Telling the Story: Power and Responsibility in Documenting Human Rights Violations

Schedule of Conference Events

Thursday, September 15, 2005

Presentations by Human Rights Documenters:

The 1994 Rwandan Genocide: The Challenges of Bringing Mass Killing to the Front Pages
Corinne Dufka, photojournalist/reporter, Human Rights Watch (United States)

Threads of Hope: The Story of the Chilean Arpillera
Marjorie Agosin, poet/activist, Wellesley College (Chile)

The So-Called Child Witch: The Creation of a Local Human Rights Story in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Angela Nicoara, filmmaker, Internews-Rwanda (Romania)

Mapiripán: A Shortcut to Hell
Maria Cristina Caballero, journalist, Harvard University (Colombia)

Gallery Exhibition (Evening):

In Memory's Grove: Commemorative Art by Kevin Sipp and Keith Morris Washington

Friday, September 16, 2005

Panel 1: Bringing to Light

What are the most important challenges faced in initially investigating and exposing human rights violations? How are primary narrative accounts produced by victims, journalists, and investigators? What power do these early accounts and early narrators wield in shaping subsequent public and institutional perceptions of the events under investigation?

Panel 2: Struggles over Voice

What forms should human rights documentation take? Whose voices ought to be primary in the assemblage and production of various texts and aesthetic representations of human rights violations? How are human rights stories told, passed on, and transformed in their movement from private experience to public forums?
Panel 3: Audience, Efficacy, Ethics

What are the central ethical responsibilities of those who document human rights violations? Is "getting the story out" always the pre-eminent moral responsibility under conditions of crisis? Under what circumstances should victims and eyewitnesses be actively pressured to share their recollections? When should forms of social memory, or of social forgetting, be actively promoted in the interest of reconciliation, peace or social healing? To which local and international audiences do human rights documenters owe their primary responsibilities?
The 1994 Rwandan Genocide: The Challenges of Bringing Mass Killing to the Front

Corinne Dufka, photojournalist/reporter, Human Rights Watch (United States)

September 15, 2005

Corinne Dufka discusses the challenges, risks, and responsibilities she and other journalists faced when covering the Rwandan genocide and ensuing cholera epidemic.

Background

I’ve had three different careers in my working life – hopefully this will be my last one. I started off as a psychiatric social worker in San Francisco, which probably served me well later in my next career, which was working as a photojournalist, primarily covering conflicts. I covered 17 conflicts on three continents, starting out in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama, then over to Bosnia for a few years in 1994, then in Africa where I lived for 10 years covering the Rwandan genocide, conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), and others. After working for about 12 years as a photojournalist, I began to be quite frustrated, feeling as though I were reading the same chapter in the same book. I had covered the second famine in Sudan, the second war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and I wanted to get a deeper understanding and appreciation of the issues that gave rise to those conflicts that I was covering on a daily basis. So, I left Reuters in 1999. I started working as a researcher with Human Rights Watch based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. My first task there was reconstructing the devastating rebel offensive against the capital of Freetown in 1999, which Reuters, with whom I had been working, did not want to cover. Now I am in charge of all of West Africa and living in Senegal. I took one year off in order to get a better understanding of international justice, and I worked as a criminal investigator with the office of the prosecutor with the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

As a photographer, I was part of the “bang-bang club,” the ones who went around from conflict to conflict, covering the big stories of our generation: at that time Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia, Chechnya. I was a very ambitious photographer, very competitive, and ultimately trying to obtain strong images. My goal was to obtain images that told the human story of conflict and how people’s lives were being torn apart by conflict, as a way of creating some sense of empathy in the consumers of those images. Working with Human Rights Watch, of course, I started seeing things as a human rights documenter, through a legal perspective, and I started realizing that so many of the things that I had covered when I was working as a journalist were actually war crimes, but I didn’t realize at that point that they were. Some of them were quite obvious, like actual executions, but others are a little bit more subtle. While working with the Special Court, I started looking at the potential for images to serve as evidence. So when I look at my work on Rwanda, I think that ultimately the efficacy of this conference on telling the human rights story is trying to understand how we can better use the power that we have as journalists,
as human rights documenters, as academics, to better promote respect for human rights and to somehow better protect the lives of people who are particularly vulnerable to conflict and hatred and intolerance.

**A Failure of Humanity**

From where we stand now, it’s obvious that a genocide was committed in Rwanda of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. From where we stand now, we can see the genocide as a killing campaign organized by a small group of ruthless politicians who saw the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus as a strategy for holding onto power in the face of challenges from both inside and outside Rwanda. We see it from the perspective of being the political exploitation of ethnicity. We understand that genocide is the gravest of all war crimes, the crime against humanity which imposes on states the duty to intervene and protect those at risk. Certainly, last year, the 10-year anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, was the time of a lot of soul searching on the part of the international community, the diplomatic community, the policy makers. Despite all of the many post-World War II conventions and treaties and resolutions to make for a better world and to protect civilians, despite the prominent role of the United Nations in nation building and the claims of “never again,” everyone failed Rwanda; governments, Rwandans, policy makers, journalists, and diplomats. It was a colossal failure in terms of humanity, really, and so I think the soul searching is important to understand because there are potentially genocidal situations that we have right now. Darfur is one of the more obvious ones. One of the less obvious ones that is quite close to my own work right now is Cote d’Ivoire, the Ivory Coast. It’s a potentially pre-genocidal situation with many of the same parallels as Rwanda: political exploitation of ethnicity, the prominent use of hate speech, the subjugation of the national security forces, and the predominate role of militias – ill-trained, ill-disciplined, ethnically identified militias. It’s a very, very dangerous situation in Cote d’Ivoire that we have right now that nobody, except for the French media, is really taking a look at.

When I covered the Rwandan genocide, I was in South Africa covering another amazing event of that year – of the decade, of the century – which was the elections in South Africa. When the plane carrying Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana first went down a couple weeks before – the event usually attributed with setting off the genocide – I had wanted to go because there was violence going on. But there had been a lot of episodes of violence in Rwanda. This is a place where there had been numerous episodes of massacres in which hundreds if not thousands of people had been killed. I remember being in South Africa and urging my boss to let me go up to Rwanda and cover The Story, and one picture came across the wire. It was a picture of this massive exodus of hundreds of thousands of people going into Uganda and Tanzania, and that was the image that provoked my photo editor to send me up to cover the Rwandan genocide. It wasn’t the genocide itself. The story at that point was what was accessible to us as journalists, which was not the genocide. The story was the exodus, another very dramatic story indeed, as was the cholera epidemic that hit the people who left Rwanda. But when you look at what pictures are remembered now from that time, it’s not the pictures of people dying of cholera, it’s the images of the Rwandan genocide. There were tens of thousands of people who were killed there, but it wasn’t clear to us.

**Journalistic Limitations**
Part of it is that, in Africa, there’s such a dearth of resources that go into journalists covering stories on the continent. I was the photographer, as I said, for East, West, and Central Africa. It would be like in Europe, where you say, “I have to decide whether I cover the GA Summit or whether I cover floods in Switzerland,” because there was only one photographer internationally based to be able to do that.

When I covered the U.S. invasion of Panama, when President Noriega was held up in the Vatican, there was absolutely zero to take pictures of. The guy was in there for probably 10 days, and photographers and journalists were on “Noriega watch.” He was invisible, but because it was considered to be an important enough story, Reuters had two photographers watching that. We were sending pictures of nuns taking out garbage, and they were getting published.

Because it was considered an important story, there was a commitment on the part of the editors of major news organizations to commit resources to that story. With the genocide, that didn’t happen on the part of editors. I think journalists had even been taken off the continent. The Washington Post, if I’m not mistaken, only has one correspondent in South Africa now, perhaps in Cairo as well. They cover the entire continent. So I think the responsibility on editors to have a wider sense and appreciation of a story is even more important, because the journalists on the ground are not aware of all of those dynamics of the story.

Because of that, there was a very small group of journalists who really knew what was going on in Rwanda and were privy to information about the planning of this genocide. There’s been a post-mortem of the lack of information as well coming from sources like the diplomatic community and United Nations, but at the time we didn’t know. All we knew was there was killing going on, but we didn’t actually think of it in our own minds as being a genocide that was happening. When you analyze the numbers of images, the play that they got, the prominence that they got within newspapers and television, it was the pictures of the exodus and the cholera epidemic at that time that got the majority of coverage in terms of space on the fronts and inside pages of newspapers. It wasn’t the killing of the genocide. When it was the early days of the genocide, before the exodus happened, what was it? It was pictures of Belgians, of white people and others being evacuated, terrified, missionaries being evacuated out of Rwanda.

I remember going into Rwanda in late April, right after the South African elections, and I remember specifically going with the reporter to the ICRC headquarters and there was this man -- he was French, I can’t remember his name -- who was based in Kigali at that time and he came up with a figure of 500,000 people being killed. They had kept quite meticulous records of the numbers of people who were being killed, so he extrapolated, looking at the relative percentage of Tutsis living within other areas of Rwanda. It was at that point that we started realizing what was going on.

**The “Invisible Protagonist”**

It was very difficult moving around in Rwanda. I traveled by myself from Burundi up to Rwanda in April when the killing was quite heavy at that point in Butare, in the south of Rwanda. You had to get up in the early morning, before they started drinking, and moving through those
checkpoints with those people was very, very dangerous. They would come up to the car with nail-studded clubs with bits of human flesh on them and guns and put them straight to your head, and you had to really chit-chat with killers and kind of woo and try to get these people to like you. I had heard on the BBC that the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) had shelled a hospital in Kigali, so I said I was going up to cover this horrific incident and Rwandan soldiers in the hospital, and they said, “Oh that’s very good.”

Once in Kigali, it was difficult finding victims of the genocide. On the other side, the RPF didn’t make it any easier because they were very bureaucratic and they did not have an appreciation of the power of images. It was a major military offensive. So, it was difficult to photograph the victims and difficult to photograph the perpetrators. As an artist, as a photographer, of course none of the elements that go into producing a compelling image – humanity, action, composition – none of them were there, and then what do you have? This exodus, which is incredibly dramatic, where you have this massive humanity going across both borders. You have it unfolding all in front of your eyes. The moment of life and death in the cholera camps, where you’d walk in and people would be failing and by the time you finish doing your turn around they would be dead. Incredibly dramatic images. I think pictures of human beings always make for more compelling pictures – and from a consumer point of view, it’s difficult to sell pictures of bodies. When I was covering the war in Liberia in 1996, I took a series of pictures of an execution, very powerful pictures. It was published on the front pages of a number of newspapers, and Reuters lost subscriptions because of that. People didn’t want to have their breakfast, their toast and eggs, and sit there and watch somebody being executed. So from an editorial point of view, there’s a sense of self-censorship as well.

What we got at that point was what were the accessible images, the accessible photographs, and it was very difficult finding pictures. We would go out with the RPF, go to some of the churches where there had been massacres, and of course there wasn’t anyone alive in these villages. They were all dead; when I look back on it, I really wish that I had taken more pictures of the bodies in the churches. Even my office had to ask me for more pictures of bodies. Part of it was just not wanting to take them, from a very human point of view. When I started working as an investigator with the Special Court and saw how important documentation and pictures are to substantiate the crime base, my memory went back to a number of places where there had been bodies, and there was clearly evidence of rape. They were in an advanced state of decomposition, but you could tell by the positioning of their bodies. There was lots of evidence there that I could have actually photographed that would have been useful.

