal enmity” as the causal mechanism for the violence to be extremely compelling.¹¹⁸

Another popular frame utilized by the media depicted Africa’s “heart of darkness,” as mentioned previously by Mark Doyle. This reference was frequently used in the Western media by such outlets as the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Washington Post*. The *Chronicle* published an editorial on May 7, 1994 entitled “Rwanda’s Heart of Darkness,” whose text characterized Rwanda as being geographically, culturally, and economically remote.¹¹⁹ On April 24, 1994, Jennifer Parmelee of the *Washington Post* also referred to Rwanda plunging “deep into the heart of darkness.”¹²⁰ Richard Cohen, another *Washington Post* columnist, wrote an article called “Tribalism: the Human Heart of Darkness,” published April 21, 1994, that not only referenced the “heart of darkness,” but went so far as to argue that “such [violence] can’t happen [in the United States.]”¹²¹ Other news agencies utilized similar language throughout the duration of the genocide in Rwanda.

¹¹⁸ Livingston, “Rwanda,” 215.

¹¹⁹ “Confronting Rwanda’s Heart of Darkness,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, May 7, 1994. Available from LexisNexis. Accessed March 21, 2008.

¹²⁰ Jennifer Parmelee, “Fade to Blood: Why the International Answer to the Rwandan Atrocities is Indifference,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 1994. Available from LexisNexis. Accessed March 21, 2008.

¹²¹ Richard Cohen, “Tribalism: The Human Heart of Darkness,” *Washington Post*, April 19, 1994. Available from LexisNexis. Accessed March 21, 2008.

These are dangerous characterizations. The BBC's Mark Doyle describes this frame as representing Africa as "chaotic" and "impenetrable."¹²² This frame serves to distance the West from these sorts of activities and events; it highlights the differences between the developing world, whose "heart of darkness" leads to such "tribal enmity," and the West, which has none of these sorts of problems. As such, it becomes difficult for the average Western news consumer to understand and relate to the events in Rwanda, because "we" are not like "them."

It also implies Western superiority over parts of the world that have this "heart of darkness," because, as Richard Cohen wrote, such events would never happen here. This sentiment of Western superiority manifested itself as its own frame that was also used by the media; Mark Doyle recounts that in July, after the RPF took control of most the country and put a halt to most of the killing, the United States and the United Kingdom landed some few dozen soldiers in Kigali to help with aid distribution. The public relations departments of both armies spun this to the media as the Western powers "taking control" of the Kigali airport, which was entirely false, given that the RPF was already in command of the airport and had permitted the troops to land in the first place. Doyle characterizes this as giving "the desired impression, of course, that the United States and the United Kingdom had finally arrived to sort out the squabbling natives, when this was complete nonsense."¹²³ Much like the "heart of darkness" frame, this served to remove and distance Rwanda from anything that could ever happen in the Western world.

¹²² Doyle.

¹²³ Ibid.

Concurrently, however, the Western media also displayed a tendency to try to put Rwanda into a “Western” framework. The *New York Times*, when describing the size of the country, labeled it “slightly larger than Vermont.”¹²⁴ A correspondent for the *Rocky Mountain News* described Rwanda as both the “Switzerland of Africa” – for its scenery – and the “Yugoslavia of Africa” – for its ethnic violence.

These attempts to “westernize” Rwanda are understandable in a sense, because they put the conflict into a context that the average Western reader could easily understand. Such efforts are also harmful, however, in that they lead to an avoidance of discussing the issues and problems that are unique to the Rwanda case. Joseph Verrengia, the *Rocky Mountain News* correspondent, wrote that Rwanda, the Yugoslavia of Africa, was “splashed with the blood of tortured and slain priests, peacekeepers and humanitarians trying to do good in the middle of an ethnic cleansing zone. Instead of Bosnians, Serbs, and Muslims, the age-old conflict in Rwanda is between Hutus and Tutsi. The results are the same.”¹²⁵ Even ignoring the sensationalist descriptions, this is an incredibly inaccurate representation of the events in Rwanda. First, while peacekeepers and humanitarians did die in Rwanda, they were not the main targets of violence; Rwandan citizens suffered far more than any foreigners in the country did. Second, by drawing comparisons between Yugoslavia and Rwanda, Verrengia implicitly claims that like Yugoslavia,¹²⁶ Rwanda was not a

¹²⁴ Jerry Gray, “2 Nations Joined by Common History of Genocide,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1994. Available from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=980CE5DD143EF93AA35757C0A962958260>. Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹²⁵ Joseph Verrengia, “Renewed Violence in Rwanda Turns Languid Capital into Slaughterhouse,” *The Rocky Mountain News*.

¹²⁶ The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice have both found that while *acts* of genocide were committed in Bosnia, namely the massacre at Srebrenica, Serbia was not guilty of genocide against the Bosnian people.

genocide. And, indeed, the results in Rwanda were not the same as what was seen in the former Yugoslavia; in one hundred days, eight times as many Rwandans lost their lives as Bosnians did over three years.¹²⁷ While both situations were horrific, the circumstances and outcomes were certainly not comparable. Such portrayals in the media helped perpetuate Western inaction and non-intervention.

Finally, the Western media outlets also attempted to apply the “balanced conflict” frame to what was an inherently unbalanced situation in Rwanda. Mark Doyle discussed the communications he received from London while he was reporting from Rwanda for the BBC. According to him, the BBC editors would frequently request that he submit balanced reports and ““put the other side,””¹²⁸ thus making the assumption that whatever crimes that the Hutu *Interhamwe* committed must have been replicated by the Tutsi RPF. According to Doyle, the editors were uncomfortable with the idea that the conflict could possibly be as unbalanced as was being reported.¹²⁹

This desire to balance the conflict led to unbalanced reporting on the part of the media outlets. Doyle describes how the Western media handled an incident in which RPF soldiers killed five members of the clergy, which the RPF leadership publicly denounced immediately. The Western media, however, covered the story with “undisguised glee,” because at last there was “proof that the 'other side' was just as evil.”¹³⁰ As Doyle notes, however, it is impossible to equate five murders with hundreds of thousands of murders; yet, in their desperation to “balance” the story, the

¹²⁷ According to the Bosnian Institute, between 100,000 and 150,000 Bosnians were killed between 1992-1995. Available from http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=2955&reportid=167. Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹²⁸ Qtd. in Doyle.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Western media did just that. A Reuters reported used this “balanced conflict” frame to describe the violence in Kigali: “gangs of youth settling tribal scores hacking and clubbing people to death.”¹³¹ While the tribal enmity frame is also being used here, what is important to note is that the author portrays the violence in Rwanda as being perpetrated by multiple parties, when in fact the Hutu militias and government forces were the responsible parties. Similarly, Lindsay Hilsum of *The Guardian* described the violence in Rwanda as “various clans...murdering others.”¹³² Again, this story implies that the both the Hutus and Tutsis have taken part in this indiscriminate mass slaughter. To call the unbalanced coverage that these particular stories received “misleading,”¹³³ as Doyle did, would be an understatement.

