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ROUNDTABLE

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Fawaz A. Gerges • George A. Lopez

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Global Governance and Genocide in Rwanda

Anthony F. Lang, Jr.

Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda,
Michael Barnett (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 240 pp., \$25 cloth.

Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure
Bruce D. Jones (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 209 pp., \$49.95 cloth.

A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide
L. R. Melvern (London: Zed Books, 2000), 216 pp., \$69.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

On April 6, 1994, the airplane carrying Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana, the president of Burundi, and many of their top advisers was shot down by a surface-to-air missile over Kigali airport. Who did this and why remains the subject of speculation and controversy. Almost instantaneously, however, the claim that rebels from Rwanda's Tutsi ethnic group had assassinated the Hutu president was disseminated widely over Rwandan radio and by other means; within hours, killings, forced displacement, and human tragedy of epic proportions had commenced throughout the country. By mid-July, when a new government was installed, more than 800,000 Rwandans had been systematically slaughtered in a government-led campaign that included the regular army and politically motivated militias.

Eight years later many questions concerning how such atrocities could occur in plain view of the world community and who should bear responsibility for them remain unanswered. Indeed, the quest to understand the responsibility of various actors for failing to stop the genocide in Rwanda has become something of a cottage industry. Three recent books, by Michael Barnett, L.R. Melvern, and

Bruce D. Jones—a political scientist, a journalist, and a United Nations bureaucrat, respectively—attempt to explain how the genocide was allowed to occur by investigating the role of international institutions, particularly the United Nations. These books provide an interdisciplinary evaluation of the responsibility of the UN—the organization charged with maintaining international peace and security—and other actors. Read together, they make a fairly convincing case that the UN was indeed responsible for failing to stop the genocide in Rwanda. At the same time, however, the three books deliver a devastating indictment of the political leaders and citizens of the most powerful states in the world—especially the United States—for failing to create the conditions that would have enabled the United Nations to fulfill its mandate and prevent the slaughter.

Though these accounts differ in details and emphasis, they are in agreement about the following facts. Various members of the international community—activists, diplomats, political leaders, and bureaucrats—dithered and made statements of sympathy for the victims for weeks, but made no effort to help, claiming that the ongoing genocide

was a product of tribal hatreds, state collapse, and civil war. Many in the media and the policy-making community believed that intervention by military forces would not suffice to stop the killings. The U.S. secretary of state would not allow his staff to use the word “genocide” in describing the killings because doing so would obligate the United States to take military action to stop them.¹ When the UN peacekeeping command on the ground frantically radioed New York for more troops and supplies, the request disappeared into the bureaucracy. When France eventually did undertake a military operation to stop the genocide, its actions were interpreted by many on the ground as support for the government leading the genocide—a government France had been supporting for years prior to the attacks.

Scholars and commentators alike have sought to identify those responsible for this outcome. Obviously substantial responsibility rests with those who directed the genocide and those who wielded machetes and guns to kill their compatriots.² But it is also important to determine the kinds of responsibilities various actors outside of Rwanda bear for the genocide. Three external agents have come under particular scrutiny: the United States, the former colonial powers (especially France), and the UN.

Criticisms of the role of United States and France have been based on three principles: that countries that generated conflict in Africa during the Cold War should bear responsibility for aiding victims of ongoing violence; that countries that have created expectations—France with its insistence on a *droit d’ingérence* and the United States with its humanitarian actions in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia—need to fulfill those expectations when humanitarian crises strike countries with little strategic value; and that

countries that are powerful have an obligation to aid those that are not.³

There are plausible, if not completely convincing, counters to these principles. States are not humanitarian aid agencies that have the freedom to help every country in every part of the world: They are political organizations whose primary responsibility is to ensure the welfare of their citizens. While states might be obligated by their adherence to treaties outlawing genocide, they also are free to interpret those treaties in ways that conform to their interests. In a world where countries rule themselves, many claim that no state is obligated to act in the interest of another.

Perhaps the most penetrating critiques have been directed at the United Nations. The UN’s mandate is to keep peace and

¹ See Peter Ronayne, *Never Again? The United States and the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide Since the Holocaust* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 174–75.

² Alison Des Forges’s *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999) gives the most comprehensive account of the mechanics of the genocide. This detailed narrative on the events prior to and during the genocide is invaluable for those who wish to understand how so many could be killed in such a systematic and rapid fashion. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has also been central in identifying those individuals responsible for the killings.

³ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) provides a stinging critique of the Clinton Administration’s failure to act in Rwanda. On France’s responsibility for the genocide, especially its support of the Rwandan government, see Monique Mas, *Paris-Kigali, 1990–1994: lunettes coloniales, politique du sabre et action humanitaire pour un génocide en Afrique* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1999). For an early condemnation of France’s role, see Francois-Xavier Verschave, *Complicité de génocide: la politique de la France au Rwanda* (Paris: Editions Découverte, 1994). See also the report of the French parliamentary inquiry, described in a special edition of *Le Monde* “La France et le Rwanda,” December 17, 1998.

security in the international system. It is not supposed to have interests that would prevent it from intervening to stop genocide.

But the UN is a complicated institution. The power to authorize peacekeeping missions and define their mandates rests with the Security Council, which is composed of states with different interests and capabilities. The Secretariat provides information and analysis to the Security Council when it is deciding whether to launch a peacekeeping mission. And the General Assembly, composed of all member states, sets the budget for both the administration of the institution and for peacekeeping missions. This complexity not only makes it difficult for the UN to operate, it also makes it almost impossible to attribute responsibility to the entire institution *qua agent*.

Trying to understand the UN's role in the genocide in Rwanda, therefore, raises difficult empirical and conceptual questions. One must locate the individuals, moments, and decisions that created the conditions for the genocide. But does this move to identify corporate agents as responsible for various outcomes make sense at the global level? Can it lead to an improved system of global governance? Fundamentally, does the concept of responsibility help us in evaluating what happened, or in shaping what might happen in the future?

A RESPONSIBILITY TO GUARANTEE PEACE?

Rwanda's civil war and genocide depended on the grouping the Rwandan population into Tutsi and Hutu ethnicities.⁴ The consensus among Africanist scholars is that these ethnic identities were colonial social constructions; in the case of Rwanda, Belgian colonialists introduced "modern" tech-

niques of ethnic and racial identification early in the twentieth century. The Belgians allied themselves with the minority Tutsi population, who were engaged in their own bid for political power. During the 1940s and 1950s, ideas of democratization and decolonization swept through Africa, leading Hutus in Rwanda to agitate for greater participation in government and society. In 1959, these agitations led to violent conflicts between the two groups. The Tutsi anticipated support from the colonial power for their suppression of the Hutu majority, but the Belgians—as part of their exit strategy, such as it was—left their handpicked allies in the lurch. By 1962, Rwanda was independent and a Hutu government was in power.

The first president of the independent Rwandan state, Gregoire Kayibanda, remained in power from 1962 until a 1973 coup d'état by Juvenal Habyarimana. Both presidents were Hutu. Under Habyarimana, the governing elite—predominantly Hutus—created a sophisticated state structure that preserved their hold on power and enabled them to achieve valuable social and political goals. Over time, especially during the 1980s, outsiders generally saw Rwanda as a relatively stable and progressive country. On the inside, however, Rwandans recognized that the *akazu*, or ruling elites, inhibited democracy and human rights. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Tutsi had fled to Uganda. In October 1990, they invaded from the north under the banner of the Rwandan Patriotic Front led by Paul Kagame. The ensuing war ended in August 1993, with the signing of the Arusha Accords.

The process of negotiating and implementing these accords forms the centerpiece

⁴ There exists one other ethnic group in Rwanda, the Twa, but they seemed to have played little part in the conflict.

of Bruce D. Jones's *Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure*. Jones, who now works for the UN, analyzes the roles of insiders and outsiders in the negotiation of the Arusha accords. The process that led to the accords' signing included the two parties to the conflict, sought to change the attitudes and beliefs of both parties through concrete action, and provided guarantees from the international community that the agreement would be enforced. Yet, when it came time to commit resources and military means to securing the agreement, the international community failed miserably. As Jones notes:

Several conflicts—including Rwanda—have entered their most deadly phase following the signing of a peace accord that included international guarantees. Where such security guarantees are not serious, problems will occur. In practice, then, such guarantees are largely symbolic and rarely result in any serious action in the face of a breakdown in the implementation of peace agreements; they are tantamount to a bluff. When such bluffs are called, the consequences can be dire. In Rwanda, those consequences were not borne by international third parties but by the victims of renewed, and vicious, warfare (p. 11).

