‘Our’ Shame: International Responsibility for the Rwanda
Genocide

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‘By the time the genocide was over, I was so angry, at America, America the beautiful, America the brave’

In 1994, countries around the world failed to respond to the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsis. As the Tutsis were systematically persecuted and murdered on the basis of who they were, nation states and the United Nations refused to name the killings as ‘genocide’ and delayed in providing any economic, political or military support to stop them. The United Nations, an organisation founded on principles of global solidarity, had a peacekeeping force in Rwanda at the time of the genocide, but this force was denied the mandate and the means to protect the Rwandan Tutsis from the persecution that they were facing. Both inside and outside the United Nations structure, there was a wholesale turning away from the genocide of the Tutsis and its implications for the rest of the world.

The international failure to prevent, or stop, the Rwandan genocide acts as a piercing challenge to widespread cultural beliefs about the meaning and implications of the crime of genocide. Genocide — the intentional and organised attempt to exterminate a defined group of people — is popularly deemed to be the ‘crime of crimes’. It is the ultimate inhumanity that constitutes a threat to all of humanity. Nation states, the United Nations and the more amorphous ‘international community’ are each understood to bear a moral and a legal obligation

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3 Only France committed military resources for a French-led intervention force, Opération Turquoise, which arrived in Rwanda towards the end of the genocide and will be discussed in more detail below. It is generally accepted, however, that this Opération was not primarily designed to end the genocide and that it — in fact — provided protection to some of the perpetrators of the killings.
to prevent or stop acts of genocide. Thus, what can it mean when genocide not only occurs, but is ignored?

In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, the international failure to stop the killings has been understood as a shameful reaction to a crime that demanded a more interventionist response. In particular, it has been conceptualised as a matter of Western shame, as a matter of Western countries — such as the United States of America, Britain, Belgium and France — failing to live up to societal expectations of them. Yet, despite these widespread criticisms of the international response, there have been no legal consequences flowing from this event — no countries have been prosecuted or punished for their failure to fulfil their legal obligation to prevent the crime of genocide. In general, questions of legal accountability for the international response have been sidelined, in favour of an emphasis on the social and moral implications of this event.

This article reflects on these contemporary approaches to the international response, as a way of interrogating how they make it possible to think about the questions of international responsibility and accountability raised by this occurrence. I explore these socially ascendant understandings of the international failure as an event of Western shame with reference to academic and non-academic investigations into the international response, such as academic research, human rights reports, investigative journalism and documentary films. As a whole, these investigative texts are a key site at which the international response has been constituted as a matter of Western shame and, thus, they are good illustrations of this broader way of thinking about this event. In line with a tradition of poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to law, human rights and humanitarianism, my analysis of these investigative texts is premised upon a recognition of their productivity. These representations of the international response are interesting, that is, because they actively constitute what this event can, and does, mean. They are the sites at which the legal, social and political issues relating to the international failure are thought and rethought. Moreover, as I will demonstrate, they are also the location at which certain — racialised and gendered — subjects are imagined.

I argue that conceptualising the international response to the Rwandan genocide as a matter of Western shame, as a matter of Western countries failing to live up to societal expectations of them, is not natural or inevitable. Rather, it is a socially, culturally and historically located way of coming to terms with this event, which has important (and problematic) effects. It entails the imagination and legitimisation of an expectation that Western countries will act as global saviours — encapsulated by the lament cited above for ‘America the beautiful, America the brave’ — who will intervene forcefully to protect ‘non-Western’ others from harm. Further, in practice,
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this mode of thinking about the international failure, as a Western failure, has deflected attention away from both the potential legal issues raised by the international failure and the global responsibility of other countries regarding the Rwandan genocide. The first section of this article examines how the international response has been framed in the investigative texts, as an event attracting social, but not legal, consequences. The second section then discusses how the international failure is critiqued in and through these texts and highlights the imagery upon which such understandings are based. I demonstrate how the criticisms advanced in the investigative texts are grounded in an image of the West as a global saviour, an image that is personified by the Canadian military commander who led the United Nations peacekeeping force in Rwanda, Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire. In the third section, I draw out the consequences of conceptualising the international response as a matter of Western shame, namely that the experience of the Rwandan Tutsis is again disregarded, as the international failure is constructed as a site of the West’s fall from grace.

1.0 ACCOUNTABILITY OUTSIDE LAW

In the wake of the Rwandan genocide, the pursuit of individual legal accountability has become an important goal. Those accused of participating in the organisation and perpetration of the genocide have been held accountable in a variety of legal fora, from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to the local Rwandan gacaca criminal trials. Yet, whilst the law has been invoked with fervour in relation to the leaders and perpetrators of the genocide, it has been strangely absent from contemporary approaches to the responsibility and accountability of the bystanders to this crime. Despite the existence of a legal obligation on states to prevent genocide, found in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention), these countries, institutions and their leaders have not faced any legal prosecution or sanction. Neither Article I of the Genocide Convention (which obliges contracting parties to prevent the crime of genocide) nor Article VIII (that enables them to request that the United Nations act in order to ‘prevent’ or ‘suppress’ this crime) has given rise to any legal action.

The failure of governments and institutions in the time and space of the Rwandan genocide has, however, had social consequences. Since 1994, there has been significant public outcry at the international response to the killings. The international response to the genocide has been documented and denounced in academic research, non-governmental reports, investigative journalism and documentary films. These texts have, therefore, undertaken the tasks of

9 With respect to relevant national legislation, Rombouts and Vandeginste also note that there are provisions in Belgian law that would deem the Belgian state to be ‘civilly liable’ for its agent’s ‘criminal failure to act’ in relation to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes: see Rombouts Heidy and Vandeginste Stef ‘Reparation for Victims in Rwanda: Caught Between Theory and Practice’ in Feyter Koen de, Parmentier Stephan, Bossuyt Marc and Lemmens Paul (eds) Out of the Ashes: Reparation for Victims of Gross and Systematic Human Rights Violations Intersentia Antwerpen 2005 p 309 at 325.
investigation, accusation and judgment normally reserved for the criminal justice system. In the absence of a legal response to the international failure, these investigative texts have become the cultural site at which issues of global responsibility for the genocide, and accountability for the international failure, have been raised, interrogated and resolved.

This section introduces these texts and examines how they frame the international failure as an event that requires a form of societal, rather than legal, denunciation. In this article, I do not analyse these texts in turn, but use them as a point of reference through which I illustrate the characteristics and tropes of a broader, socially ascendant way of thinking about the international failure as a matter of Western shame and failure. My discussion, in this section and throughout the article, focuses predominantly on the most dominant of these texts, or those texts that constitute common or accepted knowledge about this event. Such dominant representations are important because they are the sites at which the international response is authoritatively depicted and explained. These portrayals of the international failure are afforded some ‘truth’ value, their understanding of the international failure is accepted as legitimate, accurate or insightful. The international failure is constituted as an event of Western shame through both academic and non-academic investigative texts. Firstly, there is a wealth of academic research that problematises the international failure, elucidates its causes and determines who bears responsibility for its occurrence. Some of this scholarship has attracted notable public attention, such as the work of Samantha Power, an American foreign correspondent turned public policy academic, on the response of the American government to successive events of genocide. Her book, "A Problem From Hell": America and the Age of Genocide,10 received various awards and allegedly motivated the current American President, George W Bush, to assume a more active stance in relation to the ongoing conflict in Darfur, Sudan. After receiving a summary of Power’s article on the American government’s reluctance to intervene in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, President Bush supposedly scrawled on the document: ‘NOT ON MY WATCH’.11 Other popular mainstream studies of the international response to the genocide include the work of American political scientist Michael Barnett on the United Nations’ (UN) response to the killings12 and French historian Gérard Prunier’s consideration of the role of France, and other countries, regarding the genocide.13