This is a particularly troubling frame, as it, more than any of the others analyzed above, truly miscast the situation and events in Rwanda. By depicting the two sides as equally culpable, the media completely ignored the fact that in this case there existed a definite aggressor and definite victim. By misrepresenting the events in Rwanda and framing the violence as Hutus and Tutsis fighting each other rather than as Hutus systematically slaughtering Tutsis, the media outlets failed to examine the implications behind the facts, namely that genocide was, in fact, occurring. This, perhaps, more than any other distortion of the story, contributed to Western unwillingness to intervene in Rwanda.

During this time, Western media outlets were reporting on material that was being submitted by journalists on the ground in Rwanda, and thus, the news that was

¹³¹ Qtd. in Richard Dowden, “The Media’s Failure: a Reflection on the Rwanda Genocide,” in in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

¹³² Qtd. in Ibid.

¹³³ Doyle.

broadcast was totally contingent on the information coming in. This raises the question of whether the faulty reporting in the West came about because of inaccurate and erroneous reporting by in-country journalists, or if the Western media somehow manipulated and twisted the information before disbursing it. While there were some problems with the reporting in Africa – namely with the fact that many western journalists were loathe to enter Rwanda itself and were content to cover the events from as far away as Zaire, and even Kenya – the fact remains that enough journalists were in Rwanda, accurately reporting what was taking place in front of their eyes, to give the media outlets a complete picture of what was occurring inside the country.

These journalists were able to cover the genocide without relying on old stereotypes and assumptions, and they tried to alert the Western world to the fact that the situation in Rwanda was not typical “tribal warfare.” Mark Doyle, BBC East Africa Correspondent, was one such journalist. Often the only Western reporter working out of Kigali during the days of the genocide, Doyle traveled to Kigali from Nairobi immediately following the April 6 plane crash. He was also one of the journalists who was inordinately respected by Gen. Dallaire. Doyle admits, however, that even he misinterpreted the events in Rwanda in the earliest days, calling the situation “chaotic,” because early on, it was unclear to witnesses in-country exactly who was killing whom, how they were being killed, and what was motivating the killing.¹³⁴

Doyle quickly understood, however, the nature of what was happening in Rwanda. On April 11, two days before the RPF sent its letter naming the situation in Rwanda a genocide to the UN and one day before Belgium decided to withdraw its

¹³⁴ Doyle.

peacekeeping troops, Doyle filed a report with the BBC from Kigali describing the violence and the fighting between the government forces and the RPF. He made certain to caution, however, that “this [was] not just a tribal war.”¹³⁵ Thus, as early as April 11, media outlets were being cautioned against using the well-worn ethnic conflict frame to describe Rwanda.

Throughout the duration of the genocide, Doyle objected to the use of out-dated frames to describe the situation. On June 20, he cautioned in a memo to the BBC that “the BBC should not fall into the trap of bland and misleading descriptions of Africans massacring Africans without explaining why, as the news agencies are doing most of the time. The killings in Rwanda are political as well as ethnic.”¹³⁶ Doyle also strongly cautioned the BBC about trying to frame the conflict as violence between two balanced and equally guilty groups. He sent a telegram admonishing the BBC that “a BBC correspondent who has spent much of the last three months in Rwanda says the government militia [the *Interhamwe*] and the government armed forces [Hutu forces] are responsible for most of the bodies being found in mass graves in Rwanda and floating in rivers leading from Rwanda to Lake Victoria in Uganda,”¹³⁷ thus implying that the BBC should trust their correspondent that the killings were not, in fact, being perpetrated by both sides.

It is evident, then, that accurate information was reaching the Western media outlets. This is important to note, given how the genocide was covered and framed by Western media outlets, and it implicates those media outlets rather than the journalists in-country as being responsible for the misleading coverage of the Rwanda genocide.

¹³⁵ Mark Doyle, Report filed 4/11/94. Qtd. in Ibid.

¹³⁶ Mark Doyle, “Rwanda/Guidance Memo,” 6/20/94. Qtd. in Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Qtd. in Ibid.

The Amount and Nature of Coverage in the Western Media

Stanley Cohen's previously discussed "Chad rule" coincides with the widely known "Coups and Quakes" syndrome, which states that Western media and media consumers are not interested in geopolitically insignificant places unless great political or humanitarian disasters occur there. Rwanda is a textbook case of this syndrome; media coverage of the genocide was not only poorly framed, but was decidedly scant, especially during the earliest and bloodiest days. According to Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, who analyzed how Rwanda was covered by American news outlets, "American television news paid relatively modest attention to the story during its first three bloody months."¹³⁸ The general lack of coverage of the genocide in the media was a gross failure on the part of the Western media.

