Between Victims and Perpetrators: Analyzing the *New York Times* Coverage of the Genocide in Rwanda

Zehra Hirji
Harvard University

This article explores, in depth, the New York Times reporting on the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. While the conflict is often considered to be a failure on the part of the international community for their lack of response, what role, if any, did the media play in the representation of genocide? The Times covered the events on the ground every day of the violence, but how did the story unfold to the public and what are the implications of such reporting? This article hopes to analyze the events as they were portrayed by the Times and explain the significance of such reporting.

Introduction

Again and again, we declare "never again" for genocide. "Not on our watch" and other rhetoric is spouted from politicians and activists worldwide in response to the atrocities associated with the crime of genocide. As the stories unfold, as information on the terror is unleashed the world is presented with the opportunity to respond or to do nothing, as history has often sadly indicated. But what happens if the story is not told or if it is told incorrectly? How does the presentation of the "genocide" resonate with the American populace? More importantly, what is the presentation of genocide as it is taking place? An analysis of the scholarship on the Rwandan genocide reveals that we have insufficiently appreciated the evolution of media coverage on genocide. There is much to be gained from studying how the news portrayed the story as the events were taking place. As the fastest genocide in recorded history[1] every article in the 100-day period of the genocide had the potential for great impact and influence on the American public and government.

The term "genocide" was coined by Jewish-Polish scholar Raphael Lemkin in 1944 as a crime against humanity, and the term was primarily developed in response to the Holocaust. While the term can be employed in a variety of ways today, with contention among scholars as to its specific usages, in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly established the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to define the crime within a legal context. Article 2 of the genocide convention (as it is commonly known) defines the act of 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: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."[2] While the scope of this paper will not go into the legal implications of the "official" United Nations definition, it is important to acknowledge the disputes and confusion that may lie in affording the term to a specific conflict. Additionally, the potential grey areas (for example the term technically does not apply to victims of political groups and as such the mass killings in Cambodia in the 1970s would not qualify as genocide under this definition) leave room for politicians and foreign policy advisers in the field to evade designating the term in certain circumstances. That being said, in the case of Rwanda today the conflict of 1994 is virtually uncontested as an act of genocide against the Tutsi people of Rwanda.

The *New York Times* plays a huge role in American discourse and is the paper that not only citizens consult to understand which issues are most pressing, but also what politicians consult to gauge what is on the minds of the American populace, thus in some ways helping to set the agenda.[3] However, it also receives the reputation of being the newspaper of the elites and "liberal intellectuals." For the purpose of this study, it will be regarded in the context of its strong influence on the public and its international standing. How did "America's newspaper" respond to the situation in Rwanda? How did the story unfold and change as more information revealed itself? How has reporting on genocide changed since the days of the Holocaust and how will it look in the future, particularly in reference to

[1] "How to Stop a Genocide," *The Economist* (2008), http://www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displayStory.cfm?story_id=12773216.
[2] GA/RES/260, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,* United Nations General Assembly (1948).
[3] Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

events in Darfur today? Because of America's reluctance to intervene and the lack of great grassroots efforts on behalf of American citizens, it could have been naturally perceived that the *New York Times* had perhaps minimized reporting on Rwanda. For lack of information, confusion of the situation on the ground, or more pressing issues at the time in history, it is often generally assumed by advocates that the *Times* may not have devoted much coverage to this grave crisis. Surprisingly, it was discovered that the *Times* covered the story in Rwanda almost every single day of the conflict, often with several articles and photos of the situation on the ground. In the approximate 100 days of the genocide (from April 6, 1994 through mid-July), the *New York Times* published approximately 144 articles on the genocide, and an additional 50 more in the immediate two weeks following the formal declaration to the end of the violence. If the survey is expanded to include news highlights, individual captions, letters to the editor, and all types of news analyses, then Rwanda was featured in the *Times* over 250 times during the period of the genocide in 1994. (This paper focuses mainly on instances where Rwanda was mentioned as a focus of the piece in the *Times).* The quantity of coverage was astounding, especially following the end of the genocide; however, the placement in the paper of these stories was rather insignificant. Stories of Rwanda were often a feature of the front page of the international section of the paper, but made the front page of the paper only eleven times during the approximately 100 days of the genocide. Although, in the ten days following the end of the genocide, Rwanda made the front page at least three times.

The important question to consider is not if the *New York Times* was paying attention to Rwanda, but rather *how* did it present this information? How was the story told and how was the situation described? What language characterized the conflict and what was the role of the word "genocide" in particular when discussing the mass atrocities perpetrated against the Tutsi minority? This paper will look into answering these questions directly and present an in-depth analysis of the *New York Times'* coverage of the crisis in Rwanda and the lessons to be learned from America's coverage of genocide. The United States is an interesting case study in itself because of the country's unique "exceptionalism"[4] in terms of human rights and its strong interventionist attitudes in foreign conflicts. The term exceptionalism refers to a notion, described in detail by scholar Michael Ignatieff,[5] which explains that America and in the West in general, there is a doctrine of thought, which would suggest they take a unique interest in promoting a Western notion of human rights abroad. This theory is widely contested, yet can still be employed by US advisers when justifying some of their interventionist attitudes abroad. Whether or not the theory holds true in reality, the notion lends an additional significance to the US decision not to get involved in Rwanda.

Purpose of Study

Scholars have poured over the events of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, analyzing the historical setup, the details of the atrocities, as well as the aftermath. Gerard Prunier in his book *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide,* presents one of the most well-respected and comprehensive accounts of the situation in Rwanda and the events leading up to it. Although it is one of the earliest records, published in 1995 and then republished in 1997, the book provides clarifying information on the situation on the ground after the conflict had formally ended. Analysts, journalists, and scholars alike have discussed the genocide in great detail and the failures in Rwanda have become a powerful shaming tool for activists to galvanize action in today's great human rights atrocities. Literature such as Samantha Power's book *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* criticizes the United States' lack of involvement in preventing the genocide; speculation indicated that the US could have easily curbed the violence if it had chosen to intervene. Other works, such as Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, focus their analysis and criticism upon the United Nations and the international community for their inability to mitigate the crisis, allowing it escalate to such heights. Studies have yet to analyze the implications and role of the media in its portrayal of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. While scholars are quick to extend blame and admonition to governments and international bodies, they forget the critical role of the news in presenting the story as it unfolded.

Examining the media representation of genocide is crucial on a variety of different levels. To begin, it lets us retrospectively examine the situation at the time of the genocide and enables us to comprehend the story as it was taking place. How much information did we have? Were the victims and the perpetrators clearly defined? It is often taken for granted in mainstream academia that the Rwandan genocide is defined as the genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutu ethnic group, but at what point did that become clear in 1994? These questions have an impact on reactions to the genocide and can provide important lessons for prevention in the future.

A study on the media representation of genocide is also a vital component in studying collective action and grassroots responses to crimes against humanity. Scholarship in collective action and social movements is highly dependent

[4] Michael Ignatieff, *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[5] Ibid.

upon newspaper data; research indicates that there is a correlation between the coverage of an issue and citizen responses and mobilization.[6] Genocide *prevention* tends to be more of a lofty ideal rather than a utilized practice as indicated by recent history, despite the noblest attempts of the international legal regime. Genocide punishment, occurring after the devastation, is often most applicable and implemented in cases of alleged genocide. However, stopping genocide first and foremost requires a recognition and understanding that genocide is actually occurring. Because of lack of access to information and the secrecy of such heinous operations, sometimes it is not possible to understand the situation on the ground until after the fact, rendering genocide impossible to prevent. Analyses of the coverage of Rwanda can lend important insights into the future of genocide prevention in terms of collective action and social movements and the role that the media can play in such events.

The 1994 genocide of the Tutsi minority group in Rwanda was one of the most clear-cut instances of genocide (in terms of circumstances following the development of the legal term genocide as found in the genocide convention) in our current knowledge of world history, according to genocide scholar Samantha Power.[7] It was regarded as one of the biggest failures of the United Nations, which failed to intervene. The United States in particular expressed remorse in failing to stop the genocide. There was no public outcry, there were no mass demonstrations, no intense pressure on the U.S. government to intervene. It thus proved to be most cost-effective to do nothing.[8] Often deemed the "voice of America"[9] and one of the most widely read newspapers in the world today, the *New York Times* also stood as a bystander and witness to the genocide in Rwanda.