While sometimes overburdened by social scientific terms and ideas, Jones's focus on the negotiation of the Arusha Accords and the failure to implement them provides a useful case study for those interested in conflict resolution and diplomatic mediation. More important, it provides some evidence that the UN failed to live up to the commitments that it made in the accords. The Arusha Accords requested a Neutral International Force to provide security in Rwanda while an interim government was installed. The Organization for African Unity was suggested for the force, but objections both from the

parties and from the UN squashed the idea. The UN diplomats involved in the negotiations proposed a UN force. One week after the accords were signed, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent Brigadier-General Romeo Dallaire, who was later to lead the force, on a mission to Rwanda to determine what size and type of force was necessary. Dallaire believed that a force of 7,000 to 8,000 troops under UN command would be sufficient to guarantee the cease-fire.

At this point, the UN seems to have dropped the ball. As Jones puts it:

Back in New York, it quickly became clear that support for a large mission was nonexistent. The larger figure was never put to the UN Security Council: advance messages from the U.S. delegation in particular made it clear that there would be no support for a large mission in Rwanda. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) thus had to recommend a mission designed mindful of "what the traffic would bear" (i.e., bearing political considerations in mind) (p. 105).

But this passage actually does little to clarify the responsibility of the UN. Noting that the "figure was never put to the UN Security Council" suggests that the Secretariat failed in its responsibility to provide all the pertinent information to the member states. "Advance messages from the U.S. delegation" suggests that the Secretariat understood that it would not be able to pass a resolution for such a large force over the resistance of its most powerful member. Finally, Jones's source for the rationale for this decision is an anonymous member of the DPKO staff, who may have been trying to protect the reputation of his department, led at the time by the current secretary-general, Kofi Annan. By not differentiating between the Secretariat and the member states of the Security Council, Jones's analy-

sis does not bring us much closer to understanding whether the UN is responsible for failing to stop the genocide.

Jones provides further details on the role of the UN prior to and during the genocide, none of which covers new ground. His real contribution is to describe the various actors and interests that fed into the early attempts to resolve the conflict, culminating in the Arusha Accords. He demonstrates that even when a peaceful settlement is reached, the international community—especially the United Nations—must play a role in guaranteeing that accord. His insights are valuable because he works within the institution, but they are frustrating for someone interested in understanding the UN's responsibility for the failure to prevent the genocide.

A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE INFORMED?

L.R. Melvern, a journalist and author, focuses more intently on the failure of the UN in her book *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*. Melvern's account examines not only the role of the Secretariat, but also the specific role of Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali. She also examines the deliberations of the Security Council, alleging that decisions were made about the fate of Rwanda in "secret meetings" that reflected both a lack of political will and complicity in the genocide.

Melvern's book shines an unflattering light on Boutros-Ghali's performance. Boutros-Ghali had been Egypt's minister for foreign affairs. As the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's "Africa expert," Boutros-Ghali played a lonely role in a country that rarely identifies itself as African.⁵ Melvern notes that Egypt provided Rwanda with many of the small arms that were later used in the

genocide; she also cites documents from Rwandan officials who thank Boutros-Ghali personally for intervening on a crucial arms contract that replaced contracts severed by Belgium (pp. 31, 35).

Melvern does not focus simply on the failings of Boutros-Ghali, however. She is an investigative journalist, and her interviews with other key participants provide both insights and grounds for skepticism about the reliability of her informants. One of her interviewees was Colin Keating, the permanent representative of New Zealand to the UN during the crisis. New Zealand held the chair of the Security Council when Habyarimana's plane was shot down. Keating suggests that both the Secretariat and the Security Council bear responsibility for failing to stop the genocide. He certainly believes that the Secretariat failed in its primary mission of informing and advising the Security Council:

What bothered Keating was that any request by a member state for information was resented in the secretariat, where officials seemed to believe that it was not the business of states to micro-manage. Keating believed that there had to be detailed political oversight over all UN missions. A classic recipe for disaster was for those politically accountable to lose control of an operation. This was what had happened over Somalia. . . . "We were kept in the dark," said Keating. "The situation was much more dangerous than was ever presented to the Council. . . . With better information . . . the council might have proceeded differently" (pp. 111-12).