Secondly, there is a corpus of non-academic research on the international response that has been produced by investigative journalists, non-governmental organisations and documentary film-makers. The work of British investigative journalist Linda Melvern on the international response is well known and respected, both within and outside Rwanda. Melvern’s first book on the Rwandan genocide, A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide,14 uses a range of documentary sources to narrate the international failure as it occurred. Non-governmental organisations, such as Human Rights Watch and African Rights, have also published comprehensive reports on the genocide and international failure in their aftermath. The report,

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11 As above at 511.
“Leave None to Tell the Story”: Genocide in Rwanda,\textsuperscript{15} by Alison Des Forges under the auspices of Human Rights Watch and the International Federation of Human Rights is, in fact, widely regarded as the most comprehensive and accurate account of the genocide.\textsuperscript{16} Although her report does not include as much Rwandan testimony as the main African Rights report on the genocide, \textit{Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance},\textsuperscript{17} it does provide a detailed description of the history and dynamics both of the genocide and of international involvement in the Rwandan nation, from month to month across each region of the Rwandan nation. Various documentary films have also addressed the topic of the international response, including a popular American documentary film, \textit{Ghosts of Rwanda},\textsuperscript{18} which was produced to commemorate the 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the genocide. The documentary, which is often used as reference text or an educational resource, weaves together interviews conducted with a wide spectrum of people involved in the international failure — from human rights workers to national and international political leaders — into a shared narrative about the regrettable nature of this event.

There are similarities and differences between these dominant academic and non-academic analyses. Power’s book and the documentary are, in general, more representative of the bulk of mainstream analyses of the international failure. In contrast, Melvern’s and Des Forges’ accounts often adopt a more nuanced approach to the international failure and, therefore, illuminate the limits and assumptions that structure more mainstream texts on this topic. All these dominant texts, however, are culturally particular — produced by European and North American scholars, organisations and film-makers — and thus my analysis of these texts also brings them into conversation with other less ‘popular’, but more culturally diverse, analyses of the international failure.

Despite the differences between these key texts, however, they collectively produce the international failure as an event necessitating social, but not legal, consequences. In concert, these investigative texts seek to uncover the ‘truth’ and establish the ‘facts’ of the international failure to prevent, or stop, the genocide. By undertaking interviews and publishing ‘previously unpublished’ documents and minutes, such investigations claim to expose the ‘true’ details of the governmental and institutional failure to stop the Rwandan genocide.\textsuperscript{19} Melvern, for example, explains that ‘[w]ith the help of individuals who know the truth (and have found it very hard to live with), it has been possible to piece together the facts’.\textsuperscript{20} These texts aim to expose such ‘facts’ about the international failure in order to enable certain communities, national and institutional, to hold their representatives accountable. Des Forges, thus, concludes her report with the assertion that ‘[t]his work is one of many that must come to establish the historical record, to lay the

\textsuperscript{15} Des Forges Alison “Leave None to Tell the Story”: Genocide in Rwanda Human Rights Watch New York 1999.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ghosts of Rwanda} above note 2.
\textsuperscript{19} Des Forges above note 15 at 3.
\textsuperscript{20} Melvern above note 14 at 5.
groundwork for … accountability for all others who failed to respond to the bonds of our common humanity’.21 For Des Forges, this is why ‘the story must be told’.22 These texts, therefore, speak to and on behalf of a public — an entity that is defined in contradistinction to its governmental and institutional representatives.23 These investigations expose the truth to the public in order to put this public in an equal position to their representatives.24 Their claim to truth lies in their very opposition to existing official accounts of the genocide: they make the seductive claim to ‘Speak Truth to Power’.25 In purporting to tell the ‘full story’26 or the ‘truth’27 of the international response, these texts claim to be revealing an actuality that has been otherwise hidden. Accordingly, they rely upon enlightenment notions of truth as an objectively verifiable state that can be revealed or exposed.28 They deny their own status as particular configurations of the history, truth and implications of the international response.29

Yet, they produce a distinct way of articulating and addressing questions of responsibility and accountability for the international failure. In relation to investigative journalism in general, de Burgh explains that such investigations are designed to ‘expose, but they expose in the public interest, which they define’.30 Such investigative texts, therefore, do not simply reveal an already existing problem for societal consumption, but actively constitute this problem, and the grounds for public engagement with it.31 Rather than merely revealing the truth to the public in order to create a level informational playing field for government and public alike, these texts produce this very field of engagement and debate.

For example, the possibility of legal accountability for the international failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide is always already foreclosed in the investigative texts. Whilst it is acknowledged that the perpetrators and leaders of the genocide will face legal consequences, these texts are premised on the assumption that the bystanders to the genocide will only suffer the social consequences of their actions. Thus, Des Forges explains that ‘Rwandan government officials will be tried for their participation in the genocide, but foreign leaders whose inaction contributed to the scale and duration of the catastrophe will likely face the judgment only of history and public opinion’.32 In this way, the investigative texts discount the possibility of legal accountability for all others who failed to respond to the bonds of our common humanity’.

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21 Des Forges above note 15 at 771.
22 As above.
26 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
27 Melvern above n 14 at 5.
29 See Dudai above note 25 at 784–789.
30 de Burgh above note 23 at 23, emphasis added.
31 This is not what de Burgh necessarily meant, as he seems to endorse the notion that there is an objective truth that investigative journalism can reveal. Rather, I use the words of this specific statement of his to highlight an argument that I am making in this article.
32 Des Forges above note 15 at 737.
accountability regarding the international failure as unrealistic and devote their attention to endorsing a form of societal sanction for this event. The relevant legal provisions relating to the international failure are not ignored in these texts, but rather presented as having little practical effect. These texts cite the obligation to prevent and punish genocide that is found in the Genocide Convention, in order to establish that there was an obligation on countries across the world to intervene to prevent the genocide. The breach of this obligation is deemed to be shameful and reprehensible, but not automatically giving rise to any legal consequences. The Genocide Convention is noted to establish the ‘fact’ that these countries and institutions should have intervened, whilst the implications of their non-intervention are located in the societal sphere. Indeed, these texts devote themselves to publicly revealing the ‘real’ response of governments and institutions to the genocide, in order to ensure that they face some form of social accountability for their actions and inactions.

Given the existence of a legal obligation on countries to prevent genocide, it is not natural or logical to conceptualise the international failure as an event giving rise to a form of societal, non-legal accountability. This legal obligation was, in fact, recently considered and applied by the International Court of Justice in the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina v Serbia and Montenegro) in relation to the inaction of Serbia and Montenegro regarding the 1995 Srebenica massacre. Yet, with respect to the Rwandan genocide, international accountability for the killings has been thought as a matter residing outside the law. As will be demonstrated in the remainder of this article, it is also a mode of thinking about the international failure that has problematic effects — it constitutes the international failure as an issue between Western publics and their governments and it focuses on the positive potential of these governments rather than exclusively on the reprehensible nature of their actions.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE WORLD

Since 1994, the international response to the Rwandan genocide has been produced as a site of Western failure and thus Western shame. In line with general cultural understandings of shame as a feeling induced by the perception of a discrepancy between one’s idealised image and one’s actual behaviour, the international failure has been produced as a failure of certain countries to live up to societal expectations of them. This is not a claim about the international failure that is

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33 Des Forges most clearly leaves open the possibility of legal consequences stemming from the international failure: as above at 769. Yet, she still fails to discuss this form of accountability for the international failure in any detail.
34 See, for example, Melvern above note 14 at 4.
35 As above at 227–228.
explicitly advanced in the investigative texts. Rather it is a way of understanding that emerges from the portrayal and condemnation of the international failure in these texts. That is, in their criticisms of the actions and inactions of Western countries regarding the genocide, the investigative texts are driven by a belief in a certain image of these countries. It is the failure of Western countries to live up to such expectations of them that motivates the revelations and condemnations of the investigative texts. These texts denounce the failure of Western countries to prevent, or stop, the genocide, on the basis that these countries should have lived up to their imagined role as global saviours in the time and space of the Rwandan genocide.