Methodology and Research Design

As briefly mentioned earlier, the *New York Times* was selected as the basis for the study on media coverage of the Rwandan genocide for several reasons, but most importantly because of its role in American society and its position among international news sources. Experts have noted that foreign governments looked to the *Times* for insight, and public relations scholar Albert Lasker concluded that governments tend to judge American public opinion based on the editorial comments in the *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*.[10] The Polish exile government during World War II described the *Times* as a "powerful organ of American opinion" and even Pope John Paul II revealed that he was a careful reader of the *New York Times.*[11] Domestically, other newspapers and journalists often look to this paper for cues on the most pressing issues and important events. "It didn't happen if it wasn't in the Times," a New York reporter, Arnold Beichman, once confessed. Oswald Garrison Villard, respected editor of *The Nation* magazine, once said, "No important journalist can possibly do without it, and it has literally made itself indispensable to anyone who desires to be thoroughly informed as to what is happening on this globe."[12] A 1944 Washington survey of the American public also concluded, by more than five to one, that the *Times* was believed to be the nation's "most reliable and comprehensive newspaper."[13]

In order to limit this paper to the actual occurrence of the genocide, the timeframe of the study has been limited from April 6 to July 31, 1994: the day on which President Juvénal Habyarimana was assassinated along with the President of Burundi, the initial spark of the mass killings, to a little less than two weeks after the genocide was deemed over (following a cease-fire implemented by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels on July 18). While I hope to address the circumstances preceding and following the genocide, I chose specifically to limit the main analysis to the period of the actual genocide in order to survey the way the *Times* presented the situation as the story was unfolding.

When selecting articles I chose articles of all lengths and types, but limited my search to only sources in the *Times* where Rwanda was mentioned in the headline or leading paragraphs of the article. This was in order to gauge which sources were most directly associated to this particular crisis. I also consulted microform archives to gain insight on the placement and size of the article, as well as the location and prominence of photos associated with the articles.

Because of the nature of this study in analyzing the story as it came to be known, I tried not to consult too many outside sources or explore the motivations of writers or editors in presenting the stories on Rwanda. The primary goal was to decipher how the situation in Rwanda would have appeared in 1994 if one were to only consult the *Times* for news. As I did not read the *Times* in 1994 or any articles on the genocide in Rwanda during that period, it was a

---

[6] Jennifer Earl, Andrew Martin, John McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soule, "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 65-80.
[7] Power, 2002.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[10] Ibid., 11.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 12.
[13] Ibid.

completely blind study. Current literature and scholarship on the genocide were consulted after research only for a familiarization of the accepted current understanding of the situation in 1994. For this research, it was crucial to separate what we know now from what was known at the time.

New York Times Reporting on Genocide

To grapple with the role of the *New York Times* and provide context to the comparative study of genocide coverage, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America's Most Important Newspaper* written by Laurel Leff and *Israel-Palestine on Record: How the New York Times Misreports Conflict in the Middle East* by Richard Falk and Howard Friel proved important tools for comparison and analysis. Both books remark on the *Times*' reporting during conflict and their motivations for representing certain stories as well as story placement. Analyzing the coverage of the Holocaust plays particular importance in the study and will prove to be a worthwhile comparison for reporting on the genocide in Rwanda. We can also consult the *Times* directly for a brief overview of its coverage and analyses of the atrocities in the Darfur region of Sudan.

When analyzing the coverage of the Holocaust, it is important to note that the events of this genocide took place within the context of World War II. While this is no way downplays the significance of the genocide in international history it could have had severe impacts on reporting especially when considering potential pressures on the media to support the war effort in the United States. Regardless, Leff's study reveals that the *New York Times* fell short of its moral imperative to tell the story of the extermination of Europe's Jewish population.

In the initial stages of the Holocaust, minimalist coverage of the genocide could be attributed to concerns of inaccurate information or unconfirmed reports of the killings in Europe, and in several instances, the *Times* explicitly stated that its information could not be verified.[14] The circumstances when such statements about information were made lead us to infer that other reports were based on confirmed sources and accurate information. In December of 1942, eleven Allied governments confirmed the Final Solution, which is acknowledged as the first official confirmation of the genocide.[15] Leff points out that even after this confirmation, there was no "discernable change" in the coverage of the genocide. In 1940, the plight of the Jews made the front page six times, seven times in 1941, nine in 1942, seven in 1943, and then twelve in 1945. In terms of the overall number of articles, the *Times* published 240 stories about the situation in 1940, 207 in 1941, 139 in 1942, 186 in 1943, and 197 in 1944. Historian Henry L. Feinold attributes this coverage not to a failure of information, but rather, as he calls it, "a failure of mind."[16]

When addressing the content and language of the articles on the Holocaust, issues arise in comparison because the word genocide was not coined until 1944 by Lemkin, with the past events of the Holocaust in mind. The *Times* often described the events as a "mass slaughter" or used the words "murder" and "massacres." There was little attention given to ethnic tensions, racial discrimination, or group killings. The first story in the *Times* to be printed on the Nazi extermination campaign described the genocide as "the greatest mass slaughter in history."[17] Despite the strong language, the story managed to only make it to the bottom of a column on page 5 of the paper. The most significant finding of the content analysis on *Times*' articles on the Holocaust found that even when the story was covered (albeit tucked deep inside the paper) the identity of the victims, the Jews, was downplayed. Often it was indicated that mass murders were being carried out, but it failed to explicitly mention that it was a planned campaign targeted at Jews despite the confirmation of many Allied governments. Furthermore, Leff reveals that even when Jews were mentioned as the victim group, the *Times* failed to mention that they were being killed *because they were Jewish*, a vital ingredient in the genocide.[18] The only indicator of the plight of the Jews came from the editorial section of the paper, but even then, only 13 editorials out of over 3000 published in 1944 mentioned the issue.[19] Leff attributes some of the coverage inefficiencies to anti-Semitism, but even this does not fully account for the lack of reporting, especially when considering that the editor of the *New York Times* at the time was a Jew. She concludes that the *Times* intentionally buried the story of the Holocaust because it did not consider it important, especially in its historical context. While there is no assertion that the Jews of Europe would have been saved during World War II if the *Times* had more effectively covered their plight, it is impossible to gauge whether or not the public could have been moved by the genocide if greater attention had been given to the crisis.[20] Public attention was not aroused and there was no mass social movement or collective action. Regardless of whether or not the *Times* coverage could have saved lives, Leff strongly argues that the Times journalists had a moral responsibility to cover the story. It is not necessarily the

[14] Ibid., 4.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 6.
[18] Ibid., 16.
[19] Ibid., 292.
[20] Ibid., 15.

responsibility of the press to affect government policy or inspire public action, but its choice in highlighting certain issues has an impact on public discourse. The time period also contributes to another issue for comparison with Rwanda because the United Nations was not yet established during the Holocaust. It is worth noting that after the establishment of the UN, a declaration of the extermination campaign of the Jews appeared on the front page of the *Times, in addition to* a story that recognized the Holocaust, specifically the systematic murder of the Jewish people, as one of "the blackest crimes of all history"[21] Unfortunately, this recognition and acknowledgement came far too late and had no impact on the understanding of the genocide as it was taking place.