Due to its small size, economic insignificance, and geopolitical irrelevance, Rwanda never received much attention in the Western media. In all of 1993 – the year of the signing of the Arusha Accords, the deployment of UNAMIR, and the increase in tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis due to the assassination of neighboring Burundi's Hutu president – Rwanda received only two direct mentions in the American television news. Both reports related to the signing of the Arusha Accords.¹³⁹ Livingston and Eachus further note that between 1991 and 1994, no broadcast networks in the United States covered any political developments in Rwanda,¹⁴⁰ even though during those years human rights abuses were quite common. Further, the massacre of 50,000 people in Burundi, which is culturally and demographically very similar to Rwanda, was not at all covered in the Western

¹³⁸ Livingston, "Rwanda," 210.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 211-12.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 212.

television media, even though Human Rights Watch warned that those events would certainly radiate in Rwanda and cause tensions there to also increase.¹⁴¹

The Western media, like much of the rest of the world, missed the signs that pointed towards future problems in the region. This was in part because the media outlets did not have sufficient manpower in the region to appropriately analyze the events occurring in Rwanda. Most news companies did not have reporters stationed in Rwanda. Rather, journalists were based in Nairobi, which was several hours away; furthermore, several outlets – including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* – only had one reporter stationed in Nairobi to cover the entire region of East Africa.¹⁴² In addition to the escalating tensions in Rwanda and Burundi, this corps of journalists were responsible for covering all the events in Eastern Africa at the time: the Sudanese civil war, the political conflict in Kenya and political instability in Ethiopia, the continuation of civil and political problems in Zaire, and the disintegrating political situation in Somalia.¹⁴³ This structure and lack of manpower clearly indicates the Western media's inherent bias against covering African news.

With this attitude already firmly entrenched, it is hardly surprising, then, that the West and the Western media were able to ignore the buildup to the genocide for so long. The heightening tension between two groups that had been fighting each other for years and the onset of violence in a country that had already seen the slaughter of thousands hardly constituted news. Stanley Cohen analyzes this phenomenon, arguing that “media narratives are not composed for prevention.”¹⁴⁴ According to Cohen,

¹⁴¹ MacGuire, 42.

¹⁴² Livingston, “Rwanda,” 213.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 213.

¹⁴⁴ Stanley Cohen, 174.

“creeping disasters” – situations with a long and slow buildup process, such as famine (characterized by food shortages, crop failures, and drought) or genocide (characterized by dehumanization, segregation, and exclusion of the targeted group) – are not media-friendly stories.¹⁴⁵ The process and buildup to these disasters are not camera-friendly; there is no easy way to depict the solidification of the boundaries between identity groups, for example. As Cohen points out, stories about humanitarian and human rights disasters are “attached to visual images of suffering.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, while it is not acceptable, it makes perfect sense that the Western media missed the warning signs of trouble ahead in Rwanda.

Once violence broke out following the death of President Habyarimana, the media gradually realized that the events in Rwanda were, in fact, extraordinary. For many reasons, however, this realization did not lead to sufficient coverage of the events until after the killing had already waned. First, there were very few journalists inside Rwanda to report about what was actually going on. Few reporters displayed the courage shown by Mark Doyle in remaining inside the country during the genocide. Patrick Robert, a French photographer with the agency *Sygma*, arrived in Rwanda on April 9 and remained in the country for the duration of the violence. He remembers, however, that the six American correspondents who were sent in to cover the death of President Habyarimana were recalled almost as soon as they arrived.¹⁴⁷ According to Robert, the Americans described Rwanda as “too dangerous, not enough

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴⁷ Edgar Roskis, “A Genocide Without Images: White Film Noirs,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

interest...deep Africa, you know...middle of nowhere.’”¹⁴⁸ This fear and ambivalence directly contributed to Rwanda becoming the “genocide without images,” as *Le Monde* journalist Edgar Roskis categorized it,¹⁴⁹ because there were so few journalists in the country, no one documented the crimes as they happened or the aftermath of the atrocities.

The lack of coverage of the genocide also manifested itself in the American television news. According to Susan Moeller, during the month of April, which was the bloodiest month of the genocide, the three major American broadcast networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC, collectively dedicated 32 minutes of the evening news to the events in Rwanda. This constituted 1.5% of the evening news broadcast time in April.¹⁵⁰ Moeller does not, however, offer any context for these numbers, and she even argues that 1.5% of airtime constituted “moderate media attention.”¹⁵¹

Livingston and Eachus also analyzed how many minutes the major American broadcast networks devoted to coverage of the Rwandan genocide during the months of violence; their numbers are appropriately contextualized, and their conclusions are not nearly as positive as Moeller’s are. Livingston and Eachus found, as Moeller did, that Rwanda received around 30 minutes of coverage from the three major networks during the month of April. When placed within the context of the major news stories of that month, however, it quickly becomes apparent that Rwanda was not at all a major story.

¹⁴⁸ Qtd. in Ibid.

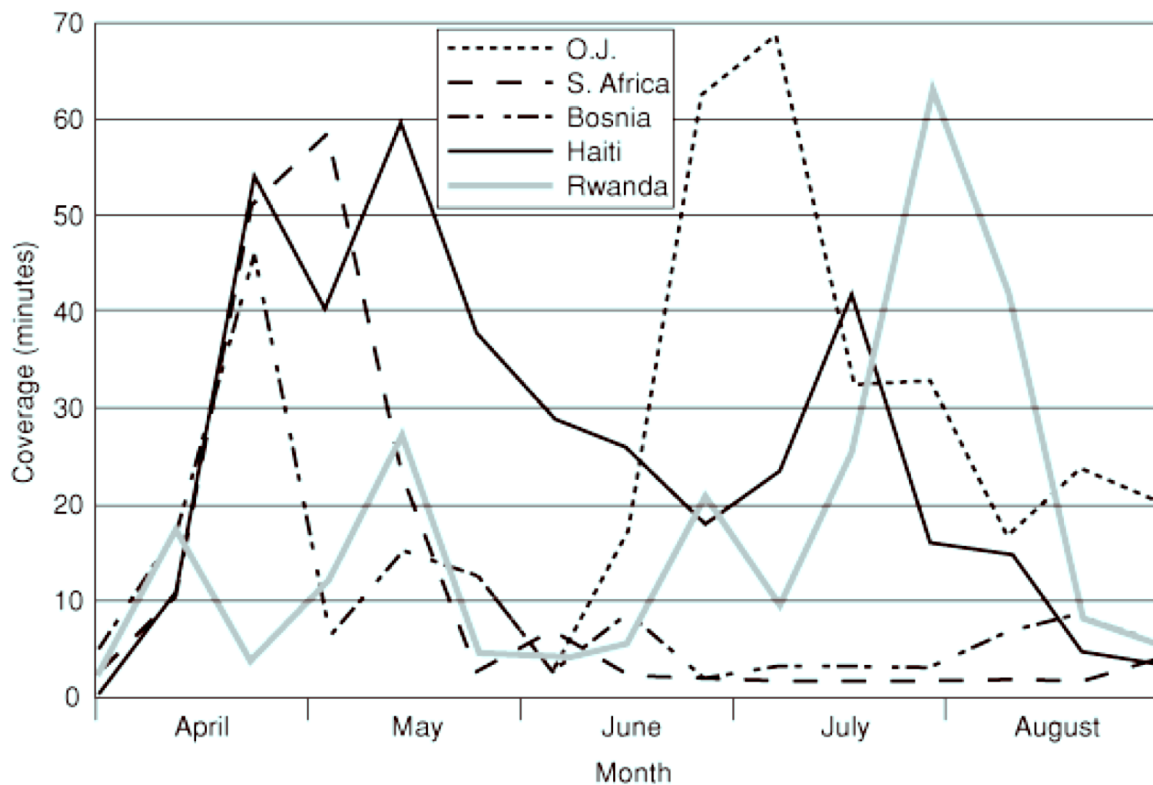
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*. (New York: Routledge, 1999): 283.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 283.