There was that long period between the Nuremberg trials and the International Criminal Tribunal in Rwanda, where journalists didn’t have an outlet for their work to actually substantiate the work of international justice and fight some of these perpetrators. So, some of those opportunities were lost. What you have is this real dearth of images of the actual genocide itself, again because of the difficulty of the images and then because of, to a certain extent, the lack of understanding of what kind of animal it was that we were actually seeing. What’s interesting is seeing how pictures – not necessarily mine, but other people’s – of the cholera epidemic are used to illustrate the genocide. Just the other day, this couple putting together a book for high school students on genocide and war crimes sent me these pictures and said, “We’d like to use a couple
of your pictures for our book.” It was a picture from the cholera epidemic. It’s happened a number of times.

**Lessons for the Future**

There were some images at the very beginning. Colleagues of mine from Reuters and other agencies went in and from the hotel were able to get some of those long distance images, so it’s not to say that there weren’t any images at all. But relative to the exodus and the cholera epidemic, the commitment of resources on behalf of the news organizations to the genocide was minimal. The people in the know definitely did know about it happening, and they had a moral obligation and they clearly chose not to pick up on it.

I was based in Bosnia for two years prior to going to Rwanda, and there was a tremendous commitment of resources. At any given time, you would have one to two photographers and certainly as many journalists from a wire service dedicated and stationed in Sarajevo and then others in Central Bosnia and elsewhere. Every little development within Bosnia was being covered, political developments as well as others, and very well covered compared to the Rwandan genocide. I think part of it is an issue of racism. I heard it from my own wire service agency; the threshold for human suffering would have to be much higher in Africa than it would be in Bosnia, and clearly because of the cultural links with Europe and so on. There was much closer affinity and therefore a much larger dedication of resources to Bosnia, definitely.

What’s so important is the building up to the genocide, and for that editors and news agencies have to commit more resources. There were lots of warning signs about the genocide happening. It was known by the international community. The famous letters from General Romeo Dallaire [commander of the U.N. mission in Rwanda] warned of the imminent genocide, and yet it received very little coverage. Instead, the coverage that came out was depicting Rwanda as a failed state, depicting the killings as tribal warfare, and none of that really reflected the true dynamics of what was going on.

When you have journalists who really do understand what the story is, they portray the story in a much more accurate way for the consumers. Instead, we had words like “confusing, anarchy, chaos, tribal warfare, failed state,” to describe the dynamic in Rwanda. The genocide was very preplanned, very organized, so it was often laughable to see Rwanda referred to as a failed state, because it was anything but a failed state. It was terribly, dangerously organized in terms of the systematic plan for extermination. The political manipulation of ethnicity and hate speech and all of those things were dynamics that came out later, and the journalists who actually knew and were dedicated to covering Rwanda understood that. But those who were based in Nairobi, for example, covered maybe 15 countries. They covered Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda… There was some degree of armed conflict in nearly every single one of those places, and then tribal clashes in Kenya. So when you look at the amount of time that they had, given all of the responsibilities, the understanding of those dynamics in Rwanda was limited. One of the key issues is the lack of resources that could have combated the indifference on the part of the policy makers. If you had people slamming them about what is actually happening, how they knew about it, how they should have been prepared, then that would serve as some kind of a balance to the indifference on the part of the policymakers who didn’t want to do anything.
There certainly has been a lot written about the warning signs. There was ample knowledge of the planning of the genocide from intelligence sources, from the U.N., from the French, from the Belgians, from the U.S. There were memos written from these people to their respective governments and bodies. The memos from, as I mentioned, the force commander, General Dallaire, he relying on high level informants who gave him very detailed descriptions about the plan. There’s a sense of preciousness on the part of those kinds of public officials to hold onto that information instead of making it more public, because it’s not easy to get access to intelligence memos about those kinds of things. I think that journalists who have the time and are dedicated to a country like that, who know it well, who can get some of those contacts themselves, can then provide an alternative source of information, perhaps not to the level of an internal intelligence memo but at least to be able to provide more warning signals about those kinds of things. To then create a sense of balance so that the public can have it because there are countries within in the security council who were asking for more information, including Nigeria, Venezuela, a couple others who were asking for more information about what was going on and were ready to push for some kind of more aggressive intervention, which of course was stopped by the United States. So I think those kinds of things are very important for informing. I think journalists and human rights activists have a very key role to play in exposing those kinds of plans and the run-up to a genocide.
Threads of Hope: The Story of the Chilean Arpillera

Marjorie Agosin, poet/activist, professor of Latin American Studies, Wellesley College visiting professor of Latin American Studies, Brandeis University

September 15, 2005

Marjorie Agosin discusses the Chilean arpilleras, small tapestries made from leftover cloth that told the stories of a variety of human rights abuses at the hands of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In Spanish, "arpillera" means "burlap."

I would like to speak now of the power of telling personal narratives, with the body, with threads, with words. One must not measure the power of transforming and saving lives through official discourses or fabricated or supposed truths.

I am a poet, and therefore I believe that human beings are formed by words as much as by bread. This is a century of violence that can only be measured in magnitudes. We must not fear to look at violence, human rights, with innocence. Perhaps we may surrender to a higher calling than ourselves. I believe this is the power of human rights, to transcend to something beyond ourselves, and that is the power of poetry, the power of truth which cannot be distorted in art.

Different disciplines have taken great interest in this art form. A very important organization in the United States – Facing History and Ourselves – an organization that educates students against intolerance and prejudice, has taken the story of the arpilleras as a case study.

The story of the arpilleras began in my country, Chile, in Santiago, in 1974. It was one of the most stable democracies of the West. You know what happened; U.S. involvement in the coup that overthrew freely elected president Salvador Allende, Colin Powell later apologizing... The country that was considered to be Latin America’s strongest democracy became its greatest horror. One thing was not censored: the power of women’s hands. When we speak of human rights, we must also speak of the body. When we tell stories about human rights, what we really search for is a body.
It began with a group of mothers, almost 14 mothers. They met in morgues, hospitals, former tribunals of justice, and realized that all the elements that were such an important part of Chilean society were closed. Completely vanished. And they sought help by contacting a newly developed organization that was a branch of the Catholic Church, called the Vicariate of Solidarity. The Chilean Catholic Church took a very courageous position towards the disappearances and abuses at the hands of the Pinochet government, very different than in Argentina or Guatemala. The more I think about this story, the more I believe that it's a story of belief – belief, magic, and storytelling. The women that suffered the most, as we know throughout the stories that we see in the media, as we know through Katrina, were the disadvantaged. The poor. Poverty is also a punishment for authoritarian governments. These women were trained in the most traditional art of femaleness in Latin America, which was to sew, to embroider. So after all the doors were closed, after they examined the bodies in the morgues and could not find their loved ones, they went to the Vicariate of Solidarity and one of the women at the Vicariate said, “Why don't you create stories, why don't you tell what happened through cloth?” At the beginning, the women resisted, because to tell the story about what happened, to tell about the abduction or to tell about the search, was extremely painful. But all of a sudden, the arpillera movement began when this group of women told through the cloth what words were not allowed to speak.

How do you construct an arpillera? Here I would like to share with you how to construct a human rights story. First of all, you create a narrative. All of the arpilleras have very similar narratives: disappearances, abductions, mothers sitting at a table waiting for an empty seat to be filled. The narrative then is transformed and transposed into the arpillera. The material of the arpillera, it's also a very important component in the telling of the story. It is made out of the remnants of the poor. So you create a story, a narrative, a work of art out of leftover things, remnants. In the very beginning of the years of the dictatorship, the women made arpilleras out of the clothing of their missing ones and told a story that was silence inside the country.

How do you measure the success of a human rights story, how do you document the workings of the arpilleras? Who knows about them? What do you do with them? Think this is exactly what I was thinking when we saw the pictures of the genocide in Rwanda. I see an image: how am I going to integrate this image into my daily life, or am I going to just watch it and be removed from it? I think that the power of the arpillera is exactly what the photographs make us question. The arpillera wants you to think about a personal memory that becomes public. I wonder how much we think that the pictures of Rwanda are our personal memories. The arpillera touches upon a universal human grief, which I think those photographs also touch: the loss of life, and especially the loss of children. There is an intersection between history, memory, and individual lives, and I think all of these elements that come together are able to construct a powerful narrative.
The arpilleras were made in the basements of churches. They were also made in the very early morning in these women's houses – not so much out of fear of being abducted or detained, but because they were so poor that they did not have enough light to sew, and they were able to do this in the early mornings. They were made individually but then gathered collectively at the Vicariate of Solidarity, the branch of the Catholic Church, and they were sent abroad in small packages of four or five. Here comes the other element: these arpilleras were able to tell a story because the story had a witness. We must not only tell stories but become witnesses ourselves of the stories we hear. They were sent all over the world, almost at random. Amnesty International has always been a great supporter of this work; the World Council of Churches; the United Methodist Church. And all of a sudden the story became larger and more fundamental and more universal than a small arpillera made in the basement of a church in Chile.

I do not know if the arpillera helped the overthrow of the dictator. I believe it really didn't. But I also would like to believe that you measure change and power by small acts of courage, and this is an essential idea of human rights. I would like to say that the arpilleras were a state of mind of hope, and they were able to move beyond Chile's secrets, beyond Chile's frightening dictatorship, to the outside world. Everyone who received the arpilleras became engaged. It was innocent. It was unassuming. Then you begin to think, “Where did she sew it? What was she feeling? Did she use the clothes of her loved one, now dead? How many mothers made these?” All of these components completed a story that was not only an individual story, but a collective one. I would like to say theirs was a story of reciprocity, a mutual shared engagement. The difference between art forms and official newspaper reports is that art allows you to become engaged in a very emotional way, in a very human way. You cannot be distanced from the poem that speaks about a mother crying for her child. If we think about the power of art and the power of narrative and the power of poetry, it's a power that has to do with empathy, with engagement, and with compassion. We live in a world that is very much afraid of using these words and making them our own.

The arpilleras were sent abroad for almost 17 years. Sometimes, not often, the arpillera told
another narrative within the arpillera. The back of the arpillera had a little pocket. And sometimes the people used to turn it around and open this pocket, and the pocket told another story. So, first you had this story in images, and you imagine how each woman constructed these images, and then the arpillera told another story. Usually, the pocket contained a little description written in the back that said something like, "My son has been disappeared since 1974. I wonder where he is." So, again, this very simple message engaged you in a story. The story was effective, in the sense that it brought awareness. People watched it. People became engaged. People went to art galleries. One of the most important art exhibits in London around the 1976 and 1977 was the work of the arpilleras. Amnesty International used them in their calendars. So, this art form traveled, revealed, and triumphed. The reasons why it triumphed, I've already shared them with you.

The last part of the story and then I will pose some questions has to do with what happens to societies that live in a platitudes of democracy and what happens to these art movement that really was born out of necessity, out of horror. And when I say necessity, was both economic necessity and an ethical necessity. Economic necessity to survive and an ethical necessity to tell and to heal.

The arpilleras continue to be made in Chile now. If some of you are students in this room, I urge you to really think about how grassroots movements evolve and how so much can still be done within democratic societies. The original makers of Arpilleras are gone, they are dead or very old. But a new group of women from Santiago shantytown continue to meet once a week at the Vicariate of Solidarity or in other neighborhood churches and continue to make arpilleras. These arpilleras do not have the same narratives of disappearances, abductions, and torture, but they tell another important story. They speak about economic injustice. They speak about unemployment. They speak about the very difficult condition of the women that are called in Spanish "temporaras," temporary fruit pickers. The arpillera evolved, inspired, and it never became something that was static. I met with these women, in January 2005, and I have stayed in touch with this new group of women. Their passion and their belief of – to use a very ancient Jewish phrase – “tikkun olam,” to mend the world, and to mend the world through cloth, is very much alive to day in Chile.