The Rwandan Genocide and When We Knew

While it would not be effective to attempt to reproduce a history of the events of the genocide as a preamble to the analysis of the coverage, it is worth noting that there was not a significant disjuncture between scholarship and reporting, (see appendix for in-depth timeline of the genocide) the actual events were depicted by the *Times,* as they are confirmed by scholars to have occurred on the ground. The discrepancy was found, rather, in the labeling of the conflict and the dates and times in which victim and perpetrator groups were identified. On April 10, 1994, the political opposition in Rwanda reported that the Hutus were trying to "exterminate the Tutsi minority."[22] On April 11, Paris reported that the Hutus were "hunting down the Tutsis." On April 16th, 1200 Tutsis were massacred in a church, a story that was widely reported internationally, including in the *Times.* On April 17, *Le Monde* reported that 1180 Tutsis were "exterminated" and the RPF radio broadcasted, "the world cannot and should not forget the *genocide* that is being perpetrated in Rwanda today." This broadcast was translated and published by the CIA on April 19.[23] On April 18, the International Committee of the Red Cross officially called the crisis in Rwanda genocide and the BBC News followed suit. On April 19, Human Rights Watch, officially declared genocide in Rwanda becoming the first American organization to do so. By April 25, the *Times*' strongest statement was an indication that there was an "extermination" and what "*appear[ed]* to be a methodical killing of Tutsis" in Rwanda. On April 27, the Pope began to use the word genocide, but it was not until May 4 that Boutros Boutros Ghali, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations declared a "real genocide" in Rwanda.[24] The United States finally came around by July 17 and officially cut diplomatic ties with Rwanda on the grounds of genocide and by July 18 the RPF had taken over and called for a cease-fire, officially marking the end of the genocide. Based on this information, it is difficult to argue that there was a lack of complete information on the events taking place or that international journalists were not on the ground in Rwanda and around the region.

Coverage Analysis

As mentioned earlier, there were over 250 occasions throughout the 100 days of the genocide where the crisis in Rwanda was mentioned as the subject of an article or feature in the *Times.* There is somewhat of a general misconception that the events of Rwanda were unclear or that the genocide was unknown until hundreds of thousands had already been killed. In fact, there were many foreign correspondents on the ground and around the region covering the story regularly. Journalists reported that Hutu militias killed civilians in cold blood in front of foreign correspondents without thinking twice.[25] Foreigners were also not targets of the violence. Contributions in the *Times* were made by many different reporters as well as inclusions from the Associated Press and Reuters. Among those covering the story there were about eight regular contributors, stationed at different locations. Paul Lewis produced 24 articles within the days of the genocide and was the reporter designated to cover the United Nations and focus specifically on their intelligence, reports, and commentary on the situation. There were several major reporters covering the countries surrounding Rwanda, primarily Zaire, Uganda, Kenya, and Burundi and among the most prolific of them is Donatella Lorch. Lorch published over 25 articles for the *Times* alone and throughout the conflict was stationed in Nairobi, Kenya; Kigali and Nyarubuye, Rwanda; Kayanza and Bujumbura, Burundi; Ngara, Benaco Camp, and Ntobeye, Tanzania; and Kasensero, Uganda. Lorch's articles focused primarily on the refugee situation as a result of the conflict, and because most of the refugees were of the majority Hutu ethnic group, she frequently covered their plight and perspective on the situation. Her first article published on Rwanda appeared on April 11. Perhaps the most prominent reporter from the *Times* on the situation in Rwanda was Raymond Bonner. Bonner was the main correspondent to cover the story from inside Rwanda. He was stationed all over the country and published stories from the cities of Cyanika, Ruganda, Gishyita, Bisesero, Butare, Gikongoro, Kigali, Murambi, Gisenyi as well as Nairobi, Kenya and Goma, Zaire. AP and Reuters stories were also published from in and around Rwanda and other correspondents covered the situation from Paris, Milan, London and other cities around Europe. The array of locations and potential perspectives of the reporters was vast and comprehensive

[21] Ibid., 347.
[22] J. Alan Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: The Rwandan Genocide* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).
[23] Ibid., 31.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Based on various sources, namely the BBC.

and would have enabled the *Times* to produce quite accurate and comprehensive coverage of the situation in Rwanda.

Analysis begins with Lorch's coverage of the conflict because she appears to have been the first regular reporter stationed on the ground. Lorch's first article came from Nairobi, Kenya, less than a week after President Habyarimana's plane had been shot down. Her article was tucked away on the bottom right hand corner of the international section (Section A) of the paper on page one. By this point, the *Times* had reported that an estimated 20,000 people were already killed in what appeared to be "civil-strife."[26] She details the "anarchy" and "terror" as described by American evacuees and mentions the Tutsis only twice, noting that the director of the American Center for Disease Control stated that the "Tutsi ethnic group were among the worst hit in the first night of fighting." By this point, there were graphic details available on civilians being armed with machetes and a full-scale "ethnic-war" taking shape. Her next article on April 13 came from Kigali, Rwanda, and again provided comprehensive coverage of the fighting and "ethnic and tribal" violence. Shockingly, this article made almost no mention of the Tutsis being the victim group or any specific targeting of them in the violence. The article portrays the conflict in terms of an all-out war and describes the Tutsis' RPF rebel army as well as the government militia negatively.[27] Even more interesting than this article was a front-page story in the *Times* that day entitled *RWANDAN REBELS PUSH INTO CAPITAL*, which focused on the strength and advancements of the Tutsi Rebel army and their historically favored position in Rwanda. That article also describes the situation as an ethnic conflict, despite a Tutsi rebel quote explaining the opposite, and it fails to make any mention of Tutsi victims targeted in the violence. In fact, the article seems to suggest that the Rebel Army was in some way an instigator of the war. Lorch's articles continued to come out of Kigali, Rwanda; and Nairobi, Kenya for several weeks reporting "massacres" and unprecedented civilian deaths, but never with a specific victim group. It was often indicated that *civilians* were dying or that *Rwandans* were dying, but there was no mention of Tutsis specifically. There was mention of ethnic conflict, but no systematic targeting. This is similar to the Holocaust coverage in which the Jews were sometimes specifically left out as the victim group. On April 25, after many international organizations and non-governmental bodies had already labeled the conflict as genocide against the Tutsi people,[28] Lorch published an article, again on the front of Section A of the paper with no photo accompaniment, saying that most of the villages and townspeople were Tutsis and that they were being "hunted down like animals" in "what appear[ed] to be a methodical killing of Tutsis across the countryside."[29] These were some of the strongest statements brought forth by the *Times* thus far and a significant instance in which the Tutsi group was distinctly labeled as the victim group. Lorch's coverage continued, but following April 30, she began to focus on the refugee situation. Her articles covered killings of Tutsi civilians, but also made certain to highlight Hutu struggles. The coverage of Hutu and Tutsi strife appeared to be very balanced, in that both groups were given equal weighting in their suffering, which seems concerning considering we know now that it was a very clear case of genocide against the Tutsis. The RPF was singled out for their attacks and there were many photos of Hutu refugees as well as quotations from Hutus who feared reprisals from the rebel army. There was talk of massacres and "wide scale killings" but no mention of the word genocide. On May 4, Lorch mentioned that western diplomats and human rights organizations were calling the situation "a methodical, organized violence carried out by the Rwandan military" (explicitly leaving out the word genocide) but then was quick to title her next section "Hutus Too, Are Targets."[30] The article itself was titled *In the Upheaval in Rwanda, Few Answers Yet* indicating to *Times'* readers that the situation in Rwanda was an 'upheaval" with confusion as to the actual events, despite much of the international community, including the United Nations, officially recognizing genocide by this point. The majority of Lorch's subsequent articles were insistent on matching all Tutsi suffering with a sort of parallel or equivalent in Hutu suffering, and it could not be clear to any reader that there was a clear genocide of the Tutsis. The reporting became "too balanced" in a sense, but this can be accounted for given that Lorch is covering the situation from the refugee camps where there were mostly Hutus, because most of the Tutsis were killed before being able to flee the country. Chaos and confusion on the ground, in addition to the very large number of Hutu families suffering in camps and terrified by the violence, may have led to a collusion of "victim" groups in the representation of this conflict, therefore perhaps distorting the image of the Tutsis as the primary victims of the genocide. There was extensive vilifying of the Tutsi rebel army and mention of their atrocities committed to the Hutus fleeing into the refugee camps, but it is recognized that most of the dead inside Rwanda were Tutsi. Lorch's focus gave voice to and personified the Hutus as the victim group. Towards the end of May, thousands of bodies began to wash down the river from Rwanda into Uganda. Lorch was the main correspondent on this scene but did not identify the bodies as Tutsis, and simply discussed them as Rwandans or civilians. In her entire coverage of Rwanda from April 10 until well beyond the end of the genocide,

[26] Donatella Lorch, "Strife in Rwanda: Evacuation; American Evacuees Describe Horrors Faced by Rwandansm," *New York Times*, April 11, 1994.
[27] Donatella Lorch, "Anarchy Rules Rwanda's Capital and Drunken Soldiers Roam City," *New York Times*, April 13, 1994.
[28] See Appendix, Chart 3.
[29] Donatella Lorch, "Rwandan Refugees Describe Horrors after a Bloody Trek," *The New York Times*, April 25, 1994.
[30] Donatella Lorch, "In the Upheaval in Rwanda, Few Answers Yet," *The New York Times*, May 5, 1994.