Such condemnations of the failure are, therefore, based on an image of the good, right or proper response of certain countries and institutions to the Rwandan genocide. The positive potential, or image of the good, that is implicitly appealed to in the investigative texts is discursively figured through the bodies of individual citizens, who are portrayed as responding in the right way, the expected way to the Rwandan genocide. In these texts, the actions of individual people are the ‘right’ response to the genocide, against which the ‘wrong’ response of governments and institutions is contrasted. Power explains that ‘[b]y seeing what they [individual people] tried to get done, we see what America could have done’, while *Ghosts of Rwanda* uses the specific example of American aid worker Carl Wilkens to argue that Wilkens ‘probably saved more lives during the genocide than the entire U.S. government’. In a majority of investigative texts, however, the response of Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire to the genocide is figured as the primary example of the right or proper reaction to this event.

Roméo Dallaire was the head of the peacekeeping force, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), which remained in Rwanda throughout the genocide. In the wake of the genocide, Dallaire has been popularly portrayed as hero in representations of the international response. Dallaire is depicted as a well-intentioned soldier who tried to do all that he could to protect the Rwandan Tutsis from the persecution that they were facing, despite the limited mandate and resources afforded to his Force. Power claims that ‘[i]f there was ever a
peacekeeper who believed wholeheartedly in the promise of humanitarian action, it was the forty-
seven-year-old major general who commanded the UN peacekeepers: Roméo Dallaire. While
Caplan aptly observes that, in a Western context at least, Dallaire has become the public ‘face’ of
the global event of the Rwandan genocide. In exploring how the international failure is
constituted in the academic and non-academic investigations of it, I use assertions that Dallaire
reacted in the right way to the genocide (in the way that countries and institutions should have
reacted) as a point of entry into such contemporary condemnations of this event. As Pevere
notes, it is in this sense, that Dallaire’s personal experience can function ‘as a way of opening on
larger questions of global indifference and responsibility’. By contrasting Dallaire’s actions with
those of nation states and the United Nations, I draw out the bases on which these actors have
been criticised for their response to the genocide; before calling into question the idealised images
of Dallaire and the West upon which these criticisms are implicitly based.

2.1 Political Wills and Military Ways

Peux ce que veux. Allons-y. (Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Let’s go.)

These words, penned by Dallaire, were first used as a salutation on a fax to the United Nations,
which requested authorisation for his Force to raid an arms cache belonging to Hutu extremists
before the genocide had even begun. Since then, he has repeatedly invoked the phrase in his
accounts of the international failure regarding the Rwandan genocide. In the investigative texts,
his use of the phrase is offered as evidence that Dallaire had the will, but not the way, to prevent
(or stop) the Rwandan genocide. He wanted to intervene to protect the Rwandan Tutsis, but did
not have the official authorisation or necessary resources to do so. Conversely, countries and
institutions are condemned on the basis that they had the power and resources to intervene, but
not the will. The core revelation of the investigative texts is, thus, that countries and institutions
had sufficient knowledge of the killings whilst they were occurring, but consciously chose not to
intervene to protect the Tutsis from the persecution that they were facing.

The relevant context for this revelation is provided in Ghosts of Rwanda, which begins with
two contrasting statements from Madeleine Albright, the former American Ambassador to the
United Nations, and Philippe Gaillard, of the Red Cross, who respectively claim that:

Albright: In retrospect, it all looks very clear. But at the time, what was happening in
Rwanda, the situation was unclear.

Gaillard: They cannot tell me that they didn’t know. Everybody knew what was
happening.

criticisms of Dallaire, however, are still premised on his promise, as a soldier, to be a hero and a saviour. Thus, they
proceed from the same assumptions as representations of Dallaire’s heroism — but reach a different conclusion.

43 Power above note 10 at 335.
45 This quote is displayed on the front of the DVD case of a documentary about Dallaire: Shake Hands with the Devil: The
   Journey of Roméo Dallaire above note 40.
46 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
It is against a background of the representations of officials, such as Albright, that they had insufficient knowledge of the killings during their commission that claims concerning the extent of official knowledge become revelatory in nature. Thus, Melvern, in line with Power and Des Forges, cites documentary evidence to prove that ‘there was nothing secret about’ the genocide.47

Official knowledge of the genocide is demonstrated, for example, by reference to the now infamous ‘genocide fax’, which Power has called the ‘genocide’s primary artifact’.48 The ‘genocide fax’ was the fax that Dallaire sent to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (the DPKO) seeking permission to raid an arms cache (see above). Sent on 11 January 1994, almost three months before the genocide began, this fax contained information that had been given to Dallaire by an informant claiming to be a member of the Rwandan army. This informant disclosed his knowledge of plans for the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsis and agreed to lead Dallaire to a place where arms were being stockpiled for this purpose. In his fax, Dallaire admitted that he could not be sure that the informant’s offer was not a trap, but he nevertheless signed off with the salutation: ‘where there is a will, there is a way, let’s go’. He was ultimately denied permission to undertake the raid, in light of the recent deaths of 18 American Rangers in Somalia who were brutally murdered after an arms raid had been conducted there. In the investigative texts, however, the ‘genocide fax’ is offered as evidence that governments and the United Nations were well warned of the genocidal violence in Rwanda, but chose not to act.49

In refuting official representations of the international response as an information failure, these investigative texts instead ‘expose’ this response as a failure of political will. Power argues that ‘[t]he real reason the United States did not do what it could and should have done to stop genocide was not a lack of knowledge or influence but a lack of will. Simply put, American leaders did not act because they did not want to’.50 In such revelations, political will is thought of as a function of self-interest or national interest.51 In Ghosts of Rwanda, Monique Mujawamariya, a Rwandan activist, explains how she was ‘enlightened’ by an American official who explained to her that ‘the United States has no friends. The United States has interests. And in the United States, there is no interest in Rwanda’.52

In a similar vein, the United Nations inaction in relation to the genocide is attributed to UN staff acting in their institution’s self-interest. Des Forges explains that ‘most staff at the U.N. were fixed on averting another failure in peacekeeping operations, even at the cost of Rwandan lives’.53 That is, after the deaths of the American Rangers in Somalia, the UN was reluctant to authorise any response to the Rwandan genocide which entailed a risk that peacekeepers would be injured or killed. The revelatory and oft-cited conclusion to Power’s research is, therefore, that the American government’s historical non-intervention regarding events of genocide has not

47 Melvern above note 14 at 227. See also Des Forges above note 15 at 5; Power above note 10 at 557.
49 See, for example, Power above note 10 at 508.
50 As above.
51 See Des Forges above note 15 at 595; Power above note 10 at 342.
52 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
53 Des Forges above note 15 at 595.
The reprehensible nature of the lack of will, or lack of appropriate will, of these countries to stop the genocide is traced to the fact that these entities had the way, or means, to do so. They had the ability to prevent, or stop, the genocide, which is why it is problematic that they chose not to do so. The theme of Des Forges’ investigation is, thus, that any international opposition to the genocide was effective, demonstrating the potential impact of any greater international condemnation of the killings. She argues that ‘[w]hen international leaders did finally voice disapproval, the genocidal authorities listened well enough’, but she continues that ‘[f]ar from cause for satisfaction, this small success only underscores the tragedy: if timid protests produced this result in late April, what might have been the result in mid-April had all the world cried “Never Again”’. She presents the failure of international leaders to slow the genocide as shameful, in light of their power to do so.