Livingston and Eachus compared the coverage of Rwanda to the coverage of other major stories during the three month duration of the genocide. They aggregated the minutes allocated by the three major networks to covering unrest in Haiti, the first free elections in South Africa, the war in Bosnia, and the murder trial of American football player O.J. Simpson.¹⁵² Until July, after the violence in Rwanda between the RPF and the government forces had ended and well after the worst days of the genocide, Rwanda was consistently allocated fewer minutes than those four other major stories. Figure 1 is a graph modeling this allocation, from Livingston and Eachus' work, "Rwanda: U.S. Policy and Television Coverage," published in *The Path of a Genocide*, edited by Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke.

Figure 1¹⁵³



¹⁵² Ibid., 219.

¹⁵³ Livingston, "Rwanda," 219.

This graph clearly depicts the disparity in coverage of Rwanda and of other issues that do not fall under the “Chad rule.” Haiti, a country on America’s doorstep, was clearly a story of interest, especially as Haitian refugees were fleeing to the United States. The end of apartheid in South Africa marked the end of a policy that had garnered world condemnation and had a particular notoriety in the United States. The war in Bosnia took place in Europe, where the United States had great strategic and economic interest. Finally, the O.J. Simpson murder trial had become a tabloid sensation in the United States, and stories about the trial sold newspapers and hooked viewers. Rwanda offered nothing other than sheer disaster, tragedy and human suffering. The conflict did not affect the United States in any way – no Rwandan refugees washed up on American shores, there was no previously existing market for stories about Rwanda, the country was not located in the backyard of American allies, and there was no celebrity involvement to grab viewers. Clearly, covering Rwanda would offer little gain to the media corporations.

The graph does depict a bump in coverage of Rwanda in early-mid July of 1994. Around this time, the Western media found a story that would be comfortable to tell: that of the refugees flooding out of Rwanda and into neighboring Zaire, Burundi, and Tanzania. According to Susan Moeller, the impending RPF defeat of Rwandan government forces sent more than two million Hutus, including those responsible for the genocide, fleeing for the border.¹⁵⁴ This mass exodus created a new crisis, particularly in Zaire, where the majority of refugees fled. The situation in these refugee camps was actually dire; the town of Goma, on the border of Rwanda and Zaire, saw 350,000 refugees (mainly Hutus) arrive in the night between July 14 and

¹⁵⁴ Moeller, 294.

July 15.¹⁵⁵ Familiar questions arose regarding whether or not sufficient food for all was available and whether or not disease would break out in the camps, and overnight the camps became a media sensation.

Unlike the systematic slaughter of thousands of people in an extremely short period of time, this refugee crisis was a familiar, news-friendly story – the West had seen and handled refugee crises before. While the media shied away from covering the bloodshed in Rwanda, they were eager to cover the plight of the refugees – in fact, such a crisis was “easy to cover,” as “the drama and tragedy were all around.”¹⁵⁶

Edgar Roskis, a journalist with the French newspaper *Le Monde* further described this:

what inspired the picture-takers, the newspapers, the magazines and television the most was not the civil war or the planned massacres of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus, but the humanitarian melodrama, the endless lines of refugees, the sacks of rice, the orphans and field hospitals, the images of downtrodden humanity and resolute volunteers, of suffering and salvation.¹⁵⁷

Stanley Cohen argues that stories “become attached to visual images of suffering,”¹⁵⁸ and according to Roskis, no such images existed in Rwanda until the onset of the refugee crisis.¹⁵⁹ The crisis at Goma offered journalists what Roskis described as “one compact, convenient location where they could instantly access an inexhaustible supply of the raw materials they needed to produce images of Africa for Western consumption.”¹⁶⁰ Goma, unlike Rwanda, was “safe” for journalists, the masses of refugees created photo-op after photo-op, and Goma gave journalists a chance to report not just about the suffering of Africans, but about how Western aid would save their

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 294.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 295.

¹⁵⁷ Roskis

¹⁵⁸ Stanley Cohen, 175.

¹⁵⁹ Roskis.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

lives. Unfortunately, the attention given to the refugee crisis meant that less attention was paid to the circumstances that drove them there in the first place; as Roskis so eloquently says, “in [the Western] mental image of the world, the African dead remain eternally remote and exotic, and we want to be kept blind to the circumstances in which they were murdered.”

The Western media knew that a humanitarian crisis was unfolding in Rwanda; journalists like Mark Doyle and Patrick Robert alerted their parent companies to this fact. However, Rwanda continued to be ignored in the Western press throughout the duration of the genocide. Only once the refugee crisis began did the Western media see an opportunity to “sell” the story; the familiar images of hungry children, crowded campsites, and Western aid packages were an easier story to tell and to show than the genocide that was happening next door. However, by focusing so much on the refugee crisis and ignoring the genocide next door, the media contributed further to Western inaction in Rwanda.

