

Question Period

Jocelyn Coulon: Thank you Linda also for that testimony. It's very moving. Now I would like to give the floor to Gil Courtemanche, a journalist and a novelist, who is well known, not just in Quebec and in Canada, but also around the world. We'll begin this discussion therefore by asking a certain number of questions to our panelists. Mr. Courtemanche, you have the floor.

Gil Courtemanche, author of "A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali": If I may, could I make one or two comments, not questions just to start? Two weeks ago, I was Mali for a literary festival. Oh yes, there are literary festivals in Africa, and when I was there, I spoke in a number of secondary schools and colleges about the genocide, of course, in Rwanda, and each school, and I guess really what I'm going to say summarized the contribution we just heard. The first question from an African student was how can you explain this tribal war 10 years afterwards in Africa? With all the information that had been given to the Africans, all the information which had been given to them, still causes them to refer to it as a tribal war.

The second comment: there's something unique about the genocide in Rwanda, and for those people who think this can never happen again, it should make them think. In history, it's the only genocide which we actually saw taking place. We actually saw it taking place. We could say that we didn't know what happened in Auschwitz. We can claim that we didn't know was going in fact, in the case of the Killing Fields, but nobody, nobody as from April 7, 1994, nobody can claim that they didn't actually see the genocide taking place in Rwanda, and it still took place. It still went on. I'd like to ask this question to Steve Livingston.

As we see in every intervention, the use of word "genocide" is like the key to a lot of things, and especially in the United States, big efforts have been made not to use that word. If the word had been used in the United States, do you think it would have changed something?

Steven Livingston: I wasn't there.

Gil Courtemanche: No I know.

Steven Livingston: My understanding is, is that, had the State Department, for instance, in it's pronouncements, used the word "genocide" calling the events in Rwanda a genocide, it would have implied American recognition of the fact, and as signators to various international treaties, it would have obligated the United States to respond in kind. So that fact, as I understand it, gave rise to some strange theatre that occurred at State Department press briefings, where the spokesperson would use words, such as we recognize that "acts of genocide have occurred," but studiously avoid actually invoking the term in a direct manner. Simply to avoid the obligations that would have ensued had she done that. So yes, that's the best that I'm in a position of answering the question at this point.

Gil Courtemanche: At one point in time in the media, was the word “genocide” used according to your research?

Steven Livingston: It began to be used, well, March-April 19, 1994. Right and actually ABC News during that period of time when that crew was diverted to the Rwanda story, away from Nelson Mandela’s inauguration. It must be said, it escapes me exactly who the ABC reporter was, but he did a very good job, and he actually began to understand. He went beyond the typical news frame of ancient ethnic hatreds, tribal warfare, and started to get to the heart of the story relatively early on, at least in the context of American network coverage. So it began earlier in the news media. As a matter of fact, if I might add, there was quite a bit of tension found between the American press corps and the State Department, because the American press corps saw exactly, and called the State Department, on it’s attempts to obfuscate the issues at hand.

Gil Courtemanche: I have a question for Anne Chaon also. We know the French government, how closely linked it was, maybe even more than that. I’m trying to find the right word, perhaps incestuously linked to the regime there in Rwanda. There was this operation therefore which took place, which in the first few days was presented as being a magnificent humanitarian operation. You saw that the country was intervening. So the French media, how did they report this in the beginning? I remember myself, it looked like a great moment of glory, a great example of French compassion. The only country which dared to intervene where the international community refused to intervene. And now, we know what the purpose of the operation really was.

Anne Chaon: Oh it’s even worse than that. When you say you know to what degree France was involved with the Hutu regime there, unfortunately, we still don’t know yet to what degree they were involved. It goes probably even beyond that, probably even beyond that, beyond what has been written to press to date. In France, on April 5, Patrick de Saint-Exupery, who was a Figaro reporter, testified in at Arusha, at the trial of the Kibuye Prefecture. He worked a great deal on the presence of France in Rwanda, and he ended up in Kibuye. There he met a French soldier there, who put on a Rwandan battle jacket, battle dress. Given the carnage there he absolutely collapsed. He burst into tears, and said, “we were the ones who trained them.” So this link was for a very long time, and it continued in ’94. The book is called, *l’Inavouable*, by Patrick de Saint-Exupery and if you read that, you will read some absolutely dreadful things about the French presence in Rwanda with this regime, but it’s even more strange than that. Once the possibility of military operation was stated, then everyone was very surprised. They didn’t know what to do. General Dallaire was there with just a few men, a dreadful situation, and the idea that finally someone was going to send troops there, and a few bags of rice, well that was good news. But the French press was very suspicious about this.