However, while countries and institutions are criticised for their failure to act given their ‘political and moral authority’, the overwhelming emphasis across the investigative texts is on the military ability of certain countries to stop the genocide. The military ability of Western nations, in general, is affirmed through the portrayal of two Western military interventions that did occur during the genocide. Firstly, Western military might is imagined with reference to the...

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54 Power above note 10 at xxi.
55 This force also included troops from Senegal, Chad, Congo and Niger, but is widely regarded as a unilateral French intervention in Rwanda: see Melvern above note 14 at 210.
56 Des Forges above note 15 at 636.
57 As above at 674. See also Melvern above note 14 at 213–215.
58 As above at 2.
59 As above.
resources and capabilities of the predominantly French Opération Turquoise. This Opération is depicted as well-equipped and sizeable and ‘deployed extremely quickly … illustrating the pace at which a determined state could move’.60 Secondly, Western military ability is established with reference to the strength and resources of the evacuation forces that arrived in Rwanda at the beginning of the genocide to evacuate non-Rwandan nationals from the country. In Ghosts of Rwanda, one of the UNAMIR soldiers explains that when the evacuation forces landed ‘we basically had our intervention force already on the ground’ — the only problem was that ‘it wasn’t there to intervene’.61

In light of their military capacity, four Western countries in particular — namely the United States of America, Britain, Belgium and France — are criticised for their response to the Rwandan genocide. The United States of America and Britain are condemned for their reluctance to contribute their significant military resources to an international intervention force. An oft-recited example that is said to be ‘emblematic, symptomatic’ of American inaction regarding the genocide relates to the slow pace at which the American government agreed to lease 50 Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) to the United Nations to reinforce the UNAMIR peacekeeping force.62 Apparently, the American government was so difficult in negotiating the terms of the lease agreement and so slow in providing the vehicles that they actually arrived in Rwanda after the genocide was over. In relation to Britain, Melvern and Williams argue for greater public condemnation of the ‘unwillingness of powerful industrialized states, like Britain, with spare military capacity’ to intervene to prevent the genocide,63 framing the relevance of British inaction as a function of the military resources of the British nation.

Similarly, the Belgian government is predominantly criticised for its decision to withdraw its contingent from UNAMIR after ten of its peacekeepers were assassinated in the first days of the genocide.64 The unconscionability of the government’s decision is traced to the integral nature of the Belgian contingent to the UNAMIR Force. The Belgian contingent is often described as the ‘backbone’65 of the Force, its ‘best armed and trained’66 troops. The acceptability of Belgium participating in the UNAMIR Force was, indeed, always premised on the ‘superior’ military ability of Belgian troops. According to UN principles regarding the neutrality of peacekeeping forces, Belgium, as a former colonial power, was not a preferable country to contribute troops to the UNAMIR Force. However, the Belgian government’s offer to participate in the UNAMIR Force was accepted due to the dearth of offers from other similarly resourced armed forces.

The military capacity of countries such as Belgium, Britain, France and the United States of America is, thus, established in comparison to other countries. That is, the Belgium battalion for

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60 Power above note 10 at 380. See also Des Forges above note 15 at 607.
61 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
62 As above.
64 Des Forges above note 15 at 17. It is also shamed for its efforts to convince states on the Security Council to support a full withdrawal of the UNAMIR Force, in order to provide some cover for its own decision to withdraw its troops.
65 Melvern and Williams above note 63 at 21.
66 As above at 10.
UNAMIR was accepted on the basis that no other country had offered to contribute military resources of the same standard. In a similar vein, the military ability of Western nations, in general, is also figured in comparison to the inability of African countries to provide well-trained and well-equipped soldiers for a Rwandan intervention. In relation to the Rwandan genocide, African countries are depicted as having the will to protect the Rwandan Tutsis from persecution, yet tragically lacking the military resources necessary to do so.67 Thus, when the UN Security Council finally decided to strengthen the UNAMIR force, the UN called on countries across the world to provide additional troops. After some delay, African countries volunteered their troops, but — as American human rights practitioner Holly Burkhalter explains — ‘only the rich countries had the resources to equip them’.68 In this context, the term ‘rich countries’ is used to refer to Western countries, such as the United States of America and Britain, who eventually agreed to provide these African contingents with equipment.69

It is in this way that the international failure to prevent the genocide has been broadly constituted as a parable for the importance of armed humanitarian intervention as the preferable international response to human rights atrocities.70 In general, the claim that governments and institutions should have acted in relation to the genocide has been equated with the notion that they should have acted militarily. Belgian commentator Alain Destexhe, for example, contends that ‘action should have been taken: a military operation was needed to protect the Tutsi’. 71 In such assertions, the verb ‘to act’ is understood as an abbreviated form of the verb and adjective ‘to act militarily’ in a manner that is representative of much writing on the Rwandan genocide. In this context, armed humanitarian intervention is produced as the right and the moral response to human rights atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide.

Des Forges and Melvern do draw attention to various non-military responses to the genocide that should have occurred, from jamming the hate radio station that broadcast the directions for the genocide to public denunciations of the genocidal regime during the killings.72 Their approach is not representative, however, of the vast majority of mainstream academic and non-academic accounts, which underscore the importance of a military response to the genocide, discussing non-military responses on a ‘continuum of intervention’.73 Even in texts, like Power’s analysis, in which non-military responses to the genocide are discussed, they are always framed as

67 Melvern above note 14 at 198.
69 Signifying the hierarchical nature of the relationship that is imagined through this vignette is the explanation given by Burkhalter that apparently these Western countries were initially reluctant to equip African troops because of both a concern that these troops may misuse the equipment lent to them and a suspicion that African countries were only volunteering troops as way of ‘outfitting’ their national armies with Western resources: as above. Again, it is notable that the equipment was only made available after the genocide had ended.
70 See Orford Reading Humanitarian Intervention above note 7 at 96–99. Orford has shown that — in legal approaches to humanitarian intervention — the case study of Rwanda is invoked as an incontestable example of the importance of humanitarian intervention in certain circumstances.
72 Des Forges above note 15 at 635; Melvern above note 14 at 230.
73 Power above note 10 at 504.
an alternative, a secondary alternative, to the ultimate response of armed humanitarian intervention to stop the genocide.  

Arguments for the necessity, and desirability, of military intervention have been contested in some studies regarding the Rwandan genocide. American academic Alan J Kuperman has controversially argued that a military intervention to stop the Rwandan genocide would not have halted the killings. In light of his estimates as to when the American government actually knew about the genocide and as to the preparations required for a military response to the killings, Kuperman contends that any intervention in Rwanda in 1994 would have only saved the lives of around a quarter of the genocide victims. The ultimate point of his work — to demonstrate that humanitarian intervention is a limited and blunt tool — has, however, also been made by other scholars, in a less controversial and more persuasive way.