How the Media Facilitated International Inaction

That the Western media failed in the case of the Rwanda genocide is clear. A general lack of coverage of the story and poorly framed reporting were both failures on the part of the media. Not only did the Western media fail to accurately cover one of the most important stories of the decade, however, but their failures directly contributed to the international community’s policies of non-intervention and inaction in Rwanda. According to Livingston and Eachus, “had the American news

organizations been more forceful,...the Clinton administration would have probably experienced greater difficulty pursuing its dogged policy of doing nothing.”¹⁶¹

The inapplicable and erroneous frames used by the media to characterize the genocide implicitly and explicitly supported the international community’s policies of non-intervention in Rwanda. The “ancient enmity” frame, according to Stanley Cohen, is not only inaccurate, but it also discourages the international community from taking any sort of action. According to Cohen, “if the media present a country’s violence as just another episode in a centuries-long Darwinian struggle for power, a twist in the endless cycle of retaliation which is beyond any imaginable solution, then bystander ‘passivity’ is hardly surprising.”¹⁶² In other words, the “ancient enmity” frame implies that the hatred between two groups is rooted so deeply that no intervention from the West could ever improve relations between the groups. This frame tacitly supports and even encourages inaction, because to intervene would be both dangerous and futile.

The media particularly favored this frame, as discussed previously, and news outlets all over the West frequently characterized the enmity between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda as being rooted in centuries of mutual hatred. According to this framework, not only would the West be intervening in an internal affair, but to intervene at all would be pointless, as no amount of intervention from outside players could ever get rid of the deep-rooted animosity between the two groups. As Richard Dowden writes, “the language used by the press to describe Rwanda reinforced the impression that what was going on was an inevitable and primitive process that had no

¹⁶¹ Livingston, “Rwanda,” 226.

¹⁶² Stanley Cohen, 177.

rational explanation and could not be stopped by negotiation or force.”¹⁶³ This frame essentially re-writes the history of Rwanda and manipulates Western assumptions about Africa to apply to this case. The result of this manipulation was tragic and misguided inaction by the international community; the commitment of a relatively small number of troops could have, in fact, save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans.

The balanced conflict frame also validated the international community’s decision to not intervene in the violence in Rwanda. Stanley Cohen addresses this type of frame, arguing “if victims – whether interviewed in hospitals or corpses in hidden graves – are not portrayed as completely blameless, then understanding and empathy are eroded.” He further argues that portraying a balanced conflict when none exists allows the Western “conscience to be comforted (and vocabularies of denial boosted) by a ‘shallow misanthropy’ and moral disgust.”¹⁶⁴ Cohen’s assessment proved to be accurate in the Rwandan case. According to Mark Doyle, the spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees issued a statement that Hutus feared for their lives and had good reason to believe they would be massacred by the RPF.¹⁶⁵ While Doyle advised his editor that this was not true and there was no evidence to back it up, nonetheless, the UN had clearly adopted this “balanced conflict” frame – which implied that Rwanda was merely the site of a civil war rather than a genocide – to apply to Rwanda, which further supported their policy of inaction.

The gross over-coverage of the refugee crisis also facilitated the international community’s inaction during the actual genocide. Rather than committing actual

¹⁶³ Dowden.

¹⁶⁴ Stanley Cohen, 177.

¹⁶⁵ Doyle.

peacekeeping forces to UNAMIR, governments congratulated themselves for sending humanitarian aid to the refugee camps. According to Lindsey Hilsum, “the relatively light coverage of the genocide and the heavy coverage of the refugee crisis helped governments appear to be responding to the most important aspect of the drama.”¹⁶⁶ In fact, the governments used the refugee crisis as a “humanitarian screen” that was used as a “fig leaf for the lack of policy on genocide.”¹⁶⁷

Awareness of the so-called CNN Effect was another factor that contributed to Western inaction in general and American inaction in particular. After the events in Somalia in 1993, the American government was extremely reluctant to get involved in intervention efforts abroad. In the wake of Somalia, government officials decided that the decision to intervene there had been largely influenced by the media; according to George Kennan:

the reason for [American intervention] lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia [famine] by the American media, above all, television. The [intervention] would have been unthinkable without this exposure. The reaction was an emotional one, occasioned by the sight of the suffering of the starving people in question.¹⁶⁸

Government officials became convinced that they had allowed themselves to be swayed into action by “television pictures,”¹⁶⁹ and when the Rwanda crisis arose less than a year later, those decision makers vowed to not fall into the same trap again. According to Livingston, the Clinton administration wanted to “learn the lessons of

¹⁶⁶ Lindsey Hilsum, “Reporting Rwanda: the Media and the Aid Agencies,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ George Kennan, Qtd. in Livingston, “How Both.”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Somalia.” It would not let “television and talk of genocide, no matter how compelling and emotional...to sway the steely-eyed pursuit of national interests.”¹⁷⁰

Unfortunately, this assumption was false. Livingston and Eachus, among others, later determined that the media actually played no role in the American government’s decision to intervene in Somalia; rather, the administration was pressured by powerful members of Congress to intervene. In the end, though, it is irrelevant whether or not the media actually was responsible for the American intervention in Somalia. More important was that key government officials *believed* that the media’s depiction of the crisis in Somalia had caused the government to act. It was this assumption more than the media itself that contributed to American inaction and non-intervention during the Rwanda genocide.

In Rwanda, the media demonstrated a frightening willingness to misrepresent the facts of the events and a decided lack of nuance and perception in their approach to covering the genocide. Further, the media highlighted the stories of the refugee crisis, which were easier to tell, perhaps, but were certainly less important than stories pertaining to the violence the Hutus perpetrated against the Tutsis inside Rwanda. The media’s failures in Rwanda are further compounded by the effect they had on Western policies of non-intervention in the genocide. According to Allan Thompson, “more informed and comprehensive coverage of the Rwanda genocide, particularly in those early days, might well have mitigated or even halted the killing by sparking an international outcry. The news media could have made a difference.”¹⁷¹ Instead, though, the consequences of the media’s myriad failures in Rwanda were the countless

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Allan Thompson, “Introduction,” in *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, ed. Allan Thompson (London: Pluto Press, 2007.)

unnecessary murders that might have been avoided if the Western powers had undertaken to intervene in situation.