Lorch used the word genocide twice, both times within quotations, first on June 9 and then on July 17. Neither case though, despite the quotations, directly called the situation genocide. The phrase "ethnic cleansing" was used once and also within quotations in mid-June.

As listed earlier another major correspondent to the conflict in Rwanda was Raymond Bonner. Bonner did not arrive on the scene until June 28, but was the main correspondent reporting directly from Rwanda. Bonner's first article detailed the refugee situation and highlighted that most of the dead thus far had been of the Tutsi minority group, but that there had been deathly reprisals by the Tutsi rebel army on the Hutus. Like Lorch, Bonner presents "balanced" reporting discussing massacres, Tutsi deaths, and Hutu suffering in refugee camps. Most often, the conflict was labeled a civil war with two-sided ethnic rivalries. On July 1, after almost every organization, international body, and many nations with the exception of the United States (which had political incentives), had categorized the conflict as genocide. Bonner clarified in his article that "some American officials and human rights organizations have called the massacres genocide."[31] Bonner's reporting overall paid homage to the Tutsis as a victim group of the large-scale massacres without going so far as to call it genocide. Bonner's unique perspective in Rwanda, especially during the time of the French intervention, gave him more access to Tutsi stories, as opposed to Lorch in the refugee camps. While Bonner recognized that the RPF had committed human-rights violations against the Hutus, he was clear to explain that it did not amount to the "mass-killings" carried out by the Hutu-comprised government militias. On July 11, over 90 days after the genocide began, Bonner wrote an extensive analysis of the Rwandan crisis and fully explained that the systematic killing of the Tutsis had begun in April and finally mentioned that public radio broadcasts had openly called for the killing of all Tutsi people.[32] Bonner goes into great detail of the situation, coming short of calling the situation genocide or even ethnic cleansing, but rather labeling the killing of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis "massacres." This article clarified the dire situation of the Tutsis, but unlike many other articles featured in the beginning of Section A of the paper, this article by Bonner was pushed back to page eight of Section A. Towards the middle of July, Bonner's coverage began to specifically focus on the mounting refugee situation as a result of the conflict, but he still mentioned the massive killings of the Tutsis. Bonner used the word genocide four times in his entire coverage, twice within quotations and twice as a reference to what the United Nations or human rights organizations had used to label the conflict. Bonner never directly used the word genocide to label the situation or describe the events in Rwanda.

Paul Lewis was the third major contributor to the *Times* on Rwanda, but he reported directly from the United Nations as opposed to on the ground in the region. Lewis was the first writer for the *Times* associated with the story of Rwanda and covered the plane crash and assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. Lewis's coverage began with a thorough analysis of the conflict and the role of the UN and UN peacekeepers on the ground. In the first couple of days of his reporting, he notes that there was some confusion as to who the victim groups were, but by April 11, confirmed through a quote from the UN mediator in Rwanda that the war and conflict were "ethnic in nature" and that civilians were "terrified by the ruthless campaign of *ethnic cleansing* and terror,"[33] although no victim group was explicitly mentioned as the target of the ethnic cleansing. This strongly-worded article featured this early in the conflict was actually pushed all the way to page twelve of section A of that day's newspaper. Lewis's next article did not come until April 22 when he reported that the UN Security Council decided to cut their peacekeeping forces in Rwanda. The United States voted in favor of withdrawing all forces, but ultimately the Council decided to reduce the troop size. By this point, many international aid organizations began calling the conflict genocide, but Lewis made no mention of this, nor did he restate his claims about ethnic cleansing. The article mentioned that tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Rwandan civilians were estimated dead, but did not mention the Tutsis specifically. He later went on to say in the same article that the "elite Hutu presidential guard" were killing "Tutsis and Hutu rivals"[34] but made no mention at all of civilian Hutu involvement or of the radio broadcasts inciting the killing of masses of Tutsis by Hutu civilians. On April 30 and May 1, two of Lewis's articles were published on the front page of the *Times.* Both articles were on column six and featured without a photograph. In these articles Lewis continued to describe the conflict in terms of massacres, carnage, and chaos. On April 30, on the first page, Lewis noted that up to 200,000 people may have already been killed (not distinguishing them as mainly Tutsis) but in the continuation of the article found on *page 19*, explained that many of the people being killed were Tutsis and that the High Commissioner for Refugees described one particular situation of Tutsi executions as "an 'ethnic-cleansing campaign' of intellectuals."[35] The front-page article on May 1 was written in a similar fashion, but at the end, on the

[31] Raymond Bonner, "Grisly Discovery in Rwanda Leads French to Widen Role," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1994.
[32] Raymond Bonner, "In Once-Peaceful Village, Roots of Rwanda Violence," *The New York Times*, July 11, 1994.
[33] Paul Lewis, "Strife in Rwanda: Peacekeepers; UN Forces Shelter Thousands in Rwanda," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1994.
[34] Paul Lewis, "Security Council Votes to Cut Rwanda Peacekeeping Force," The *New York Times*, April 22, 1994.
[35] Paul Lewis, "U.N. Council Urged to Weigh Action on Saving Rwanda," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1994.

continuation on page 7, the article mentioned that the Security Council issued a four-page report blaming the "Hutu-dominated Rwandan Government forces for the worst of the massacres"[36] but again with no mention of genocide or the intentional singling out of Tutsis for death.

On May 4, the United Nations officially declared genocide in Rwanda, but interestingly enough, Lewis did not cover this story. There was no official headline or article about the UN declaration, but the same day, Lewis published an article that included a quote from the Secretary General explaining that an African force was "necessary 'to defuse the conflict, to stop the genocide.'"[37] This was the first mention of genocide from the UN in the *Times* and this article was featured on page nine of section A. On May 26, Lewis officially noted that the Secretary General Boutros Ghali had called the "*continuing slaughter* there 'genocide.'"[38] The same article included another quote from Ghali, in which he said "It is a genocide which has been committed. More than 200,000 people have been killed and the international community is still discussing what ought to be done." Lewis left out specific mention of the victim group in the continuing analysis. He included genocide again in quotations when quoting Kenneth Roth of Human Rights Watch on May 17, in the continuation of the article on page eight of Section A.[39] On June 12, however, Lewis noted in a brief weekly review that the Hutu government had been accused of genocide, but the headline of the article declared that "tribal killings" raged on.[40] Of the major authors covering Rwanda from the *Times*, Lewis appears to have been most averse to the term genocide and employed sometimes startling and condescending terms to describe the Rwandan conflict. Most often, he explained the situation as "tribal massacres," "carnage," "ethnic slaughters," "tribal mayhem," or "bloodletting" and once towards the end of June, called it "fratricidal tribal war." Lewis, as mentioned earlier, was not on the ground in Rwanda, but covered the story domestically and based at the United Nations.

Another important note is that Lewis also mentioned radio broadcasts by Hutu militias, but never mentioned the public calls for the killings of Tutsis or the mention of *inyenzi* (meaning cockroach), a Hutu slur for Tutsis. The mention of Hutu radio broadcasts is an indicator that *Times* reporters potentially had access to and were listening to the death incitements for Tutsis, but they were not included in the articles.