Keating makes an important point. The Security Council can only function effectively if it is provided with accurate information

⁵ See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem: A Diplomat's Story of the Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1997) for Boutros-Ghali's description of his role in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry.

and analysis of events around the world. The council had been focused on the attacks by Serbs in Gorazde only a few days before, and Rwanda did not have the same geostrategic importance to many member states.

At the same time, those sitting on the Security Council, whether we think of them as individual diplomats or as states' representatives, have the resources and ability to interpret events in diverse locations around the world. Keating suggested in his interview that the council was not provided with the UN Commission on Human Rights report that detailed atrocities committed by the Rwandan government. But such documents are readily available to member states and those with staffs (including New Zealand) ought to be able to access such information. The five veto powers, with their combined intelligence capabilities, certainly could have analyzed and understood what was happening in Rwanda. While the Secretariat must shoulder some blame, the UN remains an institution of member states and the Security Council is where those states take action. For Keating and other diplomats to foist sole responsibility on the Secretariat is cowardly at best.

Melvern underscores this point in a chapter on the "secret meetings of the Security Council." The deliberations of the Security Council are not open to the public, nor are they always recorded for official purposes. Melvern's account of the Security Council's deliberations during the genocide relies on a "leak from within the Council of a remarkable 155-page document" (p. 152). One suspects the leak came from a member state's diplomat with whom Melvern was able to develop a relationship. This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that her description of the meeting emphasizes the failure of the Secretariat to provide accurate information and highlights its fawning support of

Boutros-Ghali. Her chapter also describes American and French representatives blocking effective action in the face of mounting evidence of genocide. When proposals were put forth suggesting an increase in the size of the mission, the U.S. representatives, scarred by the events of Somalia only a few months earlier, reflexively moved toward limiting the operation.

Melvern provides useful empirical evidence for evaluating the UN. One of the most important roles of a bureaucracy is to process information for those who must make decisions; it appears that the Secretariat's office failed to do this in the case of Rwanda. Melvern's sources imply that this lack of information lessens the member states' responsibility for what happened. Though Melvern's account is useful for understanding how the Secretariat acted and why the genocide was not stopped, it takes too much of the burden off the member states.

A RESPONSIBILITY TO INTERPRET?

The most recent book addressing the role of the UN in the genocide in Rwanda comes from Michael Barnett, a theorist of international relations at the University of Wisconsin. Barnett worked at the UN as a Council on Foreign Relations Fellow during the time of the genocide. Like others at the UN and in the U.S. administration, he admits that the horror he felt while reading the cables concerning the atrocities did not lead him to the conclusion that intervention was necessary or even possible (p. x). This admission, coupled with his conclusion that intervention was in fact possible and could have helped, greatly enhances his analysis.

Like Jones and Melvern, Barnett explores the role of the UN at the level of the Secretariat and the Security Council. His account, however, is set within a convincing theoretical framework that draws on ethical theory, sociology, history, bureaucratic theory, and his own work in constructivist international relations theory.

The significance I attach to the moral universe at the UN leads me to construct a narrative that gives prominence to the “cultural landscape”: the discourse and the informal and formal rules that shaped the goals of the organization, the acceptable and unacceptable means to achieve those goals, and the meaning of ethical action at concrete moments. I want to consider how individuals offered different interpretations of these rules at different historical moments, and to recognize that they had some degree of autonomy that allowed them to appropriate rules and discourse for ulterior ends. This approach, in many ways, reverses the tack taken by prior accounts. To overstate matters: many of them tend to build an explanation for the UN’s failure from the ground up, beginning with the interests of the most powerful states in the Security Council that presumably shaped the council’s decisions and then introducing other actors and values as needed along the way. This perspective generates important insights that must be included in any record of the UN’s involvement. But it tends to undervalue how the broader culture in which these actors were embedded significantly shaped their outlook on the world (p. 6).

Barnett’s account exposes the formal and informal “rules” of the UN’s bureaucratic culture, in order to demonstrate how those involved in processing information decide what the member states should know.