Comparing Rwanda and Bosnia

At the same time the Rwanda genocide occurred, civil war and ethnic cleansing were taking place in the former Yugoslavia. Comparing the media coverage of the Bosnia crisis to the Rwandan genocide and analyzing how the media affected the international community's actions in Bosnia will illuminate the regional biases displayed by both the Western media outlets and by the international community in Rwanda. It will also demonstrate the impact that accurate media coverage of Rwanda could have had on the international community's decision to intervene there.

Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia

Civil war in the former Yugoslavia broke out in 1991. The onset of fighting led to "massive population transfers," and the refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) numbers swelled.¹⁷² Bosnia declared its independence in March of 1992, an event that led to over 400,000 people fleeing the territory. These population movements were not entirely voluntary, however; many of them constituted "ethnic cleansing,"¹⁷³ which is the creation of "ethnically homogenous regions"¹⁷⁴ through the forcible removal of ethnic groups from a territory through various methods, including expulsion and death. Other methods employed by the Bosnian Serbs against the Croats and Albanian Muslims included internment in concentration camps and organized

¹⁷² Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, "A Brief History of Ethnic Cleansing," in *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

¹⁷³ Jared Cohen, 63.

¹⁷⁴ Bell-Fialkoff.

rape.¹⁷⁵ In the former Yugoslavia, hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes after their towns had been taken over by partisan groups.¹⁷⁶

By the spring of 1994, Milosevic's ethnic cleansing had been taking place for two years, and the Serbian leadership continued to encourage the violence against the Albanians in particular.¹⁷⁷ During these years, the UN had established several "safe havens" for potential victims of the ethnic cleansing; these havens had, for the most part, remained off-limits to Serbian forces, on pain of "swift and forceful response from the United Nations."¹⁷⁸ Serbian forces finally attacked the safe haven at Gorazde four days before the onset of genocide in Rwanda. According to former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, the American government "never expected [Bosnia] to deteriorate to such conditions."¹⁷⁹

Thus, when genocide commenced in Rwanda, the United States was already preoccupied with a bloody civil war in another region of the world. All in all, over three years of conflict, Yugoslavia had over 2.5 million IDPs¹⁸⁰ and between 100,000 and 150,000 deaths.¹⁸¹ This conflict, while riddled with grave human rights violations, nonetheless does not approach the numbers seen during the Rwandan genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) does not characterize the events in Bosnia as genocide, arguing that "[while] there are obvious similarities between a genocidal policy and the policy commonly known as 'ethnic

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Jared Cohen, 63.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁰ Bell-Fialkoff.

¹⁸¹ Nedim Dervišbegovic, "Revised Death Toll for Bosnian War," *The Bosnia Report*, published by the Bosnia Institute, January-April 2005. Available from http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=2955&reportid=167. Accessed March 20, 2008.

cleansing, [a] clear distinction must [nonetheless] be drawn between physical destruction and mere dissolution of a group. The expulsion of a group or part of a group does not in itself suffice for genocide.”¹⁸² Yugoslavia was not a genocide; Rwanda was. It thus stands to reason that media coverage of Bosnia and the Rwandan genocide and the international community’s intervention policies should have been comparable. This, however, was not the case.

Comparison of Intervention in Bosnia and Rwanda

Early in the conflict in Bosnia, UN deployed to the former Yugoslavia the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), a peacekeeping force. The force, which arrived in Bosnia in June of 1992, consisted of nearly 39,000 soldiers and nearly 1000 civilian police, whose mandate was to establish and oversee protected zones in which all residents were safe from armed attacks. They also enforced the no-fly zone, oversaw the delivery of humanitarian aid, and were permitted to use weapons in self-defense.¹⁸³ UNPROFOR was a visible presence in Bosnia and around the rest of the former Yugoslavia.

The comparisons between UNPROFOR and UNAMIR are obvious. UNPROFOR operated with a wide mandate that permitted them to engage Serbian forces when their mission was threatened. They also benefited from the full support of the United Nations; UNPROFOR did not have the shortage of manpower or resources

¹⁸² “Verdict, Case of Jorgic v. Germany,” *European Court of Human Rights*, Published October 12, 2007. Available from <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/viewhbk.asp?sessionId=1448788&skin=hudoc-en&action=html&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=63590&highlight=>. Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹⁸³ “United Nations Protection Force: Profile.” Available from http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unprof_p.htm. Accessed March 21, 2008.

that UNAMIR did. The UN mission to the former Yugoslavia, furthermore, was reinforced and its mandate widened when it faced new threats in the country.¹⁸⁴ In Rwanda, by comparison, the force was tiny and poorly equipped; it was also essentially removed from the country at the first sign of potential violence.

The American government was slower than the United Nations to insert itself into the former Yugoslavia, but it did eventually directly intervene in the conflict there. In July 1995, after Serbian forces had invaded Srebrenica, a UN protected zone, and massacred its residents, the United States finally entered the conflict. The American government threatened air strikes against Serbian military targets if the Serbs continued to threaten UN protected zones. After the Serbs bombed a Sarajevo marketplace, U.S. forces began Operation Deliberate Force, which consisted of continual bombing of Serbian targets.¹⁸⁵

Operation Deliberate Force was considered to be a success; the bombing was sustained between July and September, when Serbian forces agreed to withdraw their heavy weaponry from around Sarajevo. By the end of September, the country had returned to a 49:51 territorial split, which was considered optimal by diplomats negotiating the peace, and three months after the onset of the bombing, the fighting in Bosnia had ended.¹⁸⁶ U.S. engagement, along with Croat and Bosnian government offensives against the Serbs, had effectively ended the violence in Bosnia. While the United States was slow to involve itself in Bosnia, its engagement proved to be the tipping point needed to break the stalemate.

¹⁸⁴ “United Nations Protection Force: Background,” Available from http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unprof_b.htm. Accessed March 21, 2008.