Uvin and Orford, for example, have put forward an insightful critique of one of the common rationales for humanitarian intervention, namely that — in some circumstances, such as the Rwandan genocide — it is the only option. They contest the logic of arguments for the necessity of humanitarian intervention by demonstrating that they assume ‘a particular temporal focus’. Such arguments focus on the ‘moment of crisis’, the time at which military intervention appears as the only feasible response (which is also the time, as Uvin points out, at which such intervention will be most difficult, dangerous and costly). Thus, in relation to the Rwandan genocide, these scholars argue that there were multiple points in time before the genocide at which countries could have responded to the human rights abuses that were occurring in a less violent and forceful, and potentially more effective, manner.

The assumed acceptability of humanitarian military intervention is further undercut by comprehensive critiques of the assumptions and beliefs that motivate such practices. Poststructuralist and postcolonial scholars, such as Douzinas, Mamdani, Orford and Žižek, have emphasised the imperialistic nature of recent military interventions, which constitute another method through which the West is intervening in the internal matters of non-Western states. Demonstrating the continuities between historical practices of colonialism and current practices of humanitarian intervention, Douzinas observes that it is the former colonial powers of the world that are again assuming the ‘responsibility’ of intervening in other countries.

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74 See above at 514.
76 As above.
77 Orford Reading Humanitarian Intervention above note 7 at 18. See also Uvin Peter ‘Reading the Rwandan Genocide’ (2001) 3 International Studies Review 75 at 97.
78 Orford Reading Humanitarian Intervention above note 7 at 18.
79 Uvin above note 77 at 98.
80 Orford Reading Humanitarian Intervention above note 7 at 102–110; Uvin above note 77 at 95, 97–98.
81 Douzinas Human Rights and Empire above note 7 at 83.
83 Orford ‘Muscular Humanitarianism’ above note 7.
85 Douzinas Human Rights and Empire above note 7 at 64, 83.
observation can be easily applied to academic and non-academic understandings of the international response to the Rwandan genocide, which predominantly emphasise the role and responsibility of Belgium (a former colonial power in Rwanda) and France and the United States of America (who have acted as neo-colonial forces in Rwanda in recent times).

However, the predominant focus of the investigative texts on the importance of a military intervention is not without context. Rather, their focus reflects a broader contemporary trend of ‘Western powers to use force for apparently moral purposes’. It is an embodiment of the current acceptability of Western military force as a moral and justifiable response to human rights abuses in non-Western countries. Within this discursive framework, there is no space to argue that even when humanitarian intervention may be the only available option, it does not necessarily become a moral or preferable one. Contemporary endorsements of humanitarian intervention, that is, downplay the inherently paradoxical nature of claims that a response to human rights abuses based on the use of (sometimes indiscriminate) violence can be conceived as either moral or ideal. Yet, as Mamdani argues, ‘peace cannot be built on humanitarian intervention’.

Such endorsements of Western military intervention also serve a political function. Orford and Douzinas have shown how narratives and practices of humanitarian intervention are a means for Western countries to constitute their identity in relation to those they ‘save’ from harm. They are a way for Western countries, publics and governments, to imagine themselves as heroes and rescuers, always in comparison to a complementary image of a non-Western community that is comprised of either victims in need or perpetrators of violence. The following section establishes that the arguments of Douzinas and Orford bear weight in relation to investigative texts regarding the Rwandan genocide, which are implicitly premised on a belief in and appeal to the West as a militarised global saviour.

### 2.2 A Problem of Ideals

Throughout the above discussion, an image has begun to materialise: an image of the ideal or expectations that underpin academic and non-academic condemnations of the international failure to prevent, or stop, the Rwandan genocide. This image is of the Western, male military hero, namely Dallaire. Thus, in the contrast between Dallaire and those Western countries who did not intervene, Dallaire is not portrayed as the antithesis or opposite of the West. To the contrary, he is identified as part of the West and, thus, becomes a symbol of how the West should have reacted to the genocide. He is popularly portrayed as the only remnant of the potential and

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86 Douzinas *The End of Human Rights* above note 7 at 131.
87 The inherent violence of humanitarian intervention is vividly encapsulated, for example, in Dallaire’s description of humanitarian intervention as a willingness, on behalf of the West, to ‘spill our blood for humanity’: see Dallaire (with Beardsley) above note 40 at 522.
88 Mamdani ‘The Politics of Naming’ above note 82.
90 Douzinas *Human Rights and Empire* above note 7 at 68–71; Orford ‘Muscular Humanitarianism’ above note 7 at 692–699.
possibility of the West in relation to the genocide: he is ‘the last just man’. In the investigative texts, Western countries are criticised for their lack of will to intervene to stop the genocide given their relatively superior military ability. The implication of this discourse, framed in positive terms, is that Western countries should have been prepared or were expected to act as Dallaire had wanted to — they should have been prepared to intervene militarily to stop the genocide on the basis of their global superiority.

Orford observes that ‘[t]he militaristic heroic model is the common-sense framework for understanding international relations in the era of globalization’. In investigative texts about the international response to the Rwandan genocide, the issue of global responsibility for human rights abuses, such as genocide, is indeed thought of as a matter of heroic military intervention. Dallaire, who is defined and defines himself as a military man, is revered as the true ‘hero’ of the international failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide. Thus, although he reduces the experience of the genocide to the Western experience of the international response to it, Caplan aptly claims that ‘[t]he human symbol, the embodiment, the very face of the Rwandan genocide … is a white Canadian soldier’.

The appeal to the West as global military hero, which characterises the mode of understanding produced through the investigative texts, is grounded in a gendered and racialised conception of who should bear global responsibility for the international failure. Conceptualisations of global responsibility as a function of military ability are premised on a masculine model of international relations. As Dawson argues, the constitution of man-as-soldier is a key site for the establishment and affirmation of masculine identity; while Orford notes the gendered nature of the images of heroism that mark contemporary narratives of humanitarian intervention. Configurations of global responsibility for the Rwandan genocide that are premised on military heroism similarly produce an ideal image of responsible global actors as inherently masculine, in both a general sense and a more specific sense (namely, in their reverence of Dallaire).

This way of thinking about the international failure also has a cultural bias. It focuses predominantly on the actions and inactions of Western countries, specifically the United States of America, France, Britain and Belgium, with respect to the Rwandan genocide. The role of other countries in relation to the genocide is mentioned, but they are discussed as somehow secondary or less significant. Unlike many other authors, Melvern and Des Forges do note the voting preferences of China and Russia, but rarely in comparison to the frequent observations regarding the attitudes of the other (Western) permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely

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91 This is the title of a documentary about Dallaire: Silver Steven (dir) The Last Just Man Barna-Alper Productions Toronto 2001.
92 Orford ‘Muscular Humanitarianism’ above note 7 at 709.
94 On a practical level, as Charlesworth and Chinkin note, national and international military forces are predominantly comprised of men: see Charlesworth Hilary and Chinkin Christine The Boundaries of International Law: A Feminist Analysis Manchester University Press Manchester 2000 p 294.
96 Orford ‘Muscular Humanitarianism’ above note 7 at 692.
97 See, for example, Des Forges above note 15 at 377.
France, Britain and the United States of America. The biased nature of the majority of academic and non-academic investigations concerning the international failure is well demonstrated by reference to the alternative approach of a report by African Rights, mentioned briefly at the beginning of this article. This report, *Rwanda: Death, Despair and Defiance*, engages in a detailed discussion of the responses of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda and the then Organization of African Unity, as well as those of the United States of America, France and Belgium. The authors claim, for example, that even though ‘[i]t has become so customary to write off Zaire as a bankrupt, collapsed state without effective government … this attitude is unwarranted’ as ‘Zaire’s role has been utterly scandalous’.