The first reports on negotiations in the Security Council about how they were going to implement Operation Turquoise were accompanied by enormous suspicion. What were they going to do there? We’d been there since 1990. We hadn’t moved. What will we

do there? Unfortunately, over a few weeks, this became, as I said really a field of glory, if you will, for the French army. The landing, if you will, of a French contingent in Rwanda, which was welcomed by the genocidaires, if you will, who had the tricolour flag in one hand and a machete in the other. And this was noted, this was reported. And then the French came. They protected a small group of people, who were trying to escape in the southwest, a dreadful situation. Then they started to set up country hospitals, and treat mutilated babies. So this operation, which could have started off very poorly, ended very well for France. So it was the opposite trend, if you will.

Gil Courtemanche: Mark, you said you came into Rwanda via Byumba. So surely you were in contact with people from the RPF before coming into Rwanda.

Mark Doyle: Yeah surely, yeah.

Gil Courtemanche: What was at the beginning there, their line for journalists? What were they saying about what was happening in Kigali?

Mark Doyle: Their line was that mass killing had begun, and so they had to move forward to stop it. I have to say the RPF were very effective at manipulating journalists. Usually because they told the truth, actually. Kigame said something, of course, we reported it saying, "Kigame claims," if we didn't know ourselves, but a few days later when you had gone to the place that you said they had taken, almost invariably they had taken it. So there was more trust with what they said, because we gradually could prove that what they were saying was correct, not their political line, but whether they had taken town X or town Y. So in that sense, they certainly had a better reputation amongst journalists for sort of telling the truth. Of course, they had a political line, and they were doing their propaganda, and lying as well about other things than the government side. But that was what they said. "The killing has started on a massive scale. We've got to go and stop it."

Gil Courtemanche: But did they try to explain to you that there was first this coup d'état, because most of the people, who were murdered in the first days were moderate Hutus, and politician Tutsis, and businessmen. And then a planned genocide, would they give you information like that, or just speaking about large scale massacres?

Mark Doyle: Well I mean I'll have to say you know some of these questions that people ask, and some of the scenarios that people paint about the reality of the sort of things that Ad (?) and I was doing, I mean the idea that we were sitting down, debating with the RPF you know what sort of coup d'état it had been. It had taken us 48 hours to get to a place, where a hell of a lot of hot lead was flying through the air, and the RPF put us in an African hut with guards, and then finally they you, know they said, "Okay, we're taking you to the front line now." The idea that we sat down with Emmanuel Ndahiro and debated things, you know it just wasn't like that. It was grabbing what you could, when it was safe to grab it, and then fighting with your satellite phone to make it work, and try and send a story that approximated the truth. So that's the honest answer to your question.

Jocelyn Coulon: Gil, let's move onto now the questions from the floor, if you don't mind. We've got about 25 minutes left, 20 minutes really, if we're going to stick to our timetable. So please don't make introductory statements. Please don't make political statements. Please just ask your question directly. Please.

Unknown questioner: You don't know how happy I am to be at this end of a mike with the journalists. During the first days of the Rwandan genocide, I was interviewed frequently by the press, and in that time, I was told point blank that by one person, who was particularly honest with me, who said, "I cannot say what you're telling me. I cannot say that this is not a tribal war, and that this is organized by the state. My editor will not accept it. I'm interested in the way in which media concentration in a free press means that you can't have a dissenting opinion.

Jocelyn Coulon: Who wants to take this one? Mark.

Mark Doyle: I don't recognize that at all. My editors have never told me what to say. When I started using the word "genocide" they said, "Are you sure? Can we use that word, because Butros Gali says you can't." I said, "I don't care what he says," and I just don't recognize that at all. That's not the way the BBC works. I don't know if that's the way newspapers work or news agencies, but ...

Steven Livingston: I guess I'm the closest there is to an American journalist here. The corporate media in the United States means that certain kinds of stories are given preference, stories that are dramatic, but it doesn't translate into editors telling a reporter what he or she can or cannot say.