Perhaps the most important example of how the UN’s culture shaped its reaction to the Rwandan genocide is the January 11, 1994, telegram sent by Brigadier-General Dallaire to

UN headquarters.⁶ An informant in the Rwandan government told Dallaire that the Hutu-dominated government had accumulated a cache of weapons that were to be used for a well-planned, systematic mass slaughter of Tutsis. Dallaire believed that confiscating the weapons fell within his mandate. In his telegram, he asked headquarters for approval for the confiscation, and for protection for the informant. The Department for Peacekeeping Operations ordered Dallaire not to confiscate the weapons and not to provide any protection for the informant. The official response stressed that Dallaire’s proposed course of action went beyond the mandate of the mission and would unnecessarily endanger the peacekeepers. Later justifications offered by individuals on the DPKO staff argued that Dallaire’s was a relatively standard type of warning in peacekeeping operations; based on the institutional experience of the UN and the peacekeeping department, they were perfectly justified in ignoring this warning.

Barnett points out, however, that in fact the DPKO did not treat this like any other cable. As soon as the cable arrived, high-level officials convened an emergency meeting to discuss their options. They took this and other warnings about the situation in Rwanda seriously. Still, they refused to act. Barnett draws upon his understanding of the UN’s bureaucratic culture to explain this failure. Because the peacekeeping mission in Rwanda fell under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, it demanded consent and impartiality. Also, on the heels of Somalia, there was concern that the reputation of the UN as an institu-

⁶ For a reproduction of the telegram, see Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, eds., *Path of a Genocide: The Rwandan Crisis from Uganda to Zaire* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1999), pp. xxi-xxii.

tion would suffer if it took action that proved ineffective. Barnett suggests that:

By categorizing violence in a way that achieved consistency with its proposed plan of action, DPKO was able to maintain policy coherence and cognitively support its impartial stance. Organizations like the UN have a limited number of responses to any situation or demand, and the UN almost always starts with the principles of consent and impartiality That individuals define the problem after they have selected the solution is not that unusual, and is, in fact, quite a routine feature of bureaucracies and organizations (p. 87).

Barnett goes on to recount how Dallaire continued to pester the DPKO and secretary-general in order to increase the forces at his command. He was continually rebuffed, leaving him with a sense that the UN headquarters did not believe his assessments of the situation.

Even more damning is the evidence Barnett presents concerning the gap between what Dallaire was reporting to the Secretariat and what was being reported to the Security Council. As soon as the presidential plane was shot down, Dallaire recommended an increase in the force in order to coerce the Rwandan military and paramilitaries back to their barracks. This would have been a substantial change in the mandate. But the circumstances on the ground changed rapidly in only a few days. Officials in New York argued that the conflict was a civil war, and the UN peacekeeping mission should not be involved. For this reason, Barnett argues, they failed to report to the Security Council the different options until it was too late. In public statements, Boutros-Ghali and others did not use the word "genocide" but continued to refer to the events as part of a civil war. This was in direct contradiction to what their commander on the ground was reporting. "The discourse of 'ethnic cleansing,'" Barnett points out, "is much more likely to compel

action than is the discourse of "civil war." The Secretariat adopted a vocabulary that body-checked the intervention camp" (p. 120).

In his concluding chapter, "The Hunt for Moral Responsibility," Barnett argues that responsibility arises from roles that are assigned to individuals and institutions, and that when agents ignore those roles they accrue responsibility for the results. His focus on the UN and the Secretariat is thus based on the role of the UN as an institution that is supposed to provide information and prod the international community to stop atrocities such as the one in Rwanda. As Barnett concludes:

The Secretariat bears some moral responsibility for the genocide. If I seem more critical of the Secretariat than I am of member states or the council, it is not because the latter had the technical means to stop the killing—after all, member states possessed the military force. It is because the Secretariat made a choice that thoroughly violated its professional obligations and ethical duties (p. 174).

Both Boutros-Ghali and the UN have offered their own versions of what happened, and a full picture of the events in Rwanda would need to include these works as well.⁷

Connecting standard tools of empirical analysis with sophisticated ethical reflection on normative responsibility is not easy. But events like those in Rwanda demand that persons interested in reforming global institutions engage with these questions. From their diverse perspectives, Jones, Melvern, and Barnett demonstrate that reflection of this sort also demands new interpretations.

⁷ See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga* (New York: Random House, 1999), pp. 129-41; for the official UN assessment of the Rwandan genocide and its response, see "Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Actions of the United Nations during the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda" from December 15, 1999, available at www.un.org/oss/rwanda_report.htm.