I think that the problem with all of us is that we have the stories, and we have the information, and we have the belief. But how does one act from that belief? So, here are some questions for all of us to think about:

The arpillera is made out of the materials of every day life. How do we live with these materials? How do we stitch the arpillera into the fabric of our own lives? How do we begin to move from the outer landscape of the arpillera to the inner process of mending? This is, to me, one of the most important questions this conference will have to pose.

Another question to think about: Are the arpilleras part of public memory, or do they live in the company of the women who make them? How do we integrate this story as a daily reminder of a violent world, and how can we imagine and feel the thousands of hours that took to make these arpilleras? How do we imagine the solitude of these women's hands? If these arpilleras become the fabric of memory, how do we think of memory?
I would like to suggest that the arpillera is not only a public and personal story, but it takes memory to a very challenging dimension. It takes memory to a physical place. It is the hands that make it. It is made out of leftover materials of someone that lived. We must look at the physical activity of memory as a process of time, as an extension of fingers, women's hands, and at the same time, as the process of telling a story. We must ask ourselves why these stories matter. And we must also see the commonality of other similar stories. These stories are undoubtedly the products of war, the products of a controlled violence, and they must be told and understood in this context. But at the same time, the arpillera must not only be public art or public memory. We must reflect on the inward story that each woman makes. We must think about what happened to them, individually. We must challenge ourselves to know history through their hands, not necessarily – and all of you journalists must forgive me – through the lens of a photographer or the pen of a journalist. I think these clothes are part of a historical record that must be looked at and understood radically differently.

Finally, and this has to do with this conference, what is it to tell a story? What is the process of telling a story? And how does the telling of a story become our own? In the midst of globalization, each story has to stand on its own. And the stories we activate imperative acts of ethics. An arpillera, for me, is a letter to the wind, a message of the interior of the soul. Who will receive it? Will we step into the shadow and remains of one who is disappeared? Are the memories of the arpilleras part of our own? And ultimately, the fundamental question, are we going to become the witnesses that will tell their stories?

I will pass some of these arpilleras to you. This arpillera dates from 1977, and this is the only picture, a physical picture that Violeta Morales had of her brother, Nuto Morales, and she put it here. You will see that there is a very deep connection between the cloth, the objects that you incorporate into the cloth, and the physical, actual writing, which says, "truth and justice for the detained-disappeared." The back is made out of burlap, and you can see, right here, there is the pocket that tells a story.

These are the contemporary arpilleras made in 2003, 2004, 2005. Actually, I've never read what's in this pocket, so we will share it together. "These arpilleras are the product of humble, poor women. Thank you for buying our products." Let me show you what this arpillera reveals: it is women going to a health care center. The symbolism that arpilleras speak about has to do with what I addressed first: the power of hands. Hands that were not contaminated with murder or killing. Hands that were transparent. But, when we live in a globalized time, there's practically no place for handicraft. There's not a place for what is made with people's hands. I think that this message is telling us that we must also respect and understand the story, but we must not forget the hands that actually made it.

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND RESPONSES**

**Elizabeth Goldberg, assistant professor of English, Babson College:** When you were speaking of the idea of hands, and the arpilleras moving from a very specific story of a violation – almost too horrific to imagine in its specificity, in its targeted, direct, bodily harm – to a much more nebulous, sustained, constant degradation, the humiliation of economic injustice and the
bodily suffering that accompanies that, it made me think of a song by Sweet Honey and the Rock called, "Are my Hands Clean?" The song traces the genesis of a shirt from each raw material, where that material journeyed, what hands made it, each place, each stop on the journey, the shipping, the companies, how it goes back and forth, and ends up in Sears on a 20 percent discount. The song asks at the end, "Are my hands clean?" and uses the word "sister" quite consciously, "my sisters made this blouse." I share that song because, to me, it has always been so powerful, but it feels linked to this idea of creating – but also that all of us will we be witnesses, and part of that is witness to our own complicity, in very simple ways of spending. I was struck by the term "consumer" as opposed to “reader,” because it just made me realize the extent to which we simply consume. I wonder how we might move, globally, from being consumers of images and things to being witnesses to them.

Agosin: It also reminds me of a poem by Robert Pinsky, “Shirt,” which is very similar. He speaks about the buttons of his shirt, who made them, and in which country. I think that it's very important to think about the history of cloth and its relationship to work, to women, from ancient times to now. But I also think that an important message of the arpilleras is that they are works of art. They are creations. They are artistic creations out of a very inner place.

I think a way to help us not become consumers is to return. To think, “How many hours did it take for some woman to make this? What must she have felt when she was stitching memories of her loved one being tortured?” To relate it to a fundamental, personal story.

Bridget Keller: My name is Bridget Keller. I'm a Swiss lawyer, and I'm here as a private person, not representing any organization. I wanted to say that the story Marjorie was telling made it so clear that it is very important that we not describe victims of human rights violations just as victims, that we're not using them as objects to tell a story that we find important and that is important. It’s important that we see them as more than just victims of human rights violations, that we see their resilience, their courage, and their engagement. These women might not have been politically active at all, but they took their story and became very active. They were not only victi

Agosin: The majority of the women that made arpilleras were not involved in official politics. Maybe their children belonged to parties, but they were mothers, housewives, had menial jobs. They were victims of a dictatorship, but they were courageous in addressing their victimization. When you look at an arpillera, there’s something that speaks about hope. There's a movie made about them, called "Threads of Hope." I urge you to see it. It's very powerful. They're very colorful. There are always flowers. I also think that they've tried to humanize a dehumanized world. And that's also why they are so successful.

Elena Gonzáles, professor of Spanish Language and Culture, Brandeis University: You mentioned internationally the arpillera art was embraced and at the moment it served the purpose of raising awareness. You also said the arpillera artistry is very much alive today. What I would like to know is, internationally, is there still an interest in this type of art, or did it decrease after democracy came back to Chile? If it has decreased, what is your view on that? How do you feel about this art, which is obviously so important to the Chileans, being of interest to the international public?
Agosin: There are many answers to your question. First of all, in the very early years of the arpillera movement, Chile was a country of tremendous interest for Europe – especially for the socialist democracies in Sweden and Norway, and then to other democracies, such as France and Germany – because Salvador Allende was an incredible experiment of democracy – and of socialism. I believe socialism is always democratic. He only governed for a thousand days; what is so amazing is that people, after 30 years, are still talking about those thousand days of Salvador Allende's government. The Socialist party, the Communist party, Spain, everybody had a tremendous stake in the story of Chile – and, therefore, the arpilleras. But I would like to add that, like everywhere, not everyone in Chile even knew of the arpilleras, because they were clandestine. You could go to the Vicariate and not see them, because they were hidden in a room. So, within Chile, there were human rights people who took an interest and others who didn't. Those members of the human rights community who knew about the arpilleras embraced them. When Pinochet was arrested in London, the arpilleras resurfaced. Many arpilleras were made of his arrest, and they gained the same international interest.

Your question about democracy is interesting, because I think sometimes democracy allows you to become too comfortable, be too sure of yourself. There are times in Chilean history when this has happened. But I think the constant trials of General Pinochet helped maintain the interest of the arpilleras’ allies. The arpillera is really a fundamental part of Chilean history. They are very much alive, and there is tremendous interest now from many fields. College students are so interested in this story. I think this story can move to the shantytowns of Peru and Guatemala. I believe there is a revival of cloth to tell stories. I think women must believe that we are empowered. Not empowered through CNN or FOX News, but empowered to think. The arpillera allows you to be empowered and allows you to tell a story, using the most precarious materials, the materials of the poor. That, in itself, is of tremendous significance.

Jennifer Raul, senior, Wellesley College: I'm particularly moved by the image of the hand, as somebody else already mentioned, particularly how it's an extension of language. It's an extension of the voice box, really. It’s poetic to think of the hand as giving voice. One of the most interesting things about the arpillera is that it really creates an aperture for language, for voicing language, for being able to talk about things these women couldn't speak about, something so overwhelming. Perhaps something that would create so much emotion that it was too painful. And I feel, because I'm also a poet like Marjorie, that it's very difficult to express yourself when something is so painful. It would be immensely interesting, Marjorie, if you could talk about how the arpilleras did create an aperture for speaking about what was going on at the time.

Agosin: Thank you, Jen. I like what you said about the hands becoming language – and, therefore, poetry. Even though the women that made the arpilleras were not involved in official politics, Latin America is place of a tremendous political culture, and I think they were aware that words were going to be censored. When you look at an arpillera, you kind of have to look at it twice to really catch the meaning of it. You may think, “This is just done by some mothers. It's so sweet,” when you see a pot of flowers and a house full of windows painted with colors. Then you see a man with his hands tied, or a picture of a national stadium and a body hanging, all made through the cloth. Then you realize the tremendous power that this has. So, I like very
much what you said, Jen. I think we have to look at the hands as a language for human affection. Language has to do with healing, which is something so fundamental. You cannot speak about human rights without thinking about how to heal. The hands have the power to heal, because they construct the stories that, like you say, were so difficult to express through words.

**Woman:** I have a question that goes back to my experience in El Salvador. Several grassroots movements there became politicized, and the four rebel movements in some ways hijacked their pain and used it as their voices. Even the non-governmental Human Rights Commission and the aid organizations and churches were used in there. Was there an effort to try to use the arpilleras, to hijack them and use them for another purpose within that political context?

**Agosin:** You know, the question is interesting. I would have to say no. A lot of the women never joined the political parties of their children. They were not religious, but they went to the church to use the facilities of the church. I think this is why the art is so poignant, because it was not politicized. It told the truth, a truth that cannot be distorted. A lot of the mothers had children who were student leaders, labor leaders, but in a very simple way, they were just mothers, and that's also part of their courage.

**William J. Chalmus, senior, Brandeis University:** This is very interesting. I stumbled in here by accident, to a certain respect, but I'm glad I was here to be a witness. I consider myself an artist too. I'm somewhat of an urban kid, and I'm the youngest of my group that I hang around with. What this makes me think the most about is, how do you make them witnesses? It's easy to be a witness here, because we're all in such an intellectual environment. But this doesn't really happen to make other people witness where I'm from. That type of interaction can't really happen. I don't really see such a problem with being a consumer witness, because there are a lot of other things that people consume that are not as important. It might be a good thing to be a consumer witness for different issues like this. And it is a positive way to do it through art. Because, like you said, if it's accurate, then it's accurate and you can't deny that.

**Leigh Swigart, associate director, International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, Brandeis University:** As an anthropologist, I'm trying to think of the larger, cultural background of the arpilleras, and I'm thinking it's not just working class mothers who lost children and lost family members. What were the competing human rights narratives that were being produced in Chile? Also, one of the things you didn't address is what the creation of these did for the people who created them, and how that's different from what the competing narrative producers experienced.