Jocelyn Coulon: Madam.

Unknown questioner: My question is for Mr. Doyle and Mme Chaon. This morning we tried to understand the moment where a journalist becomes a criminal. I think the question that comes to my mind this afternoon is when does a journalist become a witness? Because I think witnesses you did become, obviously to a genocide. And then how do you then live as a witness, who needs a public to hear their testimonial, the fact that as Mme Chaon explained, people said we just couldn't bare to watch that. We were turning our television channel, or that people were not listening to Mr. Dallaire, because it was too hard to watch. How do you as journalists, and perhaps what could you say to the young journalists here today, experience as journalists become witnesses, this inability of the public to hear what you have to say.

Anne Chaon: I feel sorry, but I don't care.

Jocelyn Coulon: Any other reaction? No. Go ahead Mark.

Mark Doyle: You have to find ways of telling the story that people will listen to. I mean you have to find an angle, which someone like my mum sitting in London, you know,

will care about. You have to find a way of telling the story and being a witness in an effective way. It's all very well being an expert on Rwanda, and wittering on for 15 minutes, you know, if people turn the radio off, there's no point in doing it. So you have to find, I mean I hesitate to say it, but I mean, you have to find a sexy angle to the story to make it work. That is what you have to do.

Anne Chaon: Well, the sexy angle is not always there everyday.

Mark Doyle: Indeed, I mean the story in Rwanda sold itself.

Anne Chaon: I'm a little wrong when I tell you I feel sorry, but I don't care. But it's really the truth, I feel deeply sorry. You know it's unbearable sometimes. Why don't you care? You cannot imagine in what mess people are living, but so what? Do I have to stop working? Do I have to stop reporting, because nobody wants to hear around me, or because a newspaper won't pick up my stories, some won't, some will? That's it.

Jocelyn Coulon: Merci. Lina (?).

Lina Algin (?): Hello I'm Lina Algin (?) I work for Oxfam Quebec. So my question is for Mark. Sorry I will start again, what was the relationship between journalists and humanitarian NGOs doing some months after the genocide? What is the relationship now when humanitarian crises happen with these humanitarian NGOs, and what should it be, the relationship between journalists and these organizations? And I have a second short question. We've been talking about how to make you as journalists to make your editor buy your story, because there are a lot of journalists working very hard in the field to have the stories. You mentioned that, but how to make these editors buy your story? Is there a chance to change that? For instance, Congo be part of the news today, to make Columbia be part of the news today?

Jocelyn Coulon: Is the question addressed to Mark? Anne?

Mark Doyle: What was relationship during the genocide between journalists and the NGOs was quite simple, because all the NGOs ran away. So there weren't any. There was no relationship really. I mean the international committee of the Red Cross was still there doing extremely good work. Local Rwandans, who had not been killed, were continuing to try and help the churches, but in terms of international NGO, expatriate personnel, there were hardly any. There were two staying with General Dallaire and I. I slept on the floor with them. I don't mean slept with them. There were two quite brave guys, who stayed behind. So there wasn't really a relationship with NGOs.

And how should journalists deal with NGOs? I always feel if I'm interviewing an NGO, then I've failed to get the proper story, because interviewing an NGO is the easiest possible thing in the world, and I don't want to have white people on the television when I'm doing a story about Africa. It's admission of failure in my view.

How do you get the editors to buy the story? You write it very, very well.

Jocelyn Coulon: Anne, would you like to explain something?

Anne Chaon: Well, its awful. You're still working in a freedom of expression context. Through Agence Press, what we try and do is give them information, photos, text, so provide different angles, stories, reports, analyses, summaries of the events. And then they do with it what they want to do. They can use them, but we've no control over where they use them, and there's no map of having of any control. It's up to them, as Mark say, the better the quality of the evidence, of the stories, then there's a chance it might be picked up by somebody else. That's all you can do.

Jocelyn Coulon: Excuse me, I'd like to come back to this relationship about the NGOs and the media.