The editorial section of the paper presents a unique perspective on analyzing the conflict in Rwanda because instead of straight facts and news analysis it presents the opportunity for opinions on the situation. 49 opinion pieces during the period of the genocide and the two following weeks mentioned Rwanda, and 28 of them specifically discussed the conflict there.[41] This number includes letters to the editor, op-editorials, and editorials. Of the 28 opinion pieces published discussing Rwanda, 10 came directly from the editor's desk, 13 were letters to the editor, and 5 were op-ed pieces. Of the 10 articles from the editorial desk, 6 were published on or after page 22, 3 on page 18, and 1 on page 14. An editorial on April 10 mentioned Hutu radio broadcasts and "blood-thirsty" incitements for killings, despite the lack in news reporting on the issue. Naturally, most of the passionate opinions on Rwanda came from the letters submitted to the newspaper. Five published letters used the word genocide explicitly to describe the events in Rwanda. On April 23, an editorial from the *Times* editorial desk began with, "What looks very much like genocide has been taking place in Rwanda."[42] The piece described methodical killing based on identity cards, but did not call the conflict genocide outright. The author placed heavy blame on the UN for not intervening in the situation. On June 15, an explosive piece from the editorial desk described the situation as genocide in Rwanda and openly criticized the administration for avoiding the use of the term by using dangerous euphemisms. This article followed several news pieces that were printed on June 10 exposing the U.S. reluctance and hesitation to use the word genocide. Despite this, on June 24, the editorial desk seemed to revert back in another piece describing the situation as "bloodletting" and tribal "massacres" and mentioning that the U.S. government would only concede that "acts of genocide may have taken place."[43] But then finally, on July 30 and July 31, twelve days after the official cease-fire and end of the genocide, two articles from the editorial desk were published in which the situation was described as a clear case of genocide. The article on July 30 described ruthless "butchering" of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis by Hutus and with seemingly no institutional memory, criticized the U.S. government for not halting the genocide in April when it began.[44] While it can be assumed that

[36] Paul Lewis, "U.S. Examines Way to Assist Rwamda without Troops," *The New York Times*, May 1, 1994.
[37] Paul Lewis, "U.N. Chief Asks Rights Aide To Take On a Role in Rwanda," *The New York Times*, May 4, 1994.
[38] Paul Lewis, "Boutros-Ghali Angrily Condemns All Sides for Not Saving Rwanda," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1994.
[39] Paul Lewis, "U.N. Backs Troops for Rwanda But Terms Bar Any Action Soon," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1994.
[40] Paul Lewis, "June 5-10: New Atrocities in Africa; Three Bishops and 10 Priests Are Slaughtered in Rwanda As Tribal Killings Go On," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1994.
[41] www.nytimes.com/archives
[42] "Cold Choices in Rwanda," *The New York Times*, April 23, 1994.
[43] "France's Risky Rwanda Plan," *The New York Times*, June 24, 1994.
[44] "Lifesaving Aid for Rwanda," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1994.

editorial pages of a newspaper would have less hesitation in calling the conflict genocide, there was still clear reluctance on the part of the *Times*. The paper only called the situation a genocide in the opinion section *after* it was over, long after many other groups began using the term, including the US, which formally made the declaration on July 16, two days before the cease-fire.

Language

As discussed, the use of the word genocide in describing the events in Rwanda was extremely contentious and largely avoided by the *Times*. In situations where the word was used it was almost always in quotations and only appeared in the editorial section outside of quotations after the genocide had officially ceased. The use of language in the news coverage has profound impacts on the presentation of a story and how it is received by the public. In the situation in Rwanda, as is the case in many conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, the disputes are often reduced to "tribalism," "ancient hatreds" or "savagery." This condescending tone surprisingly long-outlived colonialism and exploitation of Africa itself. The conflict in Europe surrounding the Former Yugoslavia took place around a similar time period and also involved very heavy ethnic and racial fighting, but instead of "savagery" and "ancient hatreds" this conflict was most often described in the newspapers as "bitter infighting." Initially, the *Times* over-simplified the conflict, reducing the Hutus and Tutsis to their basic (and virtually non-existent) differences, but most often left specific discussion of them out. The conflict is described over 200 times as an ethnic war and reduced to "ancient hatreds." Tribalism or tribal warfare is mentioned over 160 times in the course of the genocide coverage.

The mention of genocide largely surrounded the debate over the US hesitation to use the term or was found in letters as opposed to any kind of ofccficial statement of the situation. It was not until July 23 that the *Times* referred to the situation as genocide for the first time and without any quotations in a news article.[45] The *Times* was more reluctant than the UN, all human rights organizations, *and* the U.S. government to begin using this term. After July 23, the word genocide was used several more times in describing what had occurred before the cease-fire on July 18 in Rwanda.

Pictures

Photos and graphics also played an important role in the portrayal of the conflict and the attention given to the corresponding articles. Because of access difficulties the majority of photos are from the surrounding refugee camps and are thus mostly of Hutu survivors in the camps. Additionally, many of the photos of the Tutsis are photos of RPF rebels and their advancements. This dynamic presented quite a conflict in the reporting, because the situation appeared as though the Tutsi rebels were the armed perpetrators while the Hutus were suffering in the camps. The captions did not do much to dissuade from this message. The victim groups were mentioned somewhat infrequently in the articles, but the photo captions often explained the photos of the Tutsi rebels or Hutu refugees, inciting confusion as to who the actual victims were. The reality is that there were victims on every side and that both groups suffered tremendously, but not recognizing that this was also a clear case of genocide against, specifically, the Tutsi people could have severely hindered the humanitarian process and could have downplayed the severity of the issue by reducing genocide to merely a civil war.

Over 100 graphics were featured alongside the articles, the majority of them maps. Maps were featured alongside articles over 70 times throughout the course of the coverage. Most maps were of Rwanda, but refugee sites in neighboring countries were included as well. There were over 80 photos as well, and often two photos would be displayed at a time. Photos of bodies and corpses were most often unidentified and usually no ethnic group was named or mentioned, although on May 16, a graphic of men taking refuge in a seminary was displayed and for the first time a photo caption mentioned the distinct groups and the Tutsis as the victims. The caption read,

> *As Government troops and renegade militias ravage Rwanda, in central Africa, the death toll mounts, perhaps reaching 200,000, some aid officials report. Members of the Hutu tribe have been slaughtering Tutsi since April 6 when the President, a Hutu, died in a suspicious plane crash. More than 1,000 Tutsi, like these men and boys, found refuge in a seminary in the capital as fighting intensified.* Page A3. (Reuters)

Another photo on the 17th of May also featured a caption identifying the Tutsis as victims and described, in quotations, that an alleged "ethnic cleansing" may have been taking place in Rwanda. The vast majority of photo captions, especially those featuring the victims, did not identify by ethnic group and most often referred to subjects as Rwandans. As thousands of Tutsi bodies washed down Lake Victoria into Uganda at the end of May, one accompanying photo in the *Times* was of Tutsi RPF rebels lying on a mattress in the presidential palace in Rwanda.[46]

---

[45] John Cushman, "The Rwanda Disaster: The Overview; President Orders Pentagon Action to Aid Rwandans," *The New York Times*, July 23, 1994.
[46] Reuters, "Rwanda Foes Block U.N. Envoy as Truce Fails" *The New York Times*, May 24, 1994.

Location

The location of stories published in newspapers conveys a great deal about the significance of the article, especially in relation to other events domestically and internationally. While the 1994 genocide in Rwanda often took center stage among the current international conflicts and was a regular feature of the beginning of the international section (Section A) of the paper, the story only made the front page of the *Times* 13 times in the period of this study, four of them after the official end of the genocide (see appendix for a list of front-page headlines). Rwanda made the front page three times in April (twice right at the beginning), four times in May, not at all in June, and then six times in July, mostly around the time and directly after the official cease-fire. On April 9, the headline *TERROR CONVULSES RWANDAN CAPITAL AS TRIBES BATTLE* appeared above the fold of the paper in a single column spread in the middle of the page. The next day, an article was featured above the fold on the front page again, this time with a large photo of a Rwandan woman holding a white baby and foreigners being evacuated from Rwanda. On April 30 and May 1, the headlines on Rwanda were given the single sixth column overshadowed by large photos and features on South Africa and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela. On May 21, the headline about bodies in Uganda was given two columns in the center of the paper along with a horrifying photo of bodies washing down Lake Victoria beneath the fold of the first page. This happened again with a similar story on the 28th of May along with the photo of bodies, but above the fold this time. Photos of Rwanda made the front page of the *Times* four times throughout the entire course of the genocide.