**Agosin:** Yes, yes. Thank you, Leigh. First, your first question: I don't know if I like the word "competing" narratives, but there were several other narratives. The arpillera was the most vivid one, I would say the most important. There was the work carved in stone by political prisoners in very remote parts of Chile; there was the work of writers and poets that was, in a way, clandestine, published through handwritten material that was distributed in buses. People wrote protest poetry and songs. It was there and it was ephemeral, but it was there. The arpillera is also ephemeral in the sense that you make it, then you send it elsewhere. But you can hold it. Written work was more diluted than the material word of the arpillera. This was the work that touched the people the most, because there was a visceral connection to the story.
Now, how did this change the women? I think it changed them tremendously. It empowered them. A lot of them, at first, were even afraid to make their arpilleras and they hid them from their husbands. A lot of the women were from very traditional, patriarchal households. But the arpilleras gave them freedom, and freedom as women. This is the work of a feminist consciousness, because it uses the materials that have been sometimes so devalued. And these materials become powerful. So, women, in a way, transcend the very conventional status that they've always had, really, in Latin America. Another important narrative that took place was the testimonies of shantytowns. Many, many people wrote down what was happening in their shantytown. The great tragedy is that all of it is very much vanished now, and people are trying to reclaim it. So, there were many narratives happening. But this one was the one that was able to transcend Chile and move abroad.
The So-Called Child Witch: The Creation of a Local Human Rights Story in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Angela Nicoara, filmmaker, Internews-Rwanda

September 15, 2005

Angela Nicoara, a journalist and filmmaker with Internews, talks about the phenomenon of young children being forced into painful and sometimes fatal "exorcisms" after being accused of witchcraft and blamed for family misfortune in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

My name is Angela Nicoara, and I am a journalist. I just started as a student two weeks ago in the Master’s Program in Coexistence and Conflict here at Brandeis. But before that, for three years, I worked in Africa, first in the Democratic Republic of Congo and then in Rwanda. Today I'm going to show you two films that I made in Kinshasa in 2002. They are about what they call les enfants sorciers, or "child witches."

The way I got to do this story is, I went there as a freelance journalist. My husband was teaching journalists, also, in Congo. As soon as you arrive in Kinshasa, you see how many children are in the streets, all over the place. Most of them were kicked into the streets by their parents, who accuse them of witchcraft. The reason this is happening is because families there are so poor and so large. And, because of the war, many of the families were brought together. So you will have several stepmothers or stepfathers, and it seems that what happens often is that, when something unfortunate happens to someone in the family, the one who has less power to defend himself gets accused of it. So, you will get several children accused of witchcraft.

The ones who actually make it to the street are the lucky ones. What I found out after a few months in Kinshasa is that witchcraft has a lot to do with violence. I have read several articles, even recently, in the Economist, and I have seen BBC reports that mention witchcraft; none of them mention the violence.

They say there are 20,000 street children in Kinshasa. They don't know how many of them were accused witchcraft. I can't tell you how many. Again, the violence is not out in the open. Often I would ask people, "How do you take the devil out of a child?" and they say, "We'll pray for them." What happens, though, is that if the devil doesn't come out of the soul after a prayer, they resort to more violent procedures. I often heard of children having their fingernails pulled out or having been burned. I have talked to families who kept their children without food or water for a week. And then they beat them, and they died.

On every corner of the street there is another church. It has a different name, started by people who had a vision overnight. It's to do with money – people are unemployed, churches do attract people; therefore, you know, if you are lucky and have this kind of vision, you can start your own church. In order to make more money, you do several exorcism sessions.

When I talk to people face-to-face, they tell me things. When I bring the camera, things change.
Like a certain priest, Father Frank; initially, I asked him how he would get the devil out of a child. He said he cuts the belly button. I said, "Do you mean, like, with scissors?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "I would like you to tell me that on camera." The next day, when I brought the camera, he refused to say that. He said he actually does it with oil. "It's just a cross. It's a symbolic thing."

I am going to show two films today, each dealing with the phenomenon of child witches in the DRC but using very different approaches. The first film I'm going to show you is a short documentary aimed at the Congolese media professionals. Often in Kinshasa, you would see on television all sorts of roundtables where people tell their audience how to spot the child witch, or you would see lots of exorcisms. What you don't see is how the children actually feel about it. This film was funded by USAID and it was shown at a journalists’ seminar. Many Congolese journalists asked me where this was happening. I said, “It's happening here in Kinshasa.” They were shocked. I tried to explain to them that there is another way, a more balanced way, to show this phenomenon of witchcraft in Kinshasa. The idea was for journalists to see a different point of view on the child witch phenomenon so they could do their own reporting in a different way.

During the making of the documentary, I met a group of Congolese musicians. They were all ex-street children, and some of them had been accused of witchcraft. They sang this really beautiful song, which was about how hard it is to be a child witch out on the streets. I wanted, initially, to have them in my documentary. But then I thought, “The Congolese love music,” and this was a beautiful song. I said, "Why don't we make this into a music video clip, and show it on Congolese television?" Because, apart from the religious programs on TV, you see these Congolese music groups. Great music. But there are very few video clips. So I thought I could use this format to tell them a story. This is the second film you will see about child witches.

I must say that this was probably one of the hardest jobs that I've ever done. It took two weeks to do this video, and it was hard work. The child in the film, he is an actor. And he was great. The musicians were great, but sometimes unreliable. But every time I see this video – it's probably the hundredth time – it just always… I don't know… gives me goose bumps.

The reason you see the logo for Internews at the end of the film is because they have used this film in their media seminar in Kinshasa. After Congo, I went to Rwanda and I worked for two-and-a-half years there as a Country Director for this project, which made films on post-genocide justice. Internews is an international media NGO, and it's based in Arcadia, California. It has funding mainly from USAID. But, for example, our project in Rwanda was funded for a year-and-a-half by that embassy in Kigali. It teaches journalists, mainly, but it also helps produce radio and video programs, especially in countries like Rwanda where, for the moment, you only have one TV station, government-owned. You had, until very recently, one radio station. So all the media there is very much controlled. We came in and we did this independent production, and fortunately we were allowed to show it all over the country – in schools, in villages and, very importantly, in prisons.

As a result of that music video, Search for Common Ground started a whole campaign. It was actually Search for Common Ground who helped me get money for the video clip project. They started a whole a campaign, and they created yet another film in which they interviewed lots of
Congolese VIPs and respected politicians who talked about the child witch phenomenon, saying how wrong it is. After this, the Congolese government created a commission that started dealing with these problems. Also, Search for Common Ground did a series of musical contests – again, to try to attract musicians to write songs to deal with this. The people who won had their CDs produced and distributed. They had a theater play, and they had a radio soap program.

So, it created a lot of discussion on this topic. Hopefully, some people got the message and have moved from this traditional African belief in witchcraft to another way of thinking. Once I went to a shack where an exorcism was going on, I was taken there by some people from Save the Children who were teachers. And I came out of the shack and I said, "This is just unbelievable." And they said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "How can someone believe that seven of his children are witches?" And he said, "When you live long enough in our country, you'd understand. Of course there are witches." It was hard for me to believe that these beliefs still exist, but they do. But I only lived in Africa for a few years, so I don't feel like I know a lot about it.

(FILMS ARE SHOWN)

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND RESPONSES

Female Participant #1:
I noticed that the children in your film, it was not a reality for them that they were witches. They were denying being witches.

Angela Nicoara:
Yes.

Female Participant #1:
In Filip de Boeck’s book (Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City), though, there seem to be a lot of children accused of witchcraft who have, in fact, internalized a view of themselves as witches and who make some extremely graphic confessions. And it seems to me that that is also part of what we need to look at, about how the children themselves absorb this and internalize this.

Angel Nicoara:
You're right. Children would say, "Yes, I flew last night. And yes, I was at this party. And yes, I ate these cakes." But most of the time, it seemed to me that it had to do with attracting attention. And very often it's the adults that tell them these stories, and then the children just, you know, fantasize based on them. To accuse somebody of being a witch just because he dreams that he eats, and most probably he eats very little, I think it's very wrong. I haven't read that book, so I don't know exactly what they say to prove the children are witches. I mean, often in Kinshasa I was told, "Yes, he is a witch because he ate my grandmother's soul." To explain that, they say, "Oh, this person had a dream when somebody gave him some food. He took it and ate it. That food actually was my grandmother's soul. So, he is guilty for my grandmother's death."

Female Participant #2:
It seems to me that one of the implications of telling this particular human rights story is that it
plugs into an old discourse about Africa that conflates all of Africa into one big mass as "superstitious," and that maybe contributes to the sense that Africa isn't worthy of coverage, that Corinne was talking about. Or that these things just happen in Africa because it's Africa. It's clearly urgent to tell this story for the obvious reasons of the harm being done; at the same time, disseminating this story, it seems to me, plugs into a lot of negative stereotypical discourse about Africa. So, I just wonder how that's negotiated in the telling.

**Mark Auslander:**
Since I've admonished everyone to please say their names, I am Mark Auslander in the Anthropology department. Angela, you have shown us two very powerful films. And you spoke, at some point, of the "traditional" African belief in witchcraft as being dangerous. And yet, in so many ways, what we're seeing evidenced in Kinshasa, as a number of ethnographers have suggested, is very novel. It has something to do, with the particular configurations of evangelical Protestantism – or, certain strains in evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostalism in particular – and radical economic transformations. So, if anything, the extraordinary film that you've produced, working with the musicians, it seems to me it actually harkens back in very interesting ways to much older classical African social mechanisms and performance mechanisms for the social reintegration of those who were accused of mystical malfeasance.

The category of witchcraft is a very tricky one. In a sense, a vast panoply of different sorts of powers, negative and positive, in many African cosmological systems, have been lumped together recently under this category of “witchcraft.” We need to tease them apart in some ways. One of the classic ways of reintegrating somebody who was imagined to be the classic image of the witch – which is literally the person who eats alone in so many African contexts – was, in fact, through song and dance. Whether or not you were conscious of this when you were filming and editing, that comes out – obviously in the post-production, but also among the performers themselves. So, there is a double-narrative line that you have going on: on the one hand, the song is taking us through the expulsion, and yet we see the redemption and the reintegration of the child happening much earlier than it happens in the lyrics.

And so, suddenly, you have a whole group eventually singing this song of being abandoned, and yet through their bodies, through performance, through music, which is bringing in all sorts of other powers and rechanneling them, there is the possibility of reintegration. This speaks, of course, to the great challenge that was raised by one of the questioners: “Isn't there something pernicious, isn't there something dangerous about putting forward this vision of Africa?” And I think you're working through that problem. And it seems to me that this video clip, perhaps, is in some sense a little more successful than the first film the documentary, precisely because I think you're tapping into certain kinds of African solutions to contemporary African problems, which are produced through globalization and so forth.

It's a very interesting challenge, it seems to me, that you're grappling with. But I have a feeling that through your camera, and so forth, the performers themselves may be kind of working out some of these new strategies for imagining a community. I mean, these are issues that Rosalind Shaw has also been working on extensively, and I'd be interested in her thoughts. But I just wanted to throw that out as a possibility.
Sanji Monageng:
Thank you so much for this insight. I'm Sanji Monageng, a commissioner with African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. As an African, like I indicated earlier, sorcery and witchcraft are some of the very odd habits, if you like, that we have. Like the female genital mutilation that we witnessed in the film yesterday. But what is particularly paining me with this experience in the DRC is that it's now about children, helpless people. You go beyond sorcery and inflict so much harm on them. And one wonders whether the government is aware of this, what the government of the DRC is doing about it.

I'm particularly disheartened because there are a lot of NGOs in the DRC that have worked with the African Commission, and we have never heard of this. Even as we do our promotion missions – I was in the DRC, I think, last year in February. Nobody ever mentioned sorcery and children, which is really painful and very surprising. And I just wanted to say to you, the African Commission accepts reports of human rights abuses from anybody, from any source. If you find it within yourselves, yourself and your organization, please let the African Commission know, formally. Maybe there's something that we can do about it.