¹⁸⁵ Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy, and Intervention*, (London: Routledge, 2002): 74.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

Comparison of Media Coverage in Bosnia and Rwanda

The situation Rwanda in April of 1994 could easily be considered more desperate than the situation in the former Yugoslavia at the same time. However, Rwanda received far less coverage in the Western media than did the former Yugoslavia. This is due in part to the fact that the Bosnian war was occurring in Europe's backyard. Western media outlets naturally care more about events occurring closer to home than those that occur farther away. According to Stanley Cohen, since 1991, coverage of foreign news by domestic media in Western Europe and the United States has dramatically declined, and attention to events that are labeled "bad" has declined at an even faster rate.¹⁸⁷ Proximity, then, favored Bosnia in the battle for media coverage

Steven Livingston analyzed Western news coverage of international populations who were "at risk" to be affected by a humanitarian crisis. He looked at news coverage in the year 1996, and while it is not the year of the Rwandan genocide, his results are nonetheless telling. Part of his table is replicated below.

Table 1¹⁸⁸

Country	Millions of People at Risk (% of column total)	New York Times mentions (%)	Washington Post mentions (%)	ABC mentions (%)	CNN mentions (%)	NPR mentions (%)
Bosnia	3.7 (13)	2,633 (45.8)	2046 (43.7)	833 (66)	3062 (66.7)	1204 (61.3)
Rwanda	2.5 (9)	401 (6.9)	277 (5.9)	49 (3.9)	150 (9.8)	118 (6.0)

The disparity in numbers here is astounding. Rwanda, who two years previously had experienced the world's most efficient genocide, still had a large percentage of its

¹⁸⁷ Stanley Cohen, 170.

¹⁸⁸ Livingston, "Limited."

population at risk, yet it received disproportionately low coverage. Bosnia's numbers, however, are by far the most startling. Stories on Bosnia made up over 60% of the coverage on ABC, CNN, and NPR while the other twelve situations experiencing humanitarian disasters (Afghanistan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Iraq, Haiti, Eritrea, Somalia, and Tajikistan) divided the other 40% of stories between them. It must be pointed out that Bosnia was the only European country at risk for a humanitarian disaster in 1996, and with the exception of Haiti, no North or South American countries appear on the list either. With this menu of choices available, according to Stanley Cohen's theory about proximity and coverage, it is hardly surprising that the majority of the coverage went to stories out of Bosnia. It is however, totally apparent that the Western media has a bias in coverage towards countries in or near the West.

Additionally, Bosnia received more nuanced and sympathetic attention from Western journalists than Rwanda did. The "balanced conflict" frame, for example, was not applied nearly as widely or as readily to Bosnia as it was to Rwanda. When journalists were criticized for "demonizing" the Serbs and under-representing atrocities committed by Bosnian Muslims and Croats, the *New York Times* published an article defending the original journalists as accurately depicting what was essentially a one-sided fight. According to the *New York Times*, the Serbs committed at least 90% of the ethnic cleansing, which "made nonsense of the view...that the Bosnian conflict is a civil war for which guilt should be divided between Serbs, Croats and Muslims rather than a case of Serbian aggression."¹⁸⁹ The Western media was much more comfortable portraying a one-sided conflict in Bosnia than they were in

¹⁸⁹ Qtd. in Moeller, 261.

Rwanda, where bureau chiefs mistrusted accurate reports that characterized the violence in Rwanda as being perpetrated almost exclusively by the Hutus. Throughout the duration of the violence in Bosnia, the media continued to cover the conflict and maintain pressure on decision-makers to intervene. This regional bias helped bring humanitarian intervention to Bosnia; Rwanda, as previously discussed, received minimal assistance during the genocide.

Another frame that the media frequently used in Bosnia linked the refugee problem and Western intervention. According to Piers Robinson, this frame was characterized by the use of emotive language: the refugee situation was described with such phrases as “‘mass of wailing humanity,’ ‘dazed,’ ‘weeping,’ and ‘trail of tears.’”¹⁹⁰ This language provokes an empathetic response from the reader. Robinson further found that stories using this emotive language to describe the refugee problem also used critical language to describe the character of Western intervention. According to Robinson, “news media coverage tended to highlight the plight of the refugees from Srebrenica in a tone that empathized with their suffering and also served to emphasize the failure of Western policy in Bosnia.”¹⁹¹ Such coverage eventually had a direct influence in American policies in the region.

Several factors influenced the media’s coverage of the war in Bosnia. According to Steven Livingston, “Bosnia coverage reflected its proximity to major European cities – all major operational bases for the news media – and its geostrategic importance. Second, Bosnia and the rest of the Balkans sit on the southern edge of Europe and indirectly involve at least two key NATO member states: Greece and

¹⁹⁰ Robinson, 78.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 80.

Turkey.”¹⁹² These geopolitical factors were not present in Rwanda; it was therefore much easier for the media and policy-makers to ignore the genocide in Rwanda than it would have been to ignore the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia.

How the Media Facilitated Intervention in Bosnia

The media unquestionably contributed to the international community’s inaction in Rwanda, but did the media play an opposite role in Bosnia? In fact, Bosnia is a textbook example of the CNN Effect. The impact of the media coverage of the Bosnian conflict directly influenced the American government’s decision to intervene, however, other factors also contributed to Western intervention as well.

The frames used by the media in covering the conflict in Bosnia were particularly effective in forcing the American government into action. The Clinton administration, according to Piers Robinson, was not eager to intervene in Bosnia. While the American government would condemn the crimes being perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia, they would then “fail to carry through with substantive engagement.”¹⁹³ This changed, however, once the media’s coverage brought pressure to bear on the administration.

Piers Robinson characterizes the media’s refugee/Western policy frame as being of a “do something nature.”¹⁹⁴ Because this coverage came about at a time when there was no policy in place regarding intervention following the attack on Srebrenica,

¹⁹² Livingston, “Limited.”

¹⁹³ Robinson, 73.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 82.

policy-makers were faced with a decision: follow public opinion as portrayed by the media and stage an intervention or face further criticism in the news.¹⁹⁵

Robinson recounts Vice President Al Gore's recollection of the meeting in which the policy-makers decided on a policy of intervention in Bosnia. Vice President Gore directly attributes the American plan to intervene to the media coverage of the situation in Bosnia:

we can't be driven by images...but we can't ignore the images either...my 21-year-old daughter asked about that picture [in the *Washington Post* of a Muslim woman who hung herself following a Serb assault]...What am I supposed to tell her? Why is this happening and we're not doing anything?...Acquiescence is not an option.¹⁹⁶

The prevalence of images and sympathetic frames drove public opinion towards supporting intervention. In this case, the pressure brought to bear on the American government by the images of the conflict in the media directly impacted American intervention in Bosnia.