General Dallaire: A million and so on Rwandans went through Goma, and had the military with them, and the Interahamwe and so on. The press ran to Goma, and as Anne said, abandoned the genocide. The genocide was of no interest any more, although the killing was still going on certain areas, they ran to Goma, and Goma was over aid. They were dying by the hundreds in different camps throughout southern Rwanda, but nobody cared about that. It was the Goma. All the big nations were there. The wife of the Vice President of the United States was there, and so the press maneuvered in the hands of the humanitarians. And why? Is the humanitarians need the press, because they're there helping at that time, but they know there's another crisis coming, and so they need the press to bring out those stories and pictures so they can use them to get money in order to rebuild their funds for the next catastrophe. So there is an intimacy between particularly the big NGOs and the press in regards to, unwillingly make the case sometimes worse, and in the case of Goma over aid Goma, and totally abandon the over 2 million that I had still in southern Rwanda.

Jocelyn Coulon: Thank you General. So ...

Anne Chaon: If I could make just a point about Goma. General you're right. Everybody ran to Goma, and why? Because it was so easy to cover. After months of genocide, the issue of who is good, who is bad disappeared completely. The evil was the cholera, but no political issue arose with cholera in the camps. It was much more comfortable for everybody to cover cholera than genocide.

Jocelyn Coulon: So, this lady here.

Unknown questionner: For someone from Rwanda, we're got two communities of journalists, local journalists and international journalists, and for cultural or financial reasons, these groups are never together, these two groups. The local journalists tend to cover things too closely, and the international journalists, who don't know what's going on, in fact. This morning we talked about the hate media. This afternoon we're talking about foreign journalists. I'd like to talk about something else, a possible relationship, if there was or not, if you met people from Kangura, from the RTLM, because we see at the

present time in 2004, when they seen the international journalists in there, local journalists in the small bars, or when they're just sitting on a case of beer, and this also shows the coverage done by local journalists, and also by international journalists. So I'd like know actually what happened in 1994, maybe Anne or Mark, maybe you could tell us about that?

Mark Doyle: At the time, Thomas who is the BBC French services correspondent was hiding in a hotel, and I didn't know. So I mean there was absolutely no connection between me and the local correspondents at all. It's the first time we've met, and most of the local other journalists had either been killed or were very sensibly keeping their heads down. But I mean that was a very, very unusual example. If you want to ask in general, in general I have an extremely good relationship with all of the local BBC correspondents. I've come to trust many of them with my life, and they also rely on me in other ways. I can sometimes be useful. I have a pocket full of money usually, and it's a symbiotic relationship. But, I don't really recognize the picture that you're painting there of, you know the western journalists are sitting drinking, I do drink in a hotel, but sitting in a hotel, and well you know the poor Africans are scrambling around in the mud. I mean that's not what happens. I mean our BBC correspondents are extremely professional people, who are paid properly. I totally respect them, and I always spend as much time as I possibly can with them. I don't recognize the picture you're painting at all.

Jocelyn Coulon: Maybe Anne will say something.

Anne Chaon: But I've met them really, a team of RTL, which at the time were in Gisenyi in the far west of the country, following the move by the government, and Veruggio (?), who wasn't very chatty, however. This was in the last 2 days, so things were collapsing then. It was over. They went into the meridian. There was no contact, but Valerie, I think it was Valerie, who was there to explain that there was still a chance of reconquest. So that was the only time when I saw them, and as Mark said, our Rwandan colleagues during the genocide. But in Africa today, of course, we see them now.

Jocelyne Coulon: So the last two questions if we could, because we want to stick to the timetable.

Unknown questioner: I want to direct my question to Mark and Anne, and as a foreign practitioner, I want to highlight two challenges we are facing; number one is the failure to recognize the severity, the nature and the intensity of the persecution Falun Gong in terms of their genocidal campaign in China, and due to the, not only, in the physical dimension, but also in the spiritual dimension as well due to the hate propaganda and the covering up, and the second challenge of Falun Gong is the state hate media propaganda in China, as well as extension to overseas. My question is as a reporter in the international media, how can we know to balance the report, to stop, disseminate state hate propaganda from Chinese media, as well as to make breakthrough to report reality of the nature of this persecution? Thank you.

Jocelyn Coulon: Thank you sir, but this question was addressed this morning if I understand, and we are talking about Rwanda right now. Then I will ask the lady to ask her question. I'm sorry for that.