Thank you very much.

Angela Nicoara:
As regarding what the Congolese government is doing, everybody knows about it, but nobody considers it a problem. It's like, "It's there. It's our tradition." But as I said, after this film, the huge Search for Common Ground campaign convinced the government that they needed to have a commission on children's rights, and they did. But I am surprised it didn't come to you. This campaign happened all year in 2004, in Congo.

Rosalind Shaw:
First of all, I'd like to congratulate you on your films, especially the second one. They are wonderful. But what I have to say here concerns your verbal presentation. We all want to be effective in our critiques, and I think that your film is an extremely effective critique. I think that the music is an effective critique. But the ways in which you are framing the child witchcraft accusation, in terms of irrationality, in terms of superstition, in terms of, you know, the odd, the strange, the traditional – and then attacking it as such… There's a long history of completely unsuccessful attempts by outsiders, from 18th-century missionaries onwards, to transform African ideas and practices by describing them as superstitious, irrational, wrong, barbarous. That just gives rise to a counter-reaction – you know, "Thank you very much, but go away." It's much more effective to try to understand what's going on – which doesn't mean to condone it, but to try to use the discourse itself against it.

One way of doing that, I think very effectively, has been through music, which you've already done. But another way would be through the churches themselves, which you are so contemptuous of. The distinction between what is a real church and not a real church is really not one that can be sustained. I mean, churches in many places are corrupt, especially in a place where people are economically desperate, like DRC. And what these churches are doing is, in fact, exorcising the children. If the churches are providing a way for witchcraft to be removed from the children – I've heard, incidentally, that the parents still won't accept the children back even if they've been exorcised, so there's more going on that just witchcraft, here. Wouldn't the
churches be something to work with?

Angela Nicoara:
Yes, you're right. That's exactly what Search for Common Ground did. They brought together people from churches – priests – with politicians, with children, and they talked about this. Now, I don't know if they changed anybody's mind, but at least... I'm trying to change Africa's tradition with this film.

Rosalind Shaw:
This really isn't traditional. This is about modernity, rather than tradition.

Angela Nicoara:
I mean, tradition in terms of witchcraft, believing in witchcraft.

Rosalind Shaw:
Witchcraft is thoroughly modern. That's a longer conversation.

Leigh Swigart:
Hi, I'm Leigh Swigart from the Ethics Center. One of the things I think is really interesting about these two films – and I've seen them a couple times now – is, this morning we briefly talked about kind of the language of human rights reporting, and how there tends to be a certain legalistic kind of representation, or re-presentation of human rights violations. And in fact, there's a larger international human rights community that is already on the same page, and they're all willing to be critical of certain kinds of practices. What I like about what Angela has done is that this is a human rights story for a very, very local audience. It's not for an international audience. Even the phenomenon it's talking about is something that Westerners have a pretty high level of discomfort with.

What I feel is happening here a little bit is that she's being critical, her language is critical. Some people are coming back and being relativistic about it – trying to promote a certain understanding of it – but I don't think that what she has done is essentializing, at all, a certain kind of experience in the DRC. Because it's for the DRC, and they already know it's going on, and they already understand this. It's a human rights story that, once taken out of its local context, has a problem “passing.” That's my take on it. I think it's really interesting that you have a documentary, which is a really Western format, and then you go beyond that and do a music video. I think everybody probably recognizes the music video is very effective, especially if you know that music and you know how people respond to that kind of music. I think that we can juxtapose this film production with some of the other kinds of documents people have been talking about, which really are for a much broader audience.

Angela Nicoara:
Thank you very much for your help. Yes, I didn't mention that. The song is in Lingala, and it was initially subtitled in French and Swahili. I did it in English especially for this event. So, I didn't really try to change anybody's mind in terms of witchcraft, I just tried to show them that the ones on the streets – these kids, you know – have a very rough life. Because many people, they see them but they just don't acknowledge them. They pass them every day, and they just become part.
Female Participant #3:
This film – which is, I assume, on local news, or on the local television channel or channels, so everyone sees it – is this intending to reach an audience that does not believe in sorcery, and so, when they see these children who have been cast off by their families who do believe in sorcery, they will take them in and treat them differently? Or were you more intending to speak to people who do believe in sorcery and that is a part of their life?

Angela Nicoara:
It's both. It's mainly for the latter. As I said, people kick children out in the streets. And then it's out of their hands; they don't care about what's happening to them, and they don't know what's happening to them. This shows what is happening to them. If they are lucky, they end up in a children's home. Most of them just sit on the street with nothing to eat. They sell drugs, they get sick, they get bullied, they get abused, and you never see that anywhere. Those shots that I took during the night, you never see them on television. You know, these children, some of them are small and innocent, but there are now gangs, and there are older children who take a lot of drugs. It's a dangerous environment, and not many people get to know about it. The NGOs, I don't know how much they can do and how much time they have to spend gathering them off the streets during the night or caring about them.

It's for both audiences: people who believe in witchcraft to see how the kids end up, and people who don't believe in witchcraft to try and convince the others that it's the wrong thing to do – that it's wrong to abuse kids.

Female Participant #3:
I can imagine the people who really believe in witchcraft, and that's such a part of their existence, that they're not going to see little children. They're going to see little devils in these positions out on the street, and that it's just one of the many guises of devils.

Angela Nicoara:
Did you see any devils?

Female Participant #3:
No, but witchcraft is not a part of my belief, and it's not the way in which I was raised. I actually spent two years as a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal in a village that also was very superstitious, and they were constantly telling me about witches and people who were witches. They would tell me there's a certain wood that I should not go in because of witches, and after two years I didn't want to go in those woods because I thought there were witches there. It was just such a part of their life, such a fear from the very beginning. Even in two years, for me, they had a very powerful effect on me.

Angela Nicoara:
OK, but you never went back into the woods to take the witch out of it and burn it. I mean, that was the problem for me. OK, there are witches, but don't go and kill them, you know?
S.A. Bachman:
I'm S.A. Bachman. I just wanted to say that I think it was really important, in terms of this discussion, that the first woman who spoke made a really critical distinction between the visual language that was being spoken and the language that was being spoken in this room. I think that's important. I'm here with a group of students who are documentary filmmakers and photographers, and one of the things that we all have to do is look at that discrepancy between how information is presented verbally versus visually. I felt that that comment is really important in terms of where the films begin to deconstruct things in an effective way. The language that is being spoken is, in my mind, reinforcing a certain sense of how Africa's been constructed.

Corinne Dufka:
I'm Corinne Dufka from Human Rights Watch. I've lived in Africa for my 12th to 13th year, now, in Kenya, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. And the issues of mysticism – witches is one way of talking, but it's of mysticism, of that “underneath” of things, the other life – are so terribly important. It's such an inherent and an important part of African life. But I almost feel like, to a certain extent, within the academic community there is a bit of a taboo to talk about harmful traditional practices. But frankly, from our point of view – you know, from a human rights point of view – a murder is a murder, even though we're not talking about large numbers of people. In Liberia, we have this phenomenon called the "sassy wood phenomenon," of people drinking the sap of a tree which is quite poisonous. If they drink it and die, it means they were guilty; if they don't die, for some reason, then it means they were innocent. We're not talking about large numbers of people, but we're talking about killings and murders and torture. I think that it still deserves to be denounced, to contextualize it within the societal and the cultural and the ethnic and tribal perspectives. But I also think that we shouldn't avoid talking about it for fear of saying that we're going to be somehow reinforcing all of these traditional views about Africa. I mean, we have to be very careful about language. We can't use the phrase "the bush" in human rights. It always gets edited out. But it's a language that's very common, that Africans use themselves. It doesn't necessarily have that kind of pejorative sense about it. Anyway, I guess the point is that a murder's a murder, torture is torture, and we shouldn't, I think, feel afraid of identifying and calling those things as they are, and then looking at them.

Female Participant #3:
It's not that anyone's denying that a murder is a murder, but it's not always effective to put that onto this sort of continuum of evil and alienate people because of things that they believe in. They have to work with the belief systems and the very powerful superstitions to allow people to change themselves. It's just as much of an imposition for us to create a way that everyone has to fit into making the right choice for them and change… I don't know, I just don't think it's as black-and-white as that. You have to look from an internal lens as well if you want to create change.

Rosalind Shaw:
I'm a little uncomfortable with the way in which my point about pragmatism has been reshaped as a statement about relativism. I'd like to put it in the way that my friend Rogaia Abusharaf puts it. She's a feminist anthropologist from Sudan who's been working on issues of female genital ritual surgery in Sudan for a long time. When she's asked about it, she says that as a feminist, of course she wants to eradicate it; as an anthropologist, she's interested in the right way to do it.
And going head on and using the kind of language that we've been hearing here, in terms of superstition and irrationality, is going to produce the equivalent of women marching for FGM rights – which, in fact, happened on the streets of Freetown in response to discourses about female genital mutilation here.

These understandings and practices of witchcraft are not traditional, they are new. Children have not been accused before, just as female genital ritual surgery, itself, often falls away through the choice of women themselves, when women are given alternatives, when women are empowered, when women have other economic opportunities. It looks here as if what should be fought are the economic circumstances that the discourse of witchcraft is taking hold of, and which is giving fire to this discourse of witchcraft. And if you do something about the root cause of these child witchcraft accusations, then my guess is that they will fall away.

Female Participant #4:
How new is it? Both of those things.

Mark Auslander:
I could speak to that. We teach entire courses on this, so I'm trying to summarize, but these forms of witchcraft, much of this begins to congeal in the sort of early- and mid-colonial period. But the specific notion of sort of mass violence is an even more recent phenomenon. And the accusation of children, really, just the last few years, on a mass scale, to my knowledge. It's an extraordinary thing that you've been able to document, and very horrific, and it speaks so much to what's going on in many African urban contexts, though most dramatically in Kinshasa, in terms of the breaking down of larger systems of reciprocity and kinship and so forth. It really does have everything to do, as the lyrics themselves say, with this moment of extraordinary economic crisis – which all of us, in various ways, in a wealthy, Western, northern context, are implicated in. And our response… Films and art are important, but working for global economic justice is just as incumbent on us, as Rosalind has suggested. But we are seeing a remarkably new, innovative phenomenon.

Female Participant #4:
In FGM as well?

Mark Auslander:
Oh, no. We're speaking of this category of witchcraft and accusation of children. With FGM—… Again, we're lumping together a lot of different practices, but some of them are of great time-depth and antiquity. One small part of the inter-penetration of the visible and the invisible worlds is what has come to be called “witchcraft.” And to appreciate African life-worlds, yes, we need to talk about these very horrific conditions, such as are being documented. But not at the expense of recognizing that the larger understanding of theories of ontologies, of ways of being in the world that recognize human interdependence in a mystical vein, which have much of value to teach all of us.
Mapiripan: A Shortcut to Hell

Maria Cristina Caballero, journalist, Harvard University

September 15, 2005

Maria Cristina Caballero discusses the 1997 massacre of Mapiripan, in which paramilitary soldiers killed an estimated 30 people in a remote town in southern Colombia. Her series of articles on the massacre eventually led to the dismissal of a general in the Colombian army.

I have been an investigative journalist for 20 years. Previously, I was a fellow of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, covering political corruption, but I decided to go back to Colombia and focus my work on the violence there, because it had been getting so intense. By coincidence, the very first day I arrived in Colombia, an awful massacre occurred in the south, in an area called Mapiripan.