It is important to mention other factors that influenced Western policy, however. As previously noted by Steven Livingston, Bosnia's geostrategic and convenient location almost guaranteed that the West would closely follow the situation there. Livingston argues that "instability along NATO's southern tier was as much a catalyst for US intervention as was news coverage."¹⁹⁷ The United States had many interests in the region, and Bosnia's proximity to NATO allies Greece and Turkey led to American interest in the outcome of the conflict.

Comparing the cases of the Bosnian conflict and the Rwandan genocide, it becomes apparent that Cohen's "Chad Rule" is indeed an accurate depiction Western

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁹⁶ Qtd. in Ibid., 82-3.

¹⁹⁷ Livingston, "Limited."

interest in the developing world. Bosnia, a country located in Europe, near key allies of such major world powers as the United States, received an abundance of media attention. The nature of that attention was sympathetic and nuanced, and it gave a fairly accurate portrayal of the problems and issues in the region. The media coverage even went so far as to urge action and intervention in the conflict on the part of the Western powers.

Rwanda, however, is a small, isolated country in the middle of Africa. It is not located near any major American allies, and it has no geopolitical or economic significance. The atrocities that happened there were arguably worse than what occurred in the former Yugoslavia, but the media coverage of those atrocities was insignificant and inaccurate. When the media did cover the story, they focused not on the atrocities, but on the humanitarian crisis, which tacitly implied that giving humanitarian aid would be enough to satisfy the West's "duty" there.

A comparison of these two cases shows that the media and the international community displayed a strong regional preference for Bosnia over Rwanda – that is, Europe over Africa. Additionally, Western actions and media coverage in Rwanda were strongly informed by Western assumptions about Africa that superceded the application of any sensitive analysis to the genocide and its roots. Bosnia benefited from being more familiar and media-friendly, both in terms of location and in terms of the nature of the conflict. This comparison puts Western failures in Rwanda into stark relief.

Conclusion

Western actions both on the part of the media and on the part of the international community constituted a failure in Rwanda. The Western media, which understood the magnitude of the events in Rwanda thanks to the courageous reporting by such journalists as Mark Doyle, failed to give appropriate coverage to a vitally important story. While there may have been no consumer demand for coverage of the Rwandan genocide, the media nevertheless had an obligation to cover the story fully and sensitively, which it did not do. Rather, the media resorted to inaccurate framing and sensationalist coverage of the wrong topics to make the story more palatable to the public. Unfortunately in doing this, the media tacitly supported inaction and non-intervention in the genocide.

The international community also failed in Rwanda. The UN, backed by the United States and others, abandoned Rwanda when the situation was at its most dire, and the Western powers really only interested themselves in the crisis when it became a familiar story of refugees. Bringing humanitarian aid to the refugees, unlike intervention in the genocide, made for good publicity photos for the Western countries. The failures in Rwanda are only more apparent when Western actions there are contrasted with Western actions in Bosnia, which enjoyed sympathetic media coverage and a strong UN and American presence.

The international community has repeatedly failed in its quest to “never again” stand by and witness the perpetration of genocide. Nowhere is that so clear, however, as in the case of Rwanda. The story of Rwanda is a tragedy on its own, but it is made even more so by the fact that more than half the victims could have been saved with

just a small commitment of intervention by the international community. With its passivity, the Western world condemned hundreds of thousands of innocent people to death, and the guilt of that inaction will never fade. It remains to be seen, however, if the international community has changed its attitude in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide.

Appendix A

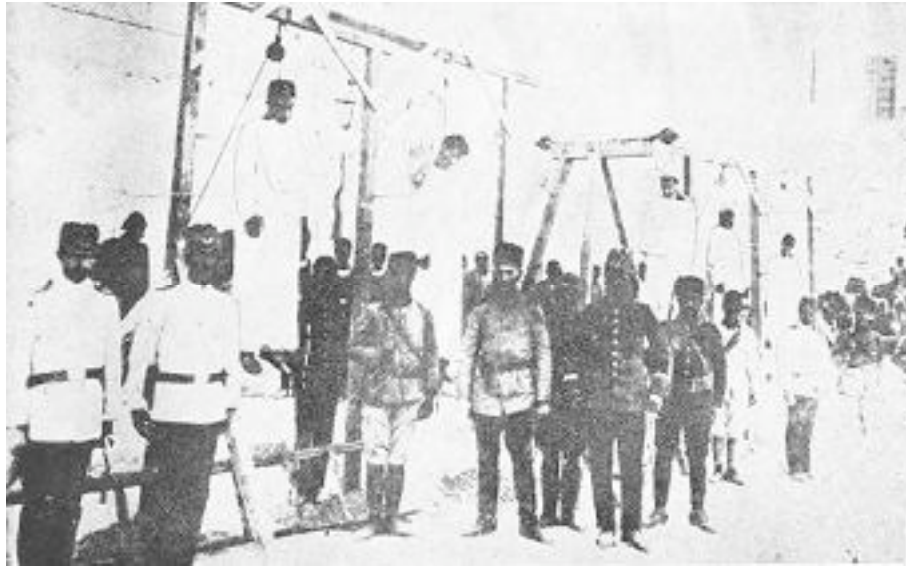
Map of Rwanda, 2005¹⁹⁸



¹⁹⁸ Map of Rwanda, *CIA World Factbook*, Available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rw.html>. Accessed February 3, 2008.

Appendix B

Images of Genocide: Armenia, 1914¹⁹⁹



Turkish hangmen and their victims



Victims in a mass grave

¹⁹⁹ Images from James Nazer, *The First Genocide of the 20th Century: The Stories of the Armenian Massacres in Text and Pictures*. (New York: T & T Publishing, 1968).

Appendix C

Images of Genocide: the Holocaust, 1938-1940²⁰⁰



Camp doctor Fritz Klein, standing among corpses in a mass grave at Bergen-Belsen Camp, Germany.



Soviet officials view corpses of victims at Klooga Camp, Estonia.

²⁰⁰ Images from U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum online encyclopedia, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/>. Accessed February 3, 2008.

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