

Jon Maxwell

Project report

BCM390, “Media, war and peace”

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University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390_13outline.pdf

Jon Maxwell prepared (1) an information pack in the form of slide show (available separately) and (2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project, below.

- The link to this document is from http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html.

BCM 390 Media, War & Peace

Project Report

Dialogue

The following is a fictional discussion between the creator of this project and a close acquaintance with little-to-no previous knowledge of the theory, case study, or assessment.

LIZ: Hey you, how is your research coming for that thing you've got?

JACK: The Research report on genocide in Rwanda?

LIZ: Yeah, that's the one. How is that coming along? Have you found many useful sources yet?

JACK: It's getting there. There's actually a lot of information about it online, and there are quite a few academic sources about genocide in general.

LIZ: That's good! You've sure got a lot of web pages open. What type of sources are you using?

JACK: Academic mostly. There has been a lot of research done on the Rwanda genocide, and on genocide theories. I even found a book called 'The media and the Rwanda genocide' by Allan Thompson which has chapters written by different scholars about how the media had a role to play. I've definitely got a lot of content to work with, it will be hard to sift through everything and pick out the most relevant information. Like, did you know that the term 'genocide' is only relatively new? And that there is no agreed upon definition of just what constitutes genocide?¹

LIZ: No. How do you mean?

JACK: Well, for starters, the term 'genocide' was first coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew who escaped to the United States in 1941, to describe the Nazi extermination of the Jews¹. Lemkin described genocide as "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group".²

LIZ: Hang on. I think I've read something about genocide. Doesn't the United Nations have a definition? Something about acts intended to destroy a national, ethnical, racial or religious group³. Both of those definitions sound pretty similar to me.

¹ Rubinstein, W.D. (2004) 'Genocide and Historical Debate', *History Today*, vol.54, no.4, p.36-38

² US Holocaust Museum (n.d.) 'Coining a word and championing a cause: The story of Raphael Lemkin', Holocaust Encyclopaedia, accessed 05/06/2013, <http://www.ushmm.org>

³ UN (2000) 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, New York, 9 December 1948', accessed 05/06/2013, <http://www.un.org/>

JACK: That's the 1948 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide'. And you're right, they do sound the same, on the surface. The Convention doesn't limit genocide to acts of murder though. It also includes causing bodily harm, negatively affecting quality of life, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children from the group.³

LIZ: But I thought genocide always involved killing?

JACK: So do a lot of other people. Campbell⁴ and Rubinstein¹ both understand Genocide to be the intentional killing of all or most of a specific group.

LIZ: Sounds like there's a lot going on with this topic. It's going to be a lot of work. Why did you pick the Rwandan genocide if it's so involved?

JACK: Curiosity mainly, I think. I didn't know much about it beforehand, but what I have come across so far is really confronting and disturbing. It makes you think how lucky we are here in Australia, and how things like this can still happen in our world.

LIZ: Definitely! So what happened in Rwanda exactly? All I know is that there was an act of genocide in the early 1990's, but it wasn't really covered in the media at all.⁵

JACK: Well, in a nutshell, there are two main ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Hutu and the Tutsi⁶. There has been conflict between these groups going back years - I won't go in to detail now, but you're welcome to view my slideshow once I'm done - and it all came to a head in 1994...

LIZ: Wasn't there an assassination around then? I think it was the President.

JACK: Exactly right! In April 1994, the President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, was assassinated. Since he was Hutu, his people responded with the systematic mass murder of Tutsis.⁷

LIZ: Wow. That's intense! So how are you putting it all together? It's just a report with sub-headings, yeah?

JACK: Not quite. I have to create an information pack to inform the public about genocide. To help them understand what genocide is, to teach them exactly what happened in Rwanda and try and explain why it wasn't covered all that well in our media.

LIZ: That sounds interesting, a lot more fun than just a normal report, that's for sure! So do you know how you're going to present this information pack? What are you creating exactly?

⁴ Campbell, C. (2009) 'Genocide as Social Control', *Sociological Theory*, vol.27, no.2, p.150-168

⁵ Doyle, M. (2007) 'Reporting the Genocide', in Thompson, A. (2007) *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London, p.20-39

⁶ De Waal, A. And Omaar, R. (1995) 'The Genocide in Rwanda and the International Response', *Current History*, vol.94, no.591, p.156-161

⁷ Caplan, G. (2007) 'Rwanda: Walking the Road to Genocide' in Thompson, A. (2007) *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London, p.20-39

JACK: I'm creating a slideshow that can be circulated via email, uploaded on Youtube, or even printed out. The intention is, hopefully, to generate online discussion among social media users, and to increase awareness of the atrocities that took place in Rwanda. I'd like to think that this could incite people to do their own research, to better understand what is going on in our world, and to maybe make a difference.

LIZ: It sounds very challenging.

JACK: It is, but ultimately, I think, worth it.

LIZ: Now that I think about it, I've seen videos online like the 'Stop Kony' campaign and such, but nothing about Rwanda. Why is that? Why wasn't it covered in the media?