I went to see my colleagues at Cambio 16, a weekly news magazine in Colombia, and asked them, “Who is covering the massacre?” No one wanted to go. It’s very far away, and there are no
easy roads getting there. It’s not possible to go by car. We went, but I had to hire an aircraft. The pilot, when we were arriving, saw some soldiers and decided he didn’t want to land there because it would be too dangerous. I was not going to go all that way just to turn around out of fear, so we asked him to go as slow and as low as possible. Finally, we found some bushes and we jumped.

A lot of people had left Mapiripan already. Of those who remained, no one wanted to talk. They were traumatized, they were in shock. There was blood in the streets. There were a lot of people crying. I was the only journalist who stayed there for several days, and eventually some people began to talk to us. They told horrific stories about a group of paramilitary soldiers, approximately 200 of them, who came to town and asked the men to stand in front of the slaughterhouse every night. They cut them to pieces, dismembering them until they died. Night by night, for five nights, they killed people this way. They threw the body parts into the river beside the town. They had cut off all communication, but the penal judge of Mapiripan found a way to call the army forces headquarters to tell them what was going on. He called eight times; no help arrived until a week after, when lots of people had been killed.

I began to get testimonies from some of the paramilitaries. After the killings, they got very drunk and began talking about how they got to Mapiripan, saying they had arrived by plane. The only airport in the region is controlled by the army, the national authority. The national record said there were two flights that arrived from the north of Colombia, but when I went to the regional airport to ask for the records, they didn’t have these flights registered. The investigation took months. The judge gave me all the documentation he had. We published his testimony and other evidence in a series of articles.

The top commander of the paramilitary was in the region, supervising the massacre. Finally, I got an interview with him, and I asked him to explain. He told me that his father had been killed by the guerillas, and all his brothers and sisters had vowed revenge. He considered himself a hero. He thought that he was helping to stop the guerillas.

He also said he was tired of killing people, that he had other plans for his life before the killing of his father. To my surprise and the surprise of many, he said, “I’m willing to begin peace negotiations.” I published the interview, and afterwards he sent a personal envoy to speak with me at the magazine. The envoy brought with him the first written peace proposal of the paramilitaries. I said, “This goes beyond journalism, this goes beyond a scoop,” and I immediately contacted the International Red Cross.

Then we said, “Let’s try to get such documents from all the factions.” To our surprise, we did, and we published them in the magazine, calling it “Peace on the Table.” There were elements there for beginning peace negotiations with all the warring factions. That has not yet happened.

Through exposing a human rights abuse, I suddenly got involved in something else. As a human being, I wanted the violence to stop. In some ways, Colombia is extremely polarized. Some journalists just go to one region or the other. I have been asked, “Why did you assume these risks, you could have easily been killed?” But I believe that journalists have a social responsibility.
QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND RESPONSES

Florence Graves, director, Brandeis Institute for Investigative Journalism: I know that the Committee to Protect Journalists tracks the deaths of journalists all over the world, and that Colombia has the record consistently, roughly 30 journalists a year. Tell us more about that.

Caballero: Colombia is many countries in one. There are seven big cities, and there are many very underdeveloped rural regions that have been forgotten by the policymakers for centuries. Because of the absence of law and order, paramilitary factions have controlled these regions for many decades. In the south of Colombia, the guerilla commanders are law. People consult with them. If you go to these regions without making contact first, you are seen as a spy. I have always tried to make sure that I contact people in the region in some way or another before I go. And, I have been very lucky. I wonder sometimes, “Why am I alive?” Many colleagues have been killed. Some of it is lack of experience; sometimes the situation is critical, and they get killed in battle; some of them are kidnapped and held for ransom. The people in these regions, a high percentage of them are afraid of the paramilitaries. They follow orders, because if they don’t do what they are told, they are killed. When I go to these regions by myself, some of these people decide to protect me.

Dan Terris, director, International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life: You reported very courageously on a difficult story. It sounded like you started telling that story with the purpose of determining what happened and to be able to trace the responsibility. It seemed as though the ultimate purpose of that account was to seek accountability. Then you got into this conversation with the paramilitary leader, and you participated in the process in which your paper took an active part in this peace plan. That conversation is in some ways a step back from the process of accountability. I wonder whether that was something that troubled you.

Caballero: As a journalist, social responsibility was a goal since the beginning. My goal was to generate change. As an aside, because I was the only one publishing this for a while, the prosecutor general asked me to guide the research. I said, “That’s not my role.” As a human being, my role has been to help people. I wanted to expose who was responsible. When I was leaving Mapiripan, an old man without shoes, extremely thin and very dirty, ran to me and said, “You must do something for us. All my children are dead. Two joined the guerillas, two joined the paramilitaries. I was told they killed each other. All the children of Colombia are dying. These guerillas and paramilitaries are destroying all our children, our future.” I said, “I will try.”

Pamela Cytrynbaum, associate director, Brandeis Institute for Investigative Journalism: What I hear you talking about is not as much “I want accountability,” but, “I want truth.” I feel like what you were setting out for was, “What is the story?” That seems to override everything for us. What happened in that five-hour interview with the paramilitary leader, do you think, that allowed him to open up and push him to change policy?

Caballero: It was a very intense interview. I told him, “I don’t support what you’re doing, I don’t support what any of the factions in Colombia are doing.” At the beginning, he was very calm. When I asked about Mapiripan, he began to lose control, and I began to wonder if I was
going to walk out of there. He said, “Maria Cristina, I am totally exhausted. I am more exhausted than after any other combat. This is exhausting. You make me think.” He had read my articles, I was known in Colombia for being a tough journalist. Years later, when I spoke to him for the first time after that interview, he said, “Of course I remember you. You talked to me with respect. You were the first one to listen to me.”
In Memory's Grove

Commemorative Art by Kevin Sipp and Keith Morris Washington

September 15, 2005

In this exhibition, two important African American artists explored the legacies of tragic loss and human rights violations, with particular attention to the history of lynching and racial violence in the United States.

In a large sculptural installation, "Strange Fruit Hanging from the Tree of Life: Reflections of Bruno," Atlanta-based artist Kevin Sipp recalled the death of Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno, burned alive by the Inquisition in 1600, as a point of entry into the long history of victims of injustice and intolerance the world over. Sipp's "memory tree" projected the sounds of prayers and laments for the lost, from Bruno to lynching victim Emmet Till, organized around the haunting anti-lynching song, "Strange Fruit."

Boston-based Keith Morris Washington took visitors on an uncanny journey through American landscapes of pain and memory, through shroud-like paintings depicting now-pastoral settings where lynchings once were perpetrated. Washington's murals subtly juxtapose bodies, trees, and the land, memorializing the victims of America's long history of domestic terrorism against persons of color.

The opening of the exhibition was marked by an observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the lynching of Emmett Till, murdered at age 14 in Mississippi on the night of August 28, 1955.

Students line the entryway to the Dreitzer Gallery in Spingold Theater at Brandeis University, each reading names of the victims of lynching throughout the history of the United States.
"Strange Fruit Hanging from the Tree of Life" - A sculptural installation created by artist Kevin Sipp and students in Mark Auslander's anthropology class.
**BRINGING TO LIGHT**

The first of three discussion panels held on day two of the conference (09/16/2005)

**Moderator:** Florence Graves, director, Brandeis Institute for Investigative Journalism

**Panelist Presentations:**

*The Perpetrator Narrative: West African Mercenaries*—Corinne Dufka, reporter/photojournalist, Human Rights Watch

*Some of the Challenges that Journalists Confront*—Maria Cristina Caballero, journalist, Harvard University

*Transparency and Truth at What Cost: Unveiling the Rape of Girls in Darfur*—Maryam Elahi, director, Human Right Program, Trinity College

**Discussant Responses:**

Susannah Sirkin, deputy director, Physicians for Human Rights

Maria Green, assistant professor, Heller School for Social Policy and Management

**Introduction:**

What are the most important challenges faced in initially investigating and exposing human rights violations? How are primary narrative accounts produced by the victims, the journalists, and investigators? What power do these early accounts, and early narrators wield in shaping subsequent public and institutional perceptions of the events under investigation?

Corinne Dufka is a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch. She's based in Dakar, Senegal, and she's in charge of HRW work in West Africa. In 2004, she was named a MacArthur fellow – sometimes called the “Genius Award” – for her work in human rights.

Maria Cristina Caballero is a very distinguished journalist who is now at the Center for Public Leadership in the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government. She was an investigative reporter for 20 years in her native Colombia, a war-torn country where two factions have been fighting for over 40 years.

Maryam Elahi is an attorney and the founding director of the Human Rights Program at Trinity College, the first undergraduate human rights program in a U.S. college. She was an advocacy director on the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe for Amnesty International.

**Panelist Presentations**
The Perpetrator Narrative: The Stories of West African Mercenaries

Corinne Dufka describes interviews she conducted with 60 West African mercenaries – some of whom were responsible for grave human rights violations – and discusses the complexity of looking at the issue of human rights violations from the side of the perpetrators.

I was based in Sierra Leone from 1999 through 2003. In the course of that work, I interviewed hundreds if not thousands of victims of some of the most atrocious violations that we’ve seen on the African continent: massacres; amputation, primarily of limbs, the signature atrocity of the rebel; widespread and systematic rape; the abduction of child soldiers; burning people inside their houses. It pretty much touched on every single category and specific violation in war crimes as outlined in the Geneva Convention. I spent several years interviewing victims of these atrocities and writing reports.

Then I worked for a year at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and there I had the unique experience of interviewing informants who are, of course, a key part of any criminal case, war crime tribunals as well. It was fascinating to hear. I remember quite clearly one of the first, most horrific incidents that I documented at Human Rights Watch was the double-arm amputation of about seven or eight young men and women in one particular incident in Sierra Leone. I remember walking into the hospital and it was quite dark. Their arms were wrapped in white, and my eyes had to adjust. I saw that there was one double amputee sitting in a bed, and then as my eyes adjusted I looked around the room and there were seven double arm amputees. Three years later, I interviewed a perpetrator who was in fact the commander of this particular incident. It was absolutely fascinating to understand what he was thinking, his particular circumstances – socioeconomic circumstances, and a number of other factors that went into his trajectory as a rebel commander.

So I started thinking about this, and when I went back to HRW after taking the year off, I decided to look at the phenomenon of mercenaries in West Africa, young men who migrate from conflict to conflict to conflict. Part of me, after interviewing all of these victims, wanted to understand what is at the basis of this continuing destructive cycle of brutality and war crimes in West Africa that's been going on for over 15 years now, to get a look at some of the issues that give rise to the war. Because of course, you can have peace negotiations that bring war to an end, but it doesn't mean that is going to lead to a rule of law, and accountability, and peace within a given country. We see that in Sierra Leone right now, where you have had a peace process and yet the issues that gave rise to the war remain: the crushing poverty, the inequitable distribution of resources, the lack of rule of law, the abuses by state institutions meant to protect and represent the people. Instead, the judicial system, the police, the army, they have a very predatory relationship with the people they're entrusted to serve and protect. Some of the other issues which gave rise to war in Africa are the proliferation of small arms and the willingness of countries – state and non-state actors – within West Africa to ferment insecurity and war within the regions, primarily for the purpose of resource exploitation – diamonds, coffee, cocoa, and timber.
So, I set about this work. It was kind of controversial work, even within Human Rights Watch because our classic modus operandi is going out and interviewing victims and then coming up with reports and recommendations on holding people accountable, stopping the abuses, getting countries involved who can impact policy. People at HRW kept saying, "Well, what recommendations are you going to come up with?" And I said, "Well, I'm not quite sure." But, they gave me the go-ahead for this research project. I identified a number of ex-confidents with whom I'd been working in West Africa, and I told them my requirement for interviewing people who had participated in at least two conflicts. I thought I'd only be able to find 15 or 20, but these fixers helped me to identify 60 young men who had fought in two or more conflicts. And then I set about interviewing them.