Yet, in dominant approaches to questions of international responsibility for the Rwandan genocide, the focus remains on Western countries. As illustrated by the investigative texts, the UN’s failure in relation to the Rwandan genocide is largely attributed to the actions and inactions of its most ‘powerful’ national members. Des Forges, for example, explains that ‘the Rwandan operation lacked a powerful patron among [Security] council members to force the normally slow pace of the U.N. bureaucracy. Only France had the interest to play that role, but its effectiveness was undercut by its close identification with the Habyarimana government’. In other places, the inadequate UN response is blamed directly on Western countries, such as the United States of America, who did not want to contribute their resources to a strengthened UN presence in Rwanda. The potential of the UN as an international institution is limited to the national interests of certain countries. Even discussions of the more amorphous, but potentially more inclusive, ‘international community’ are predominantly given content with reference to the behaviour of the United States of America, Britain, France and Belgium. The international is generally conflated with its Western parts, whilst certain Western countries are inflated to become *the* world, *the* international community, *the* states that matter.

Accordingly, in and through these investigative texts, the international failure to prevent, or stop, the Rwandan genocide is produced as a matter of specifically Western shame. It is primarily the behaviour of Western countries that is revealed to the public and it is mainly Western countries who are condemned for their failure to intervene despite their military strength. While the response of Western countries to the Rwandan genocide is an important consideration in contemporary discussions about who bears responsibility for this event, so too are the responses of Asian, African and Eastern European countries. As permanent members of the Security Council, why have China and Russia not been criticised in the same way as Britain and the United States of America? In light of the South African President’s apology for his country’s actions and inactions regarding the genocide, why is the role of South Africa not examined in more depth? If Senegalese writer Boris Boubcar Diop can ‘admit that the Rwandan tragedy provoked, if possible, even less interest in Africa than in the rest of the world’, why are Rwanda’s neighbours not being condemned for their disinterest in the genocide? Alternatively, if the topic for discussion is
really that of global responsibility for the Rwandan genocide, why are the responses of each and every country and international institution not addressed?

In dominant representations of the international response to the Rwandan genocide, including the investigative texts, questions of international and global responsibility are being posed and answered in problematic ways. Examinations of international responsibility or the responsibility of the international community and the United Nations have been translated into explorations of Western responsibility. The responsibility of the United Nations in responding to human rights atrocities, such as the Rwandan genocide, is neatly excused through a portrayal of this institution as wholly guided by the interests of its member states. Meanwhile, Western nations are criticised for their lack of will to intervene to prevent the Rwandan genocide given their superior ability to do so. Together these three tendencies that mark the approach of the investigative texts produce a way of thinking about the international response to the Rwandan genocide that is reminiscent of the colonial notion of the ‘white man’s burden’. That is, they produce a mode of thinking about the response that both figures the West as the global actor and calls upon this global actor to have the will to intervene in non-Western countries around the world on the basis of its relative superiority.

The colonial notion of the ‘white man’s burden’ was rhetorically premised on the notion that Europeans were naturally superior to the people in the countries that they colonised. The factual nature of European superiority, which was always figured in contrast to non-Western inferiority, was interpreted as indicia of a naturally hierarchical world order, in which some peoples were meant to be masters and others were meant to be slaves. As inherent masters, colonial countries were, thus, understood to enjoy both advantages and responsibilities that stemmed from their superior status. According to colonial beliefs, the natural superiority of Western countries meant that they had duties and obligations to civilise and ensure the sustenance of the populations that they colonised. This was the burden of responsibility that they bore — described by Cesaire as the white man’s ‘responsibility for the world’.

Academic and non-academic analyses of the international response to the Rwandan genocide also invoke this notion of the ‘white man’s burden’, albeit in a contemporary guise. In these texts, the United States of America, Britain and France are collectively referred to as the ‘Great Powers’, the ‘major powers’, and the ‘rich countries’ in implicit contrast to their absent other: the powerless nations, the poor nations, the African nations. Further, it is on the basis of their power, specifically their military power, that these countries are criticised for their failure to intervene to protect the Rwandan Tutsis. It is in light of their relatively superior military abilities that their lack of will to protect the Tutsis is condemned.

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105 Cesaire as above at 73.
107 Destexhe above note 71 at 50.
108 Burkhalter above note 68 at 50.
Thus, it is also on the basis of their power and superiority that they are entreated to care beyond their own borders. It is through a contemporary revival of the ‘white man’s burden’ that these Western countries are implicitly called upon to assume responsibility for the world due to their elevated global status. It is particularly appropriate to apply the term the ‘white man’s burden’ to a mode of understanding premised on the heroism of the masculine military soldier. That is, such a masculinised rendering of racial superiority is an apt demonstration of McClintock’s claim that ‘race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other … [r]ather they come into existence in and through relation to each other — if in contradictory and conflictual ways’.109

It is no accident, therefore, that this gendered and colonial mode of thinking about the international failure figures Dallaire as its ideal and hero. Despite Dallaire’s personal commitment to stopping the genocide and continuing to bear witness to it, Dallaire is a colonial man. In the Introduction to his memoir, for example, Dallaire describes his encounter with a Rwandan boy that even he connects to his objectives as the commander of the UNAMIR Force. He writes that:

\[\text{Suddenly up ahead we saw a child wandering across the road … [h]e was about three years old, dressed in a filthy, torn T-shirt, the ragged remnants of underwear, little more than a loincloth, drooping from under his distended belly. He was caked in dirt, his hair white and matted with dust, and he was enveloped in a cloud of flies, which were greedily attacking the open sores that covered him … [t]his child was alive yet terribly hungry, beautiful but covered in dirt, bewildered but not fearful. I made up my mind: this boy would be the fourth child in the Dallaire family. I couldn’t save Rwanda, but I could save this child}.110

Dallaire’s plan to save this Rwandan boy from his country, however, is thwarted by a member of the Rwandan Patriotic Front who refuses to let Dallaire take the boy away. In this passage filled with conventional media imagery of the African child as an object of Western pity (filthy, torn … loincloth … distended belly … caked in dirt … cloud of flies), Dallaire writes of his desire to save this boy from the curse of his country in lieu of his unachievable wish to save this boy’s country from itself. It evinces a belief, on Dallaire’s behalf, that — as a Westerner — he can offer this boy a better life than he could ever have in Rwanda. Further, in the context of this passage, the recent genocide in Rwanda is not the issue, but rather — through the invocation of stock media rhetoric regarding Africa as victim — Rwanda and this boy become symbolic of the state of all African countries and all African children who suffer, respectively.

Thus, when Dallaire himself acknowledges that he is ‘filling a certain role’ for the Western world in the wake of the Rwandan genocide,111 there is cause to be wary. For the role that Dallaire currently fills in many representations of the international response is that of the colonial Western, male military hero. Without impugning the material efforts of Dallaire before, during and after the Rwandan genocide, the above passage demonstrates the problematic nature of understanding Dallaire as the ultimate personification of the desired Western response to the

110 Dallaire (with Beardsley) above note 40 at 2–4.
111 Dallaire cited in Dawes above note 48 at 38.
Each endorsement of Dallaire as the hero of the international failure serves to affirm the legitimacy of conceptions of global responsibility as the ‘white man’s burden’ for the world. In this respect, it is possible to see how the image of the West as superior and as a potential saviour, highlighted by Douzinas and Orford in literature on humanitarian intervention more generally, is also reiterated and reaffirmed in representations of the international response to the Rwandan genocide.