Of the over 200 articles written primarily about Rwanda in that time period, only 13 made the front page of the *Times* and only 33 of them made the front page of the international news section (Section A), found much later on in the actual paper. The rest of the articles and photos were tucked away even farther back. One of the most compelling and ground-breaking stories published in the *Times* was entitled "A Killer in the Eye" and was published on June 5, 1994. This article was a 3,195 word contribution from the *New York Times* magazine written from the refugee camps. It went into disturbing detail of the genocide, referring to the conflict as genocide and openly discussing the methodical systematic killing of the Tutsis and their Hutu killers. The story is evidence that even from the refugee camps, the *Times*' reporters had evidence that genocide was being openly carried out against the Tutsi people. This rare and chilling story was published in section six on page forty of that day's *New York Times* newspaper.

Identifying Victim Groups

As with the *Times* reporting on the Holocaust, it was found that in the coverage of Rwanda, the identity of the victims was often left out of the story, as was the notion that they were being killed *because* of that identity. Unlike reports of the Holocaust, the *Times* did make it clear that the fighting in Rwanda was "ethnic in nature" but indicated that it was very much a two-sided conflict with both groups fighting each other in a civil war. To an extent, this was indeed true. The Hutus and Tutsis had conflicts with each other for decades and this was not their first bout of ethnic-related violence. However, reducing the particular situation in 1994 to a civil war downplayed the severity of suffering on the part of the Tutsi people who ultimately lost an estimated 800,000 lives. As the coverage progressed, more often than not articles began to mention that a majority of victims were Tutsi and usually included moderate Hutus in the victim category. Some authors, particularly Donatella Lorch, almost always equated Tutsi suffering with Hutu suffering and when deaths of one group were mentioned, so were the other. In many of these instances, it appeared as though the *Times* was being balanced and fair, but it could be deemed inappropriate to be this "balanced" when one group was committing genocide against the other. At some points, it was truly unclear which group was the actual victim group and if there even was genocide or a specific targeting of Tutsis. The "rebels" being of the Tutsi minority while the Hutus were mainly refugees in the camps also contributed to this confusion and was sometimes misleading in the conflict representation. Photos of armed RPF forces and women and children suffering in the camps also strongly reinforced this confusion and led to disparities in whether or not genocide of the Tutsis was actually taking place. In approximately two or three articles, *Times* writers tried to explain the origins of the Hutu/Tutsi divide, simplifying the Tutsis as "tall, Niolitic peoples" and the Hutus as "short and stocky." Much later, again with no institutional memory, this oversimplification was criticized by *Times* writers and some reporters explained that it was often almost impossible to decipher between Hutu and Tutsi without the use of their identification cards.

The US and UN

Much of the issue and concern in the US to the situation in Rwanda was how to label and appropriately "deal with" the dire humanitarian crisis and ongoing conflict situation. Many of the *Times* articles surrounded the debate of the Clinton Administration to avoid using the term genocide and the UN's role in the matter as well. One would imagine that it would have been breaking news when the UN officially declared genocide in Rwanda or when the US finally ended their debate and declared genocide in mid-July that it would have been breaking news, but one of the most compelling findings of this entire analysis was the *Times*' decision to downplay both of those formal declarations. On May 4, the UN Secretary General declared "real genocide" in Rwanda before the press and the Security Council, which the main UN correspondent to the *Times,* Paul Lewis, included in his story. Additionally, this article was located on page

nine of Section A. The UN recognition of genocide was not highlighted in the *Times*. The Clinton Administration formally came forward recognizing genocide in Rwanda and on July 16 and expelled the Rwandan ambassador from the US on grounds that perpetrators of genocide would not be tolerated. This move, and the official recognition of the US government, was featured as a sub-article on the very bottom right-hand corner of page six.[47] It is unclear why the *Times* would not have highlighted the move greater, and the paper's recognition of genocide seemed to come after even that of the reluctant and politically motivated US government. It was not until July 22 that the *Times* began publishing news articles using the word genocide to describe the situation in Rwanda without quotations or in reference to another group's accusations.

Post-conflict coverage

The *Times* coverage of the situation in Rwanda picked up the greatest momentum following the end of the cease-fire on July 18. By this point, there was a massive refugee situation in the neighboring countries and aid and relief organizations began pouring in without hesitation after the official end of the violence. In the two weeks after the RPF took over Rwanda entirely and declared a cease-fire, the *Times* published 49 stories on Rwanda, three of which made the front page. The article titles were written in all capital letters and often began with an urgent "THE RWANDA CRISIS" and then a following sub-title. Most hesitation and reluctance in covering the story subsided after the cessation of violence and heavy coverage of the story continued for several months. There are many reasons why the *Times* would cover the story so heavily: the increased access for reporters, the sheer magnitude of the humanitarian crisis etc. But the fact that the coverage was so much more significant than that of the death of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans in the previous several months seems astounding. There was a general tone shift and it appeared as though there was a lift in hesitation with post-conflict coverage and the debates on the terminology "genocide" were finally over.

Situating the Issue

Given the in-depth analysis on the specific coverage of the Rwandan genocide, it is important to situate the issues within its historical context and present other variables, which may account for the lack of reporting or even the particular style of reporting on Rwanda. On April 6, 1994, the day Rwandan President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, most journalists in Africa were not readily available to cover the story. Most journalists were in South Africa to cover the election of Nelson Mandela, the nation's first black president after a dark past of discrimination and apartheid. On April 27th he won the presidency and was inaugurated by May 10, 1994. The media and press capitalized on finally having such a positive story to come out of Africa. As journalists were looking to highlight the story of Mandela, Rwanda was taking somewhat of a backseat.

The U.S. coverage of Rwanda was also negatively impacted by the crisis in Somalia and the failure of the U.S. intervention there. Somalia was a complicated mess, a difficult story in Africa to cover, and was falling deeper and deeper towards becoming a failed state. In 1993 in a joint-assault U.S. forces assisted in an offensive against a Somali militia, which supported a fierce warlord, and two U.S. helicopters were shot down and the assault was unsuccessful. Many Somalis died and eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed. The event was a horrifying experience for the Clinton Administration, many government officials and the public, and many were skeptical about getting involved again in conflicts in Africa. An unfortunate reality of international reporting is the simplification of outside conflicts and the strong sense of comparison between other conflicts in the region. When discussing Rwanda in the *Times,* there were often references made to Somalia and US hesitancy to get involved, as well as more direct comparisons to situations in Burundi and Uganda. Even now, when discussing violence in Kenya or the crisis in Darfur, parallels and comparisons to Rwanda are made in order to simplify the conflict and break down the adequate response and consequences. In addition to the shadow of other African conflicts, the situation in Bosnia was heating up at the time of the genocide in Rwanda. While the conflict had yet to hit similar magnitudes with the massacres in Srebrenica occurring in 1995, Americans were very concerned with the situation there and the crisis in Europe took precedence over a far-removed conflict in Central Africa. Almost daily, stories from Bosnia and the Former Yugoslavia headed the international section of the paper. The other major competitor for attention during the period in 1994 was the conflict in Israel/Palestine. An ongoing conflict, which has always been of primary concern to the U.S., any story on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict always received a more prominent position in the sector of international news in the paper. Regardless, the situation in Rwanda at the time featured more civilian deaths and human rights violations in a shorter period of time than other situations in the world at the time. While other historical issues can explain limitations in reporting, they do not absolve any moral imperative to cover the genocide in Rwanda.