The interviews were quite intimate. They were just the two of us, because I speak Sierra Leone and Creole and could understand and communicate enough in Liberian English. I think they saw me as somewhat of a mother figure. They were all young men. They were very brutally honest with me about the atrocities they had committed, the reasons they went into fighting. The world that they presented was a world as full of brutality as it was devoid of hope. Their primary motivation for going to fight in another man's war, or another country's war, was that of economic desperation. They were absolutely obsessed with the struggle for survival. And they talked about the possibility for looting as the most promising economic opportunity, which of course speaks to the level of failure in their own country to provide for them.

They were inaugurated into this world of brutality. Most of them – nearly all of them – had been child combatants, had for their first war either been forcefully abducted at a relatively young age, usually 10 to 14, or felt as though they had no other choice but to join a rebel movement for the purpose of protecting their families. But the second war, and all subsequent wars that they had fought in, were clearly voluntarily. It was born out of this sense of economic desperation. And what they obtained through looting was primarily for the benefit of their family. That kind of surprised me, because I had the vision of them buying nice sneakers, buying drugs, and so on. But primarily it was to pay school fees, to pay medical fees for their immediate and extended family.
I started out all the interviews by having them describe their childhood and the man that they dreamed of being when they became an adult. They wanted to be people who would be respected. Not necessarily in terms of a profession, which is kind of our view of what would be respected, but someone who people came to for advice. Someone who people came to to help them pay school fees for their own children. Worth is measured by the number of people who can be dependent on you. It was heartbreaking, looking at the disparity and the disappointment they had about the way their own lives had become.

So I tried, through the report, to humanize a population that had been dehumanized as being the perpetrators. It was a way of looking at accountability not just based on the individual accountability of the commander who had ordered X, Y, or Z massacre, but instead looking at the various different levels of accountability – their own governments for betraying them; the international community.

The point there is bringing to light, trying to look at an issue that in some ways can be so clear – you have your victims, you have your perpetrators, the good guys, the bad guys – and looking at this grey line where the process goes into turning a victim into a perpetrator. It's a very complex and dynamic process. There certainly is a fair amount of sympathy for child combatants. But once they become 17, once they become 18, there's a complete lack of empathy, when in fact those people are the result of this long trajectory.

**Challenges that Journalists Confront**
Maria Cristina Caballero discusses an eight-month series of articles she wrote defending Bruce Olson, a Christian missionary kidnapped and condemned to die by a Colombian guerilla group for exploiting the Motilones, an indigenous group in Colombia. For her stories, Caballero ventured into the jungles to interview indigenous leaders, who testified to Olson's 30-year history of service to them and in some cases volunteered to die in his place.

Bruce Olson is Norwegian, but he grew up in Minneapolis, in a very religious and well-off family. He wanted to do something for people in need, and he began to read about indigenous communities. He decided to go to Colombia – initially he went to Venezuela, but his goal was to go help the Motilones, an indigenous people in Colombia. He went there to establish contact, and eventually lived with them for practically 30 years, trying to help them.

Photos by Bruce Olson

Bruce Olson and one of the Motilone Indians who befriended him in the jungles of Colombia.

Photos by Bruce Olson
In October 1988, I was in the newsroom at *El Tiempo*, the main daily paper of Colombia. I was their director of investigations at the time. The guerrilla groups and all the factions in the country liked to send press releases on their decisions and activities to all the media in Colombia, to point out the importance of their activities. One of the press releases was about Bruce Olson; the National Liberation Army, commonly known as the ELN, had kidnapped him, judged him in the revolutionary justice system, and found him guilty of exploiting the Motilones. He was condemned to die, and he was going to die soon. They were planning his execution. At that point, I didn't know anything about him. That's how I began researching who he was.

He began working with indigenous people at age 19, as a missionary. He received money from people and churches in Minneapolis who wanted to support him, because he had a lot of idealistic goals. He learned the Motilones’ language, their traditions. Going deep into the jungles of Colombia, it's like going into history. It's amazing, the communities there and how they live. They have very interesting traditions.

Bruce Olson decided to help them, to educate them, to give them the opportunity to go to school, to give them health centers. He progressively made a lot of contacts in the international community and the religious communities, and got money to finance a lot of these activities. He also created a program for the indigenous people who were more interested in learning about law. Many of them went to law school and to business administration schools. The Motilones began to see Olson as their main support in Colombia. When the guerrilla factions were trying to get their territory, the Motilone lawyers and the more educated people began to defend their communities.

I went to the jungles. I interviewed the leaders. They showed me how, in some cases, they had survived epidemics thanks to Olson, because he brought in health officials and doctors. As I was progressively publishing these articles in *El Tiempo*, a lot of human rights organizations — initially from Colombia, then from abroad — began to say, "Why do they want to kill Bruce Olson?" These indigenous people that allegedly had been exploited by Bruce Olson were defending him strongly. The leaders said they would die for him, he was so important for the community. He was the only white man that had been helping them for decades. They were not going to allow the guerrillas to kill Olson; they were going to fight, they were practically declaring a war against the guerrillas if they killed Bruce Olson.

Finally, and for the first time, the ELN decided to release a prisoner they had condemned to die. They released him because the situation got so tense for them among these indigenous communities and the international human rights organizations. Amnesty International was very important for the ELN at the time, because the ELN was allegedly the defender of the poor people and the peasants of Colombia. They released Olson, and he came to the paper I was working for and said, "Thank you for the articles. You saved my life."

They found in Olson a way to get the education that many of communities had not had access to. And they made their voices heard against the business of the guerrillas, how they were mistreating some of these communities. There were street protests against the guerrillas. They were a force, the leaders of these indigenous communities, organizing themselves, going to
to different places to talk about how Bruce Olson had helped them much more than the guerrillas. At that time, the president of Colombia said, “This is the first white man to be defended by the indigenous communities in our country, in Latin America.” To me, that's an example of the power of public opinion, and an example of how, through these articles, we were able at least to save one life.

**Transparency and Truth at What Cost: Unveiling the Rape of Girls in Darfur**

Maryam Elahi discussed the boundaries that human rights documenters can sometimes cross, inadvertently worsening a situation they are trying to improve.

I'm going to take on a role that I rarely have an opportunity to do, and that is to give a critique of the humanitarian human rights movement and the journalist in a particular context. I'm going to show you a video that was done by a group called the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

The Women's Commission was created in the late 1980's, and it has an organic relationship with the international rescue committee, one of the largest humanitarian groups, which does fantastic work around the world in getting all sorts of aid to refugees and internally displaced people. The Women's Commission was created by a group of women who felt very strongly about the needs of women that often are not addressed. They wanted to make sure there is a focus there. The group does excellent work in providing technical expertise, and it does a lot of advocacy work and sets policies. And, obviously, it has worked on gender-based violence issues as well.

[Elahi showed a brief video filmed during a trip that members of the Women’s Commission took to Darfur, Sudan, to assess the needs in a refugee camp. Underage girls who had been raped were asked to speak about their experiences, on camera, while surrounded by other residents of the camp.]

I'm using this opportunity as a board member of the Women's Commission to raise what I think is a very serious question about what you just saw. You saw on film the faces and names of two underage girls who talked about having been raped. And the big questions before us are, “Is that irresponsible? Is that reckless? Is that exploitative?”

The way that, unfortunately, we in the Western world respond to tragedies – whether in our own countries or around the world – is by seeing the face of a victim. This is really problematic. All of us need to think about more creative approaches to be able to do our advocacy work, to mobilize the public, legislators, etc., in countries where they're going to respond to crises like this without necessarily putting the face of the victim forward. Especially an underage rape victim.

The other issue that was really problematic to me was that they had a male translator involved in this whole thing. Again, it's a lack of sensitivity. In most societies where we come across such incidents, you're dealing with patriarchal societies, where the minute a woman is raped, people raise questions of guilt at the victim. It is a stigma in many societies. The woman becomes marked. Whereas, if a man is arrested and beaten, his family's not going to desert him, his
support group is going to be there. Women very often face desertion, and so there are secondary traumas that come into play.

The questions that is raised is, “Are underage women – girls, I would say children – in a position where they can give informed consent to having their names and photos used for publicity purposes?” I would say “Never.” Even in circumstances where you have very courageous women come forward, approach journalists and say, ”We want you to get the word out,” they don’t know what they’re consenting to. They have no clue what is going to happen, how this will transform their lives forevermore. There should be a line drawn where you have children who are exploited. We should be a lot more careful in maintaining confidentiality.

The other question that we need to ask is, "What are the motivations of a journalist, human rights worker, or humanitarian worker in getting this story out?" We need to see the face of a victim, or hear the name of a victim. But at the same time, there are circumstances where one should not be seeing the names, the faces, etc. And I do think it's both reckless and exploitative for us to do this.

In the context of Bosnia, a lot of the women who were raped actually decided that they would go and speak before the tribunal as witnesses. They were protected witnesses, and they went and gave their testimony. I remember talking to a few of them at some point, and they all said they felt secondary trauma. They didn't feel an immediate reaction by the world community, they didn't feel an immediate response by the tribunal, and so the sense of having been yet again exploited. In a number of cases, they had mentioned that their families had turned their backs on them, that they were suffering even more as a result of this. Remember that whenever a foreigner walks into a tent in a refugee camp, or a small village; you're noticed by everyone. You're an outsider walking in. So already there is a tension focused on who you are, who you talk to, etc.

As you noted from the video, there was no opportunity to talk one-on-one with the victim. Whatever transpires is pretty public. In one instance, the Women's Commission had a delegation in the Thai-Cambodian area, and they were interviewing some victims. One young woman talked about having been raped in some detail to the delegation. At the end, the delegation said, "Well, do you ever run into the perpetrator?" and she said, "Yes. He is in that tent." Clearly, the perpetrator had seen people coming and interviewing this woman.

I really feel that this sense of incredible responsibility should be on the shoulders of all us who are involved, whether it's as a journalist or human rights worker. The intent is obviously noble. It's to go out there, get information, come out, and mobilize some kind of action to bring the perpetrators to justice, and to end the human rights violations. But does anyone look back and see what happened to the particular victim? That's the big question here. One human rights group that has traditionally done very good follow-up is Amnesty International, by again focusing on victims and trying to get relief for particular victims. And I think more and more groups are doing this.

Another issue that is really important for us to be cognizant of is the incredible power relations that exist. In a lot of cases, you are a member of a humanitarian organization. A young girl talking to you is thinking, "If I tell this story, it might result in more food, more water for my
family, for my tribe. They will bring us help, and food, and therefore I should talk." We need to be very cognizant not to exploit this.

So what is to be done, and how do we approach this in a way that is much more respectful to the particular victims whose stories we use to mobilize action for the greater good? Something that I would recommend is that we all work toward developing recessive guidelines that NGO's, humanitarian groups, and journalists respect. But first I would say there should be absolute confidentiality with all sex crimes. They need to ask victims if they're willing to talk to tribunals, human rights documenters, NGO's, etc. And only when the victim concedes, then they can create that relationship. This is not to say that we're going to be silent. Clearly, you can talk about what's happening in the field, and the dilemma is going to be not being able to give names. We need to be much more creative about the approach. I think in all cases, we just need to not accept informed consent for underage victims. They are children whose lives have been traumatized and stigmatized, and they will be forever ruined if their names and faces are out there and people all over know about what's happened. Clearly, within their community they've talked to people, and folks know about this. But as the international community that comes into contact with them, we need to be a lot more sensitive to how we approach them. We need to work with local NGO's, agencies, women's groups, etc. There are many courageous workers who go to these refugee camps and work on education issues, work on providing some sort of sexual and reproductive rights information to women and girls. We need to be much more supportive of that.