The problematic nature of these investigative texts, therefore, is traceable to the particular image of the potential good of the West to which they appeal. They produce a mode of understanding international responsibility for the genocide that is premised upon a figuring of certain, Western countries as superior in relation to other countries, who are coded as Rwandan, African or simply non-Western. The superiority of these Western countries is then constituted as the basis of their international responsibility to respond to human rights atrocities, while the relevance of legal and non-legal norms regarding such a responsibility are implicitly discounted. Within this discursive framework, the Rwandan Tutsis can only ever be imagined as helpless victims (personified by an orphaned child unable to communicate his own wishes), whilst — even in their failure to respond to the genocide — Western countries are constituted as strong and able to stop human rights abuses, their potentiality exemplified through the thwarted actions of Dallaire. Meanwhile, the agency of the Rwandan people — perpetrators and victims — is downplayed through a focus on the actions and inactions of outside countries regarding the genocide.

There is nothing natural or inevitable, however, about conceiving international or transnational responsibility as a function of superiority. Unlike the other texts, Des Forges, for example, does not trace the responsibility of France, the United States of America and Belgium solely to their military greatness or global power, but also to their significant involvement in the Rwandan nation before, during and after the genocide. By alluding to such prior involvement as a possible ground for a form of responsibility, Des Forges’ account departs from the conventional presentation of national and institutional bystanders to the genocide as constitutively external to the history and affairs of the Rwandan nation. As such, her account — as well as Melvern’s account — recognises the point made by Uvin and Orford that it is erroneous to preserve a conceptual distinction between the causes of the conflict and those who failed to prevent it, as it was the very involvement of ‘external’ countries and institutions in Rwanda that — in part — helped to create the economic, social and political conditions in which the genocide took place. While Belgium was a former colonial power in Rwanda; Belgium,
France and the United States of America have been involved — to differing extents — in Rwandan military and governance affairs in more recent times. Thus, it is also on the basis of such involvement that — according to Des Forges — they may be held responsible for the genocide and the international failure to prevent it.

It is also not logical to come to terms with the Rwandan genocide in a way that emphasises the potentiality of those who failed to prevent it, rather than simply the reprehensibility or criminality of their actions and inactions. In the investigative texts, questions regarding the deviant, transgressive or illegal nature of the international failure are transformed into inquiries based on the ‘good’ and ‘positive’ potentiality of the countries and institutions that are critiqued. The societal force of existing condemnations is grounded in their belief in the potentiality of the actors whose behaviour that they critique, and they interpellate a similarly disposed public or audience. Thus, Power frames her investigation as an engagement with the following issue: ‘time and again, decent men and women chose to look away … The crucial question is why’.

Yet, there have been serious allegations regarding the actions of certain countries, such as France, the Republic of Seychelles and the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire), in aiding and abetting the genocidal killings. While Melvern shows that countries such as China, South Africa, Egypt and Zaire supplied arms to the Rwandan authorities throughout the genocide; the French soldiers in Opération Turquoise have recently been accused of actively participating in the murder of the Rwandan Tutsis and the rape of Tutsi women. Both these allegations raise issues of international criminal responsibility for the genocide itself, issues that are obscured through a mode of understanding the genocide as a failure of Western countries to be their ‘best selves’. They might invite a legal response that is more denunciatory and retributive in nature than current approaches to the international failure, which often pursue a type of social disapproval and reprobation. The next section continues to consider the effects of conceiving of the international failure as an issue of societal accountability between a public and their governmental or institutional representatives.

### 3.0 National Narcissism: The Citizen as Victim and Hero of the International Failure

In light of his research regarding the UN response to the Rwandan genocide, Barnett makes the observation that the UN response can be partially explained by the fact that, during the genocide,

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117 Power above note 10 at xvi–xvii.
118 With respect to the arms allegations see Melvern above note 14 at 5, 182–3. The Rwandan Government has established a commission into the role of France before, during and after the genocide. People have testified about French participation in both the genocide and the rape of women during the genocide. The report of the commission has been completed but has yet to be publicly released.
‘[w]hat was at stake was bigger than Rwanda’. From the above discussion it is clear that, in the aftermath of the international failure, what is at stake is other than Rwanda. This final section charts the nationalistic and narcissistic nature of prevalent understandings of the international failure as a matter of Western shame. In the first section, I alluded to the way in which the international failure is constituted as a national problem, giving rise to a form of social — not legal — accountability. This section demonstrates how — within this mode of thinking — the significance of the international failure is restricted to the relation between citizen and government (or staff and institution), leading to both the victims and heroes of the international response being imagined as Western individuals.

Firstly, the investigative texts produce a nationalistic way of conceiving of the implications of the international failure. As discussed earlier, these texts speak on behalf of and address a public that is constituted in opposition to its governmental or institutional representatives. These texts reveal the ‘truth’ behind the international failure in order to allow such, national or institutional, communities to hold their representatives responsible. As such, in and through such understandings, the international failure is produced as a breach of societal expectations that exist in the context of a relation between citizen and government (or staff and institution). That is, within the framework of the investigative texts, the international failure is constituted as a national problem. It is in this vein that most research regarding a particular country’s role regarding the genocide has been undertaken by its own nationals. British journalist Linda Melvern has highlighted the British government’s response to the genocide; American journalist and academic Samantha Power has focused on the American reaction to the killings; while Adelman and Suhrke observe that the most ardent critics of the French government’s involvement in the genocide have certainly been the French people themselves.

This mode of coming to terms with the international failure is unduly restrictive, operating to foreclose any discussion of more cosmopolitan or transnational modes of thinking about accountability for events such as genocide. Yet, in Ghosts of Rwanda, a Belgian journalist, who was in Rwanda during the genocide, explains the difficulty of her position when she was called upon by a group of Rwandan refugees to save them from the genocidaires. She recounts her predicament: ‘[t]here was a whole group of people, but in the whole group, one woman started to speak and started to explain why they were afraid and what was happening to them. And she started begging us to take her and the others with us. She was speaking to me, a woman to a woman, saying, “I’m afraid. Please help me!”’. Without suggesting that this experience is evidence of a universal womanhood that unites both the Belgian journalist and the Rwandan refugee, it does gesture to the potential diversity of the relations that might give rise to a sense of

119 Barnett above note 12 at 14.
121 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
accountability for another person’s suffering. That the journalist felt as though she was asked to help as a woman, so too can her failure to help be understood as a breach of a relation based on a shared identification that is other than simply national identity.

Moreover, and secondly, there is a certain narcissism that marks understandings of the international failure as an event of national, or institutional, shame. Investigations that locate the significance of the international failure in the national or institutional sphere make it possible for certain victims and heroes of the international failure to appear (and appear as dominant). In a discourse that entreats citizens to hold their governments accountable, such citizens are also constituted as victims of the international failure. They are victims in the sense that they have been let down or disappointed by the response of their representatives to the Rwandan genocide. The Ghosts of Rwanda documentary, for example, begins and ends with a segment of an interview with an American aid worker, Carl Wilkens, who remained in Rwanda during the genocide. Articulating his disappointment at his country’s shameful response to the genocide, Wilkens proclaims, eyes teeming with tears, that ‘[b]y the time the genocide was over, I was so angry, at America, America the beautiful, America the brave’. In his anger-inflected sorrow, he is portrayed as another victim of the international failure on the basis that he was betrayed by his country. While he — as an individual citizen — did all that he could to protect people from the genocide (see above), his country failed him, by failing to live up to his ideal of America as a beautiful and brave nation, willing to intervene to protect others from harm.