Conclusion

The *Times* reporting on Rwanda was extensive, and there is much more that can be said about choices made in the

[47] http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=166&did=116712451&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=11&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1231715580&clientId=11201.

reporting of the story. Overall, I observed that the reporting from the *Times* could be broken down into various significant stages. There was the initial reporting, a period of confusion marked by the complexity of the conflict and doubt in the nature of the conflict. While it was immediately established as an ethnic conflict, the situation was over-simplified and genocide was not immediately clear. This stage was in effect from the beginning to the end of April, and then aid groups and international organizations began coming forward with details of a case of clear genocide against the Tutsis. Radio incitements for the killings began almost immediately after the assassination of the Rwandan president on April 6, and, despite open and public access to these broadcasts, they were not mentioned in the *Times* until April 19.[48] Despite reported access to them as early as April 6 the broadcasts were mentioned in the context of the Hutus being "as bloodthirsty as the Tutsis" as reported on the Hutu radio. It was not until July 17 when Lorch mentioned in an article that the radio broadcasts at the beginning of April were largely responsible for spreading the slaughter so effectively and rapidly.[49] This initial stage could explain some limitations in the *Times* and their reluctance to call out specific victim groups or portray the conflict as one-sided. The second stage in reporting began in May and continued until early July and represented a rather clear case of "underreporting" in the conflict and an over-emphasis on balancing the situation. By May 4, the UN, the ICRC, Human Rights Watch, and the Pope, but the *Times* was decidedly skeptical. By mid-May, it was officially recognized that there had already been at least 500,000 civilian deaths in Rwanda, but there were only three front-page stories on Rwanda in this entire second stage. Photos of advancing rebels and suffering refugees colored the pages of the *Times*. If one were to have consulted only the *New York Times* for news and information, it is possible that one would have been fairly convinced that a clear genocide of the Tutsis was *not* taking place in Rwanda. The third stage of reporting began in the month of July when US government responses were criticized and more editorial pieces were published expressing strong reactions to the situation in Rwanda. Reporting also picked up significantly in the month of July, the greatest number of articles appearing during this month. The final stage in reporting on the conflict came immediately after the cease-fire when the greatest number of stories, including the greatest number of front-page headlines, was published. There was almost a flood of articles and responses following the cease-fire. This reporting can be explained by the fact that at this stage, the conflict was no longer genocide, The issue itself was no longer contentious, but there now existed a definite humanitarian and refugee crisis. Aid groups were pouring in and the conflict was finally a conflict that became more understandable to reporters and citizens alike. The *Times* coverage at this final stage was extremely comprehensive; it finally became accepted knowledge that events before the cease-fire had constituted genocide of the Tutsis, but claimed that the bigger issue at hand was the refugee crisis. The complicated nature of the conflict during the genocide and the attempts to oversimplify it for readers could explain some of the limitations in more accurate reporting and the specific portrayal of the situation in terms of distinguishing victims groups and the specific targeting of Tutsis in the genocide. It should also be noted that local stringers and editors may have played a significant role at the *Times*[50] and it may be possible that certain words, perhaps even "genocide," were removed from the original writings of *Times*' authors. As "America's paper," with an international standing and recognition, its commitment to accuracy is taken very seriously. While this may have explained hesitation initially, by mid-May this no longer seems like an appropriate excuse for reporting failures.

The *Times* reporting on the Rwandan genocide was prolific and there were no major discrepancies between reporting and what has been accepted as historical truth. No major events were left unmentioned, but the importance of certain stories and issues was certainly minimized. The *Times*' desire to perhaps present an unbiased or balanced analysis of the situation actually led to an indirect misreporting of the Rwandan genocide and prevented the situation from becoming clear. It is difficult to spur collective action in response to messy "grey conflicts" or civil wars with no clear victim or perpetrator groups. The *Times*' reporting played a role in minimizing public outrage to the genocide because the paper never made it clear that a grave injustice or genocide was taking place as it was occurring.

This research makes no claims about any underlying intentions or motivations of the *New York Times* or why they would hope to minimize the Rwandan genocide. The study is merely an analysis of how the reporting was carried out and its implications on foreign policy actors and potential advocates against human rights violations. The study was conducted as a complete blind study, as I had never read an article in 1994 about anything, let alone a *Times* article about Rwanda, before deciding to embark upon this research. The information discovered on the in-depth review of the story of the Rwandan genocide as it unfolded according to the *New York Times* revealed fascinating insight and can lend to the future of studies on collective action and media reporting. For comparison, we can turn briefly to current reporting in the *Times* on the situation in Darfur. The war in Darfur is far different from the situation in Rwanda and approximately 300,000 – 400,000 civilians have been killed since fighting began

[48] Donatella Lorch, "Massacres Spreading in Rwanda," April 19, 1994.
[49] Donatella Lorch, "Vicious Circle; Hate Returns to Haunt Those Who Cradled It," *The New York Times*, July 17, 1994.
[50] Leff, 2005.

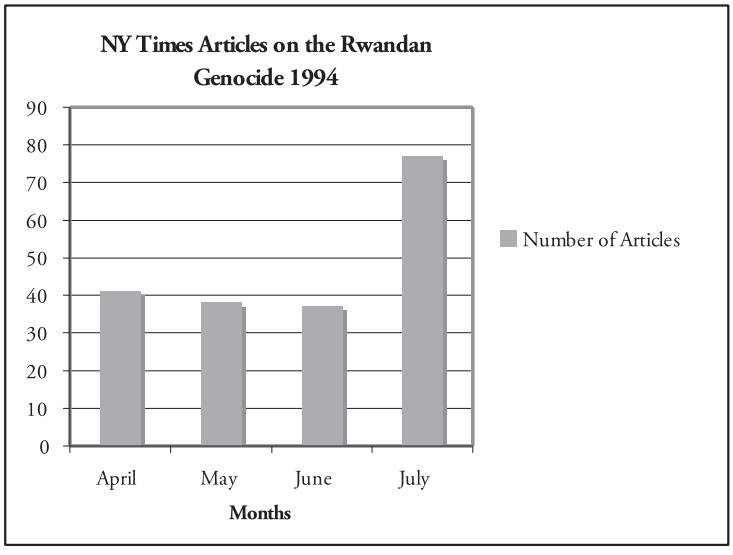
in 2003, as opposed to about 800,000 in the 100 days of Rwanda. As early as 2004, many people were calling the merciless killing of civilians in the Darfur region of Sudan genocide, perpetrated by the Arab Janjaweed militia with the implicit approval or even assistance of the Sudanese government. In February 2004, Editorialist Nicolas Kristof from the *Times* called the situation in Darfur "the world's greatest humanitarian crisis" and described it as on par with the genocide in Rwanda, before any other organization or international group had declared genocide. The context of the situation has changed (Rwanda looms as a shameful mistake that many in the world are adamant about not making again), and the *Times'* and the US' impulsiveness in advertising the severity of the situation while clearly defining the victims and perpetrators (the black civilians of Darfur versus the perpetrators, the Arab Janjaweed and the government) is startling in comparison. Additionally, grassroots activism and collective action on behalf of the victims of Darfur have been some of the most extensive in the recorded history of genocide. Granted, the situation must also be considered in the current timeframe, but speculation could correlate reporting and the simplification of the good versus evil as a facilitator for collective action, and perhaps account for the lack thereof in the situation in Rwanda. It is also worth noting that activism for Rwanda was not non-existent, it simply was not seen at the levels we are seeing today for Darfur.

In the future, a greater comparative analysis of the coverage of the crises in Rwanda and Darfur could provide even more insight to the evolution of media reporting on genocide and the correlation between collective action and media reporting. This study could also be extended to include other American papers and their variance in coverage in addition to international papers, possibly even an African newspaper, to see how the stories unfolded around the world as they were happening. Despite a lack of knowledge of the motivations or benefits of minimizing the story of the Rwandan genocide in the *Times*, the content analysis of the articles and the evolution of the stages of reporting may lend to greater overall understanding of the coverage of genocide, especially when considering the analysis of the coverage of the Holocaust and a future retrospective analysis of Darfur.

Appendix

Appendix Content

1. Quantity of Articles
2. Major authors and their locations
3. Front Page Headlines
4. Timeline: When did we know?
5. Bar chart on term usage, genocide, savagery, ethnic cleansing, tribal, warfare, ancient hatreds
6. NY Times timeline
7. Timeline: 100 Days of Genocide



*In July 49 of the 77 articles were published *after* July 18th, after the official end of the genocide
**It is estimated that by mid-May, there were over 500,000 deaths according to the Red Cross and by the end of the genocide, there were an estimated 800,000 deaths.