Jennifer (unknown last name): Hello, my name is Jennifer, and I'm a student here at Carleton. My question is a little bit broad, and it's for everyone on the panel. All day today I think we've been deciding the onus of the problem in Rwanda, the lack of international support had a lot to do with the lack of media coverage, and the lack of participation with the U.S., and other western countries. My question to you is, we have all these boundaries when coming up with a new situation like the genocide in Rwanda, languages we don't understand like General Dallaire was saying, cultures we don't understand. Is there any way that you can think of to overcome these boundaries, as like new journalists, and changing the system so that maybe the media is not so corporately involved?

Jocelyn Coulon: Who wants to take this one? Linda?

Linda Melvern: When it came to Rwanda, I think there was a complete lack of understanding of what was going on. There was a peace agreement, the Arusha Accords, and whether or not that peace agreement was realistic will be a debate for years and years to come. But I know this. That what we expected Rwanda to do, achieve a power sharing, democratic government in two years has taken a place like northern Ireland, which is similar, decades to achieve. And I don't think that one could have reported Rwanda at the time without taking that into account. The other thing to remember is that genocide was already present in April, 1994. I have studied a place called Gikondo quite closely, which is a part of Kigali, and in that area 150 Tutsi went to sleep elsewhere, in churches and in UN-protected sites before the genocide even began. So it was a complete failure to understand Rwanda before the genocide, as well as afterwards.

Jocelyn Coulon: Thank you Linda. The very last question please.

Unknown questioner: Thanks. My question is, I think, mainly for Mark and for Steven. It relates to the political impact that you feel that British journalism, print and electronic had on political processes in the U.K. So, for example, on April 19 when you first used the word "genocide" electronically, was there an increase in the frequency or intensity of opposition and questioning in the House of Commons, House of Lords, or was there another form of political response that resulted, you feel, from the coverage that you and others were provided.

Jocelyn Coulon: Okay, thank you. Very short answer Mark.

Mark Doyle: The short answer is I'm afraid I don't know, because I wasn't in London at time, but I strongly suspect that they didn't discuss Rwanda at all in the House of Commons. However, that's not to say that we don't have an influence. I'm convinced that the work that I did in Sierra Leone and the appalling things that were happening there

was at least in some tiny way instrumental in the intervention of the British army, which helped bolster the UN force in Sierra Leone, and save the country from very bad fate.

Jocelyn Coulon: Steven?

Steven Livingston: I think Mark's answered.

Jocelyn Coulon: Okay Linda?

Linda Melvern: At the end of the April in the Security Council, there was an eight hour debate about whether or not to use the word "genocide." Eight hour debate, and during that debate, the British ambassador, Sir David Hannay, said that if the Council used the word "genocide" they would be a laughing stock, and it was only when the New Zealand president of the Council suggested that they go into public session that a compromise was reached. This is not the way the Security Council was intended to operate. The Security Council was intended to operate in open session, with decisions openly arrived at. And there's something else that is very serious about what happened in the U.K. On May 9 in the House of Commons, MPs were told that 200,000 people may have died in Rwanda in a civil war. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that Parliament was misled. I have tried to cover this story, and I have been threatened with the Official Secrets Act, which is why I say there is so much more to find out. Thank you.

Jocelyn Coulon: Steven, very shortly please.

Steven Livingston: Well, the last slide that I didn't get to has to do with, in some sense, whether or not Mark is correct to say that media, international media can serve as an indicator, an early warning device for genocide. Generally speaking, I don't think that that works that way, because too often media are reactive after the fact, too far into the circumstance. There are developments that are changing that. The greater mobility that media have today than they did in 1994 I think though gives us some hope that that may be changing.

Jocelyn: Well thank you very much. I think you will join me to congratulate our speakers and Gil Courtemanche.

Allan Thompson: I have a couple of very important announcements while I have your attention. First of all, if all of our panelists, chairs and discussants could please either remain at the front of the room, or come to the front of the room. I think this is the one moment when we're all here, and I would like to ask our student volunteers to bring you a gift. And while there still is a silence in the room, I'd like to remind you in the upper foyer, we still have some books for sale, particularly two of the Linda's books, "Conspiracy to Murder," her new book, which is available only in Canada, only at this event, and "A People Betrayed." In that same foyer when we're finished here, after the fourth panel, again I invite you to join us in the upper foyer for a reception at the end. So now we'll take our coffee break, and if the panelists could please join us at the front.