In a similar vein, Dallaire is often depicted as a victim of the United Nations’ response to the Rwandan genocide. After he returned from Rwanda to Canada, Dallaire suffered a high-profile mental breakdown, culminating in his eventual discharge from the Canadian armed forces. Since then, Dallaire has been popularly portrayed as a ‘broken man’, another victim of the international response to the genocide. Dallaire’s status as a victim is traced to his ‘abandonment’ by the UN, who failed to empower him to intervene to prevent the genocide and, thus, ‘condemned’ him and his Force to watch passively while it occurred. In Ghosts of Rwanda, Gaillard thus explains that ‘[h]e was abandoned by his own organization. This is terrible. To be abandoned by his own organization, it’s terrible. I was always supported. It’s a big difference, a huge difference’. In the terms of this introspective discourse based on national and institutional affiliation, certain heroes of the international failure are also constituted. As the dominant image of Dallaire-as-Western-hero suggests, within this frame of understanding, the heroes of the international failure are those individual Westerners who responded to the plight of the Rwandan Tutsis. The ‘positive story’ of the international failure is, therefore, found in ‘the stories of courageous

122 In a similar vein, Prunier also refers to the role of churches (as both ‘bystanders’ and ‘accomplices’ during the genocide), gesturing towards another relation that gave rise to some form of responsibility for the Rwandan genocide, see Prunier above note 13 at 250–253.
123 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
124 Dawes above note 48 at 41.
125 See Power above note 10 at 341.
126 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
individuals who risked their careers and lives in an effort to force the U.S.A to act. Thus, not only are the Rwandan victims of the genocide obscured in such texts that foreground the Western victims of the international failure, so too is the heroism of the Rwandan victims and survivors of the Rwandan genocide. Only Des Forges’ account emphasises the courageous acts of individual Rwandans who opposed the genocide or refused to participate in it. In the other investigative texts, it is hard — if not impossible — to make out the strength and resistance of the survivors of the Rwandan genocide.

In contrast, in other forums, the heroism of Rwandans who resisted the killings has been foregrounded. Mamdani notes, for example, how the prefect of Butare used his influence to prevent genocidal killings from occurring in the locality that he governed, until he was himself murdered and replaced with a leader more willing to support the systematic extermination of the local Tutsis. It is in relation to courageous actions such as these that the African Rights report claims that the ‘credit for the extremists’ failure does not lie with the international community: it lies with the Rwandese. The strength and resilience of the Rwandan people is also evinced through their very survival. Those individuals, some of whom have endured or witnessed the deaths of their whole families during the genocide, who have somehow also managed to survive its aftermath.

It is in this sense that the international failure has been constituted, from a Western perspective, as a matter of ‘our’ collective shame. While the primary focus of investigative texts is on the behaviour of governments and institutions, there are also suggestions that the lack of political will regarding the genocide was traceable to a lack of public pressure on such governments to intervene to stop the killings. Power, for example, claims that ‘[i]t is the realm of domestic politics that the battle to stop genocide is lost’ and urges American citizens to pressure their government to respond to human rights atrocities across the world. In this way, as Dawes — speaking of and as the West — explains, the international failure has ‘become a more potent and vivid story in the West than the genocide itself ever could be. We are culpable, and it feels good to be culpable. It assures us that we are good people, because we are the kind of people who feel bad about these sorts of things. As such, condemnations of the international failure as shameful become an opportunity to affirm the West’s potential to be good.

It is the narcissism of this way of thinking about the international response to the Rwandan genocide that, to some extent, makes possible statements such as that of the former American Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright. In Ghosts of Rwanda, Albright explains: ‘I wish that I had pushed for a large humanitarian intervention. People would have thought I was crazy. It never would have happened. But I would have felt better about my own role in this’. Albright explains that she wished she made the appearance of trying to do more,

128 Mamdani When Victims Become Killers above note 114 at 218–219; see also Prunier above note 13 at 259–260.
129 African Rights above note 17 at 1061.
130 Power above note 10 at xviii.
131 Dawes above note 48 at 21.
132 Ghosts of Rwanda above note 2.
not because this might have led to less people being murdered, but because it might have made her feel better about herself in the wake of the (always-inevitable) genocide. Her statement draws attention to the type of introspective and image-based official responses that the investigative texts may intentionally or unintentionally invite. Albright’s statement also demonstrates the forgetting that is inherent in such understandings of the international failure that overlook, or absent, the Rwandan implications of the international failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide. Socially ascendant ways of understanding the genocide, as a site of Western shame, are appropriative, borrowing the historical event of the international failure as a symbol of something other than the Rwandan experience of this event. It is in a similar vein that even the name ‘Rwanda’ has been reinscribed as a Western experience. Opening his book with the statement that ‘Rwanda lives inside of me’, Barnett proceeds to explain that ‘[t]he Rwanda that now dwells inside me is not a geographical territory. Rather, it is a metaphysical space … defined by a profound sense of loss’. In such statements, ‘Rwanda’ is not a geographical place: it is a term that signifies Barnett’s experience of the international failure. On a broader scale, not only the name ‘Rwanda’ but also the experience of the Rwandan genocide has been appropriated — transformed from a Rwandan event into a site of ‘our’ Western shame instead.

4.0 MOVING BEYOND ‘OUR’ SHAME

I began this article with an observation about the selectivity of law’s enforcement in the wake of the Rwandan genocide, and throughout the article I have charted the way in which the international failure has been thought about as a matter of social, rather than legal, responsibility. The purpose of my discussion has not been to advocate a turn to law to deal with questions of international responsibility for the Rwandan genocide, but rather to highlight the inherent partiality and incompleteness of an ascendant way of thinking about the international failure that is — in part — produced through academic and non-academic investigative texts. By critiquing these investigative texts, I am not impugning the value of existing academic and non-academic research on the genocide. The texts that I have discussed are important societal texts and they have successfully focused public attention on questions of responsibility and accountability regarding the international failure. My aim instead was to draw attention to the particular way in which they pose, investigate and answer such questions, in order to unsettle the inevitability of their rendering of the international failure and its significance.

For it is the way in which these texts make it possible to engage with the international failure that is important. Mamdani, for example, has argued that the ‘wrong’ lesson has been

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133 In Ignatieff’s words, does the Western ‘we’ just wish it ‘intervened in order to save an image of ourselves as defenders of human decencies’? See Ignatieff Michael The Warrior’s Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience Chatto & Windus London 1998 p 95.

134 Barnett above note 12 at ix.

135 As above at xiii.
drawn from the international failure to prevent, or stop, the Rwandan genocide.\textsuperscript{136} He argues that this event should not have become a parable for the importance of humanitarian intervention, but rather an example of the importance of pursuing peace through good faith political settlements. His criticisms underscore the fact that the way in which the international failure is interpreted in its aftermath has material implications, with respect to future similar situations, but also — I would argue — in regard to how non-Rwandans respond to and relate to the historical events of the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsis and the global failure to prevent it.

Thus, I have shown that what is most problematic about the investigative texts, and the modes of understanding they contribute towards, is the \textit{way} in which they represent the meaning and significance of the international failure. These texts — to differing degrees — problematically imagine, idealise and affirm an image of the West as militarised global saviour. Moreover, this saviour is imagined in relation to Rwandan, African or simply ‘non-Western’ others, who always appear as inferior in relation to the ‘superior’ West. The texts then configure the significance of the international failure in relation to its implications for Western governments and Western citizens. Premised on the relation between these two entities as the site of breach, loss and heroism, a Rwandan public body, with its own victims and heroes, is constitutively other to the understandings of the international failure produced in these texts. In this sense, dominant understandings of the international failure constitute yet another forgetting of or disregard for the experiences of the Rwandan Tutsis during the 1994 genocide. 

\textsuperscript{136} Mamdani ‘The Politics of Naming’ above note 82.