2. Authors

Major Contributors	Location	Number of Articles
Paul Lewis	United Nations	24
William E Schmidt	Nairobi, Kenya. Bujumbura, Burundi.	8
Jerry Gray	Goma, Katale, Munigi Refugee Camp, Zaire. Nairobi, Kenya.	5
Donatella Lorch	Nairobi, Kenya. Kigali, Nyarubuye, Rwanda. Kayanza, Bujumbura, Burundi. Ngara, Benaco Camp, Ntobeye, Tanzania. Kasensero, Uganda.	25
Alan Riding	Paris, France.	4
Richard D. Lyons	United Nations	8
Marlise Simmons	Paris, France.	4
Raymond Bonner	Cyanika, Ruganda, Gishyita, Bisesero, Butare, Gikongoro, Kigali, Murambi, Gisenyi, - Rwanda. Nairobi, Kenya. Goma, Zaire.	24

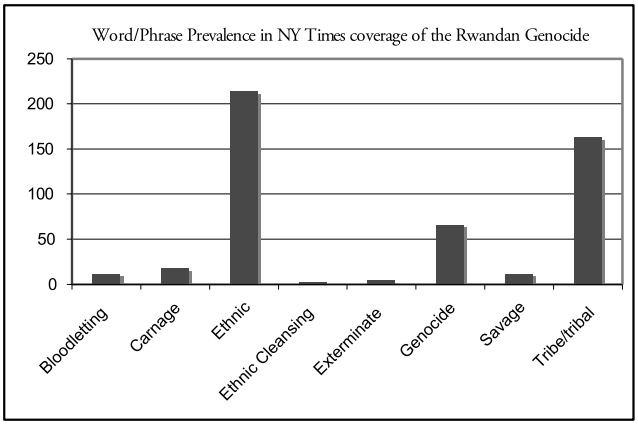
Other correspondents from Berlin, Rome, Paris, Washington

3. Front Page Stories on Rwanda

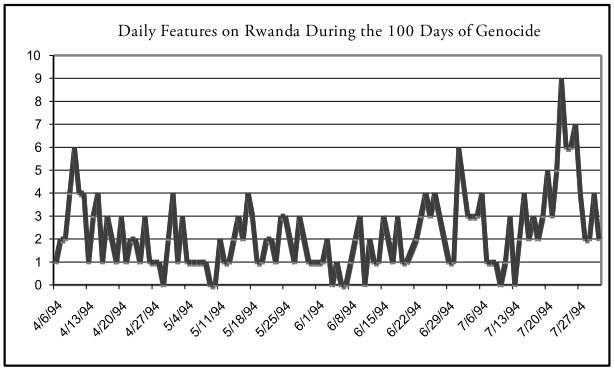
April 9 – TERROR CONVULSES RWANDAN CAPITAL AS TRIBES BATTLE
April 10 – WESTERN TROOPS ARRIVE IN RWANDA TO AID FOREIGNERS
April 30 - UN COUNCIL URGED TO WEIGH ACTION ON SAVING RWANDA
May 1 - US EXAMINES WAY TO ASSIST RWANDA WITHOUT TROOPS
May 14 – SECURITY COUNCIL AGREES ON PLAN TO SEND PEACE FORCE TO RWANDA
May 21 – THOUSANDS OF RWANDA DEAD WASH DOWN TO LAKE VICTORIA
May 28 – BODIES FROM RWANDA CAST A PALL ON LAKESIDE VILLAGES IN UGANDA
July 16 – TRAIL OF SUFFERING AS RWANDA EXODUS CONTINUES
July 17 – RWANDAN ARMY IN DISARRAY AT CAMP ON BORDER
July 23 - THE RWANDA DISASTER: NEWS ANALYSIS; Did U.S. Err On Rwanda?
July 23 – THE RWANDA DISASTER: THE OVERVIEW; PRESIDENT ORDERS PENTAGON ACTION TO AID RWANDANS
July 24 – THE RWANDA DISASTER: THE OVERVIEW; Cholera's Spread Raises Fear Of Toll of 40,000 Rwandans
July 30 – U.S. SENDING FORCE OF 200 TO REOPEN RWANDAN AIRPORT

4. When Did We Know?[51]

10-Apr	Political opposition on Rwanda reports that Hutus were trying to "exterminate the Tutsi minority"
11-Apr	Paris reports Hutus are "hunting down Tutsis"
16-Apr	1200 Tutsi massacred in church, reported everywhere
17-Apr	Le Monde reports that 1180 Tutsis "exterminated" in a village
17-Apr	RPF radio reports "The world cannot and should not forget the genocide that is being perpetrated in Rwanda today." On April 19, the CIA translated and published this radio report
18-Apr	The ICRC begins using the term genocide
19-Apr	Human Rights Watch calls Rwanda a genocide
25-Apr	NYT indicates there is an "extermination" and what "appears to be methodical killing of Tutsis"
27-Apr	The Pope uses the word genocide
4-May	UN secretary general declares "real genocide"
4-Jul	RPF takes Kigali
16-Jul	United States officially recognizes genocide
18-Jul	RPF takes over, cease-fire declared, genocide over



[51] Alan J. Kuperman, *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: The Rwandan Genocide* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).



7. 100 days of a Genocide (Courtesy of BBC News 2004)[52]

6 April: President Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira are killed when the Rwandan leader's plane is shot down as it is about to land at Kigali Airport. Hutu extremists opposed to the Arusha Peace Accords are believed to be behind the attack.

7 April: The Rwandan armed forces and Interahamwe militia begin the systematic killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. UN forces, unwilling to breach their mandate, fail to intervene. 10 Belgian UN peacekeepers are killed.

8 April: The Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) launches a major offensive to end the killings and rescue 600 of its troops based in Kigali under the Arusha Accords.

9-10 April: French, Belgian and American civilians are rescued by their governments.

11 April: The International Red Cross (IRC) estimates that tens of thousands have been slaughtered. UN soldiers protecting 2,000 Tutsis at a school are ordered to withdraw to Kigali airport. Most are killed after their departure.

14 April: Belgium withdraws its troops from the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda.

15 April: Slaughter of thousands of Tutsis gathered at Nyarubuye Church seeking protection.

21 April: The UN cuts the level of its forces in Rwanda by 90% to just 270 troops. The IRC estimates the dead could now number over 100,000.

30 April: The UN agrees a resolution condemning the killing but omits the word 'genocide'. Tens of thousands of refugees flee into neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire.

Mid-May: The IRC estimates that 500,000 Rwandans have been killed.

17 May: The UN Security Council issues a fresh resolution saying that 'acts of genocide may have been committed'. It also agrees to send 5,500 troops with new powers to defend civilians, however deployment is delayed by disagreements between the US and UN over the financing of the operation.

22 May: RPF forces gain control of Kigali airport and Kanombe barracks, and extend their control over the northern and eastern parts of Rwanda.

22 June: With arguments over the deployment still continuing, the UN authorises an emergency force of 2,500 French troops under Operation Turquoise to create a 'safe' area in the government-controlled part of Rwanda. The killing of Tutsis continues in the 'safe' area despite the presence of the French.

4 July: The RPF takes control of Kigali and the southern town of Butare. Its leadership claims it will form a government on the basis of the Arusha Accords.

13-14 July: Refugees fleeing the RPF advance in north-western Rwanda flood into Zaire. Approximately 10,000-12,000 refugees per hour cross the border into the town of Goma. The massive influx creates a severe humanitarian crisis, as there is an acute lack of shelter, food and water.

18 July: The RPF announces that the war is over, declares a cease-fire and names Pastor Bizimungu as president with Faustin Twagiramungu as prime minister

---

[52] BBC News, "Timeline: 100 Days of Genocide," April 6, 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3580247.stm.

Selected Bibliography

- *100 Days of A Genocide*. April 4, 2004. BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3580247.stm>.
- Earl, Jennifer, Andrew Martin, John McCarthy, and Sarah A. Soule. "The Use of Newspaper Data in the Study of Collective Action." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 65-80.
- Gourevtich, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. New York: Picador Publishing, 1999.
- Ignatieff, Michael. *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Kuperman, J. Alan. *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: The Rwandan Genocide*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001.
- Leff, Laurel. *Buried by the Times*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- LeMarchand, Rene. *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994.
- LexisNexus Archive of the *New York Times*, 1994.
- Power, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2002.
- *Preventing Genocide*. The Economist. December 11, 2008. <http://www.economist.com/world/unitedstates/displayStory.cfm?story_id=12773216>.
- ProQuest - NYT Archive Microform of Articles on Rwanda, 1994.
- Prunier, Gerard. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.