JACK: That's a good question. One I'll hopefully be able to shine some light on. Basically, as I'll be explaining in the slideshow, it wasn't covered in Western media because Western media wasn't there to cover it⁸. There weren't many international journalists present in Rwanda during the genocide, and the journalists that were about didn't have an adequate grasp of Rwandan history to understand and convey what was actually going on⁷. It's hard to believe, but it took almost a week after the genocide began for Western media to stop calling it a 'civil war', and almost a month before the majority of Western media was calling it 'genocide'.⁹

LIZ: That's crazy, to think that something so horrible could be going on in the world and we didn't know about it. What about the Rwandan media? Were you able to find anything out about what it said?

JACK: That's another disturbing, yet intriguing thing. I couldn't find a single instance of Rwandan media supporting the Tutsi. It was all pro-Hutu propaganda. Their national radio station, 'Radio Rwanda' even called for Hutu citizens to kill the Tutsi!¹⁰

LIZ: Unbelievable!

JACK: I know! And their print media wasn't any better. Almost a quarter of all newspapers founded in 1991 were linked to the Hutu regime and were actively aggressive towards Tutsi.¹¹

LIZ: I said it before and I'll say it again, there's a lot going on with this topic! Are you sure you'll be able to get it all into a slideshow which people will be able to understand? I mean, it'll have to be really straightforward and easy to watch if you want people to take something away from it.

⁸ Kuperman, A.J. (2003) 'How the Media Missed Rwandan Genocide', accessed 06/06/2013, <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/COMM.7.8.03.HTM>

⁹ Stanton, G.H. (2004) 'Could the Rwandan Genocide have been prevented?', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol.6, no.2, p.211-222

¹⁰ Des Forges, A. (2007) 'Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda 1994' in Thompson, A. (2007) *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London, p.20-39

¹¹ James, E. (2008) 'Media, genocide and international response: another look at Rwanda', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol.19, no.1, p.89-115

JACK: I've been struggling with that for a while now, how to format everything and present it to the public. It goes without saying that I need to include the key information, but I don't need to waffle on and on, putting people to sleep with a comprehensive history of Rwanda and genocide throughout the ages.

LIZ: You do tend to waffle on.

JACK: Hey! I know, I know. That's why I've been running everything by a few friends of mine and why I showed an early version of the slideshow to several people of varying ages.

LIZ: What was the verdict?

JACK: Less is more. The general consensus is that I should keep my slides short and succinct. It's better to have more slides with less on them, than it is to cram a whole lot of content onto the screen. More than a few test subjects also suggested that I change the order in which I present certain points.

LIZ: For example?

JACK: For example; I was initially planning to begin with definitions of genocide, followed by different theories on genocide as discussed by Campbell⁴ and Stone¹², and then move on to Rwanda.

LIZ: And now you're not?

JACK: Not anymore. Apparently the slideshow flows better if I introduce the Rwanda genocide early and talk about the theories after, so people have a basis on which to apply the theories in their minds.

LIZ: Makes sense. You mentioned 'theories on genocide'. What theories are those exactly?

JACK: I talk about two theories; genocide as social control, as discussed by Campbell, and genocide as transgression, as discussed by Stone. Basically, the former considers genocide to be a normal part of society, as a way of handling grievances, kind of like the law system (Campbell, 2009)⁴. The latter sees genocide as a form of social exclusion, a way to alienate the targeted group and to justify the transgression of social norms and laws by individuals (Stone, 2004).¹²

LIZ: It sounds like you know what you're talking about, like you've put a lot of thought into this slideshow. Have you had to consider anything else?

JACK: Thanks, I try. The main thing I've had to do is consider the strengths and weaknesses of my theories in how they relate to the case study, and the portrayal of genocide in the media.

LIZ: I think they work well together, your theories I mean. I can see how they could both be applied to the genocide in Rwanda. Like, the Hutu believe they have been wronged by the Tutsi, so they are seeking retribution. They also see them as different from themselves, as people to be blamed for everything. I'm not too sure how the theories relate to the media side of things though...

JACK: It's like this, the theories of genocide as social control and as transgression could both be applied to the media in Rwanda as well. Just look at the 'Kangura', a Rwandan newspaper. In one issue it named the Tutsi as the same 'evil' from the country's history, and in another it published the 'Ten Commandments' for Hutus,

¹² Stone, D. (2004) 'Genocide as Transgression', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol.7, no.45, p.45-60

which stated how the Tutsi were different and deviant¹¹. The media is supposed to be fair and balanced, providing the populous with accurate, unbiased reports. As such, people are inclined to believe what they hear on the radio, or read in a newspaper. Even if it isn't fair or balanced.

LIZ: But not everyone blindly accepts what is in the news, surely?

JACK: True. That's the main weakness I found within almost all of my sources, and with the theories themselves. They all assume that the media has ubiquitous control over our behaviour. Yes, propaganda can certainly have an effect on a community, but it's not all powerful. The key thing to keep in mind here is that there were a lot of other factors, such as years of oppression, which fuelled the Hutus actions.

LIZ: I suppose there is always room for more investigation.

JACK: Certainly. I wouldn't be surprised if we see more collaborative research into genocide between historians, sociology scholars, and media effects experts.

References

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