Amnesty International is developing a whole framework within its work on sexual and reproductive rights on how to approach victims on all of these issues. And a lot of this is coming out in the context of the SVAW campaign, the campaign that is now going on against sexual violence against women. So we'll be seeing and hearing much more about this. I think we need to get the word out that these victims, in particular underage women, are incredibly vulnerable. There is a power relation between them and us that we need to be much more cognizant and respectful of, and we need to be much more creative in thinking of ways that we can create that kind of empathy in our societies without once again putting the faces and names out there.

**DISCUSSION**

**Florence Graves:** Each of these presenters discussed “bringing to light” in terms of human rights violations on many different levels. Maryam talked about the responsibility you have in bringing these violations to light, especially when it involves children, and especially in the cases of sexual assault, or sexual abuse. Maria Cristina talked about the role of a journalist and the ability of creating public opinion in bringing to light a human rights violation. And especially, potentially, of the death of someone who had actually been helping the indigenous people. And Corinna talked about the challenges in bringing to light by understanding the perpetrators and their motivations and really getting to the core of what's creating this kind of violence that is creating the human rights violations.

**Discussant: Susannah Sirkin, Deputy Director, Physicians for Human Rights**
Corinne was really very eloquent in talking about the perpetrators. One of the issues that we can take from that and discuss further is how we look at our responsibility and how we stereotype or categorize groups in any intercommunal conflict. Maria Cristina picked up on this, because in both cases we're talking about people who are sometimes perceived as perpetrators or victims, and very often are both or are caught in the crossfire. In many of the wars in South America for instance, in Central America, we tend to say, "This is rebel community, and that is a government community. This is a military, that is a non-governmental entity." And in fact, probably the vast majority of the populations in the countries we're talking about mostly want food, resources, jobs, and peace. This is not to absolve perpetrators from guilt, think that's something we should really be clear about. And yet, empathy does not mean absolution. But it does mean that perhaps we might want to look a little deeper as to responsibility and as to how we deal in the aftermath with holding those responsible.

All speakers spoke very powerfully about looking beyond the intensity of the immediate conflict to a much more international responsibility for fueling some of the root causes, whether it be inequitable resources, or the diamond trade in Sierra Leone and Liberia, or the drug war trade that goes between the North and the South and the East and the West globally. How do we respond to that? Human rights organizations are notoriously pragmatic, so we tend to shy away from going to the root causes in our deep recommendations. As Corinne said, "Human Rights Watch isn't going to talk about structural violence." In fact, numerous human rights organizations are starting to talk about structural violence, and I hope Human Rights Watch will engage in that sometime in the next decade. I know there's a lot of discussion internally about that, and we had a very interesting debate between my boss and Corinne's boss in the Human Rights Quarterly about economic and social rights and whether we can do “shame and blame” tactics when it comes to those sorts of larger economic issues.

I want to respond a little more in depth to Maryam's really important presentation, because Physicians for Human Rights has dealt a lot with these dilemmas. As a medical organization, we look very carefully at the issue of informed consent, probably more than most other human rights organizations, because that's part of medical responsibility. Any documentation we do as a medical organization that we want to get published in a professional journal has to undergo peer review. Usually you have to have an internal review board look at the ethics of your review. In that context, in the last few years, we as an independent nongovernmental organization not academically based have had to struggle with, “What should our internal review board look like?” This includes, "How do we assess what is informed and what is consent?" How do you get that in the middle of the pictures that Maryam showed, at the same time that you have people begging you to tell their story? It is not an easy answer.

I agree totally with Maryam about children. Many times, in many of our investigations in Afghanistan, in Sierra Leone, in Sudan, we have wanted to document and interview children, including in population-based studies. We have for the most part decided not to, because we just cannot deal with the difficulty and the responsibility. That does not mean we don't report on abuses against children. We do. We certainly would not use names, and we do blur their images. Even for adults, getting informed consent for photographs is a very challenging thing. I think all human rights organizations should actually get releases if they're going to show an image. You know, your picture may go on the internet; in Sudan, they might not know what the internet is.
Their picture might be seen in a newspaper. They might appear on Sudanese TV. Who might look at that? It's not that farfetched. We have had people who we've interviewed in the past who have been killed within weeks of our having interviewed them. I'm sure that's true of every major human rights organization. This is not an easy dilemma.

The flip side, though, is that we should not also be overly paternalistic about it. We have to figure out how to give the survivors the maximum amount of agency to determine what should be done with their story at the same time that we do everything we can to protect. I know that Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and others now have programs to follow up, to stay in contact literally day by day with people they've interviewed to make sure that they're OK and to raise alarms and alerts if anything should happen as a result of their having been exposed. How to get a private interview in a refugee camp is a very, very challenging thing, but deep interviews should be done in private. And we know that in Chad and Darfur there are informants in the camps. This is true of many other conflicts as well. This issue of the power relationship is really important. The first thing we say to people who we talk to is, “We cannot offer you anything as a result of you talking to us. We are not giving you money, or food, or better healthcare, or anything. The only thing we can promise to do is to tell your story to the world or to political leaders.” We try as much as we can – you can't do it completely – to break down this power relationship.

Discussant: Maria Green, Assistant Professor at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management

What I'd like to do for these few minutes is to pause for a moment on the simple question of what makes a story a human rights story as opposed to a story of tragedy. Because that's an edge that we're often on, and I think that's very much to the point of what we're dealing with.

“A man dies” is probably a tragedy. We all die. But it's not necessarily a human rights story. “A man is killed” very likely is a human rights story. “A man is killed by his government because of his political beliefs” is definitely a human rights story.

The distinction in those examples is agency and accountability. This bad thing happened, and it happened because someone else did something they were not supposed to do, or someone failed to do something they had an obligation to do. We've got a human rights issue. A woman has a bruise because her spouse hit her: is the human rights responsibility entirely on the spouse, is it perhaps on the legal system that doesn't prosecute spousal abuse? That's where the human rights questions begin to come in.

As I listened to the panel just now, I kept listening to see how agency and accountability came into the discussions. In Corinne Dufka's presentation, we saw the lens being pulled back. We saw the agency of the perpetrators themselves, and then we stepped back and looked at the choreographers of the violence. Very often, in what looks like casual spontaneous violence, communal violence, usually there's an organizer. We know that now. It looks spontaneous, but it's not.
Then we saw the lens pulling back further, to national policies that put people in positions of desperation. Then the lens came back even one step more, to the international community and to international financial actions that might have led to the national policies that led to the individual decisions. So we saw this train of accountability coming far back. That's a crucial element. When we think about a human rights story, how are we phrasing the accountability?

In our second presentation by Maria Cristina Caballero, we heard an interesting story. We heard accountability and agency coming in on two different parts. One was the accountability of this man who had been kidnapped. The other was the accountability of the people who had done the kidnapping. What struck me particularly was when she mentioned how much it mattered that Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch got involved because the thing that the group needed to respond to was the fact that they were being accused of human rights abuses when they wanted to be the good guys. So the fact that it got framed as a human rights issue, which inherently carries with it the agency question, had an impact.

The final presentation raises many, many different issues. I want to pick up on one almost passing remark that I think speaks very much to the agency question again. And it was the mention that victims of rape more often are seen as guilty, as somehow contributing to what's done to them. The implication was that other victims often aren't seen as guilty; in many cases, that's true.

But what about when a child dies of malnutrition? Very often that's maybe bad luck; the child had the bad luck to be born in a poor country. Maybe it's the parents’ fault. If they'd been better providers they would have been able to make sure that child stayed alive. If you're looking at it in human rights terms, you're starting to think back, “So what led to this situation? Is there an outside agency that led to this situation? Is the responsibility of the government to ensure that systems are in place so that everyone has access to basic nutrition, and that doesn't happen? Is there a human rights violation?” If there's an actual policy that led to there being no food in that region, if there was a policy of blocking food shipments, if there was a policy of making the land unarable to extract oil, then it's not just bad luck, it's not just the parents’ fault. We've got a whole realm of responsibility. If the story telling doesn't include that question of accountability, then it's seen as the victim’s fault – if the victim's even called a human rights victim at all.

That leads me to another core question in all of this, which is "Why are we telling the story?" Which again speaks to the question of, "How do we relate to the victims?" Are we telling the story simply so that people are aware of a tragedy? Are we telling the story to mobilize the listeners of the story, the audience, to deal with the tragedy? Or are we telling the story to identify agency so that we can really speak to exactly why this tragedy is happening and how we can stop it? If we think of our human rights storytelling in terms of agency, that will affect how we look at that last question.

**QUESTION AND ANSWER**

**Josh Rubenstein, Regional Director of Amnesty International:** I wanted to respond to a couple of points Maryam raised. First, of course, the incident you cited was regrettable. There's
no defending the use of these underage victims. But in general, keep in mind it was regarded as a
great victory in the 1990s when rape was finally recognized as an international crime. Sixty years
ago at Nuremburg, it was not. And many people to this day don't realize that rape was very
widespread by the Nazis, particularly on the eastern front where they were far more brutal than
they were in the west, in France and elsewhere. One reason was because at Nuremburg, very few
survivors testified. I think there were only three in February of '46, all presented by the Soviet
prosecution, interestingly enough. Neither the French, the Americans, nor the British presented
any survivors to be witnesses either at the IMT or at the 12 subsequent proceedings. I think we
have to keep that in mind. This incident shouldn't color, say, the bravery of the Bosnian women
who made an enormous difference in the '90s by their willingness to come forward and speak
quite frankly about what happened to them.

Secondly, how do you tell the story of torture in South Africa without mentioning Steve Biko?
How do you tell the story of disappearances in Argentina without telling the stories we've been
able to document in dealing with the madres and the abuelas and all that? You can't. And so it's
not just some kind of selfish act on the part of activists. It is also a legitimate mobilizing tool.
We're not just there to make ourselves feel good, and our research look compelling, but to get
people to act. And you can't get people to act when you have anonymous victims. You have to
put a face on the struggle, and on the suffering, and on the misery. And that's why there was a
very pragmatic decision 40 years ago to focus on individual prisoners of conscience, a term we
invented after all. That's why there's tension within the Amnesty International movement today,
over the fact that there are fewer individual prisons being assigned to members, and to groups,
and to chapters. Then how do you organize those chapters to be active? What are they supposed
to do? This discussion kind of reminds me of the famous Charlie Brown slogan where he said,
"You know, I love humanity, but it's people I can't stand." Well, the counterpoint to that is,
speaking for myself, I mistrust people who say they want to save humanity. I do believe in trying
to rescue individuals.

Maryam Elahi: Very good points. Of course, I agree with my friend Josh. I do think I wanted to
sort of dramatize the situation of children. Very often, because we are so moved as human rights
workers by the atrocities that are happening, and we so much want to come back and mobilize
action and bring about change that we might not be sensitive to the kind of place where we're
putting our feet in. For me, it's actually been a big struggle after I saw this video at a board
meeting last year. It came out after July. I was just stunned. I kept thinking, "These are 12- and
14-year-olds, and they have no clue of the ramifications of what's going to happen to them." Not
to be