

Why is the Truth About Rwanda so Elusive?

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

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It's not often I praise the BBC for producing real journalism. Further, it is with some disbelief that I find myself applauding Jane Corbin, who I will struggle till my dying day to forgive for her despicable piece of Israeli propaganda parading as reportage a few years back on the Israeli navy's attack on the Mavi Marmara aid ship to Gaza.

Nonetheless, Corbin has now fronted a truly disturbing revisionist documentary on Rwanda, called Rwanda's Untold Story. The programme's argument is that the official story about a straightforward genocide by the Hutu majority of Rwanda's Tutsis 20 years ago is highly selective and entirely misleading. One scholar suggests that the narrative we have been fed is the equivalent of reducing the Second World War to the Holocaust and claiming nothing else of significance happened.

What the documentary demonstrates forcefully is that Paul Kagame, the hero of the official story of Rwanda's genocide, was almost certainly the biggest war criminal to have emerged from those horrifying events. Kagame led the Tutsis' main militia, the RPF. He almost certainly ordered the shooting down of the Rwandan president's plane, the trigger for a civil war that quickly escalated into a genocide; on the best estimates, his RPF was responsible for killing 80% of the 1 million who died inside Rwanda, making the Hutus, not the Tutsis, the chief victims; and his subsequent decision to extend the civil war into neighbouring Congo, where many Hutu civilians had fled to escape the RPF, led to the deaths of up to 5 million more.

Not surprising then that Kagame is championed by Britain's own biggest war criminal, Tony Blair. But the rot has spread much further. Rwanda, now praised as a model democracy under Kagame, is in truth a police state, where the president kills or locks up all opponents, fixes the elections, and has made any questioning of the official story he created – that the Tutsis were the exclusive victims of the genocide – a crime.

The BBC has not had to dig up any new information to make this programme. It's all been available for years. But no one apart from a few experts – academics, UN military personnel who were there, UN investigators, and Kagame's former, and disillusioned, inner circle – have dared to speak out.

The real criminals, as ever, it seems, have been the western powers and the UN. They have happily paraded their remorse at failing to intervene at the time of the genocide (presumably because their self-confessed error helped to justify the subsequent wave of bogus "humanitarian interventions" in the Middle East). But what the documentary makes clear is that Blair, Bill Clinton, Kofi Annan and many others have helped to whitewash Kagame's crimes against humanity and provide a veneer of legitimacy to his current oppressive rule. Anyone who has threatened to blow the lid, like Carla del Ponte, the chief

prosecutor at the UN's international tribunal on Rwanda, has been forced out.

But as I watched the programme, one thing struck me forcefully in particular, though it was not referred to by Corbin: what were the journalists who crawled all over the Rwanda story for years doing? How were Blair, Clinton and Annan allowed to forge the myth of a simple Hutu genocide of Tutsis without serious challenge from serious reporters working for serious newspapers that were supposed to be making sense of these events for us?

From my own experience covering Israel-Palestine, I can guess what happened. The reporters on the ground feared straying too far from the consensus in their newsrooms. Rather than telling their editors what the story was (the model of news production most people assume to be the case), the editors were creating the framework of the story for the reporters, based on the official narrative being promoted in political and diplomatic circles. Correspondents who cared about their careers dared not challenge the party line too strongly, even when they knew it to be a lie.

Rwanda also offers a telling example of how such group-think works, and how a non-expert far from real events but schooled in a kind of London or Washington consensus on foreign affairs ends up policing the limits of possible thought in a way that strips us, his readers, of the right to hear a counter-narrative.

The guilty party in this case was George Monbiot, often seen as one of the most radical and original thinkers publishing in the British mainstream liberal media. Two years ago he wrote an ugly attack, entitled "[Naming the Genocide Deniers](#)," on two scholars, one of them the renowned Ed Herman. Monbiot eventually [dragged in](#) a host of other thinkers, including Noam Chomsky, accusing them of being "genocide belittlers" for not turning on the pair at his instigation.

The crime committed by this tiny group was that they had raised the possibility that the official story of the genocide in Rwanda – as well as of some of the massacres in the Balkans – might not be entirely historically accurate, and that the accounts might have been distorted for political advantage. Monbiot, uninterested in assessing their claims or addressing the facts, abused them for straying from the official narrative. Monbiot might like to reconsider his behaviour, for which I and others [criticised](#) him at the time, and issue a long-overdue apology.

That aside, Monbiot's disgraceful accusations are a useful illustration of how powerful is the emotional, imaginative and possibly financial grip of the mainstream media on journalists, even those feted for their independence.

It is with that context in mind too that one should tip one's hat to the BBC and, reluctantly, to Jane Corbin for doing their jobs for once. Rwanda's Untold Story reminds us how rarely journalists actually engage in the myth-busting, truth-telling work they claim to be bedrock of their craft.

Sadly, the Youtube link I watched this on was quickly removed, on copyright grounds. Those in the UK should be able to watch it on iPlayer for a while longer. Others will need to keep their eyes open online or hope it is shown on BBC World.

[Jonathan Cook](#), based in Nazareth, Israel is a winner of the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are [Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan](#)

[to Remake the Middle East](#) (Pluto Press) and [Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair](#) (Zed Books). [Read other articles by Jonathan](#), or [visit Jonathan's website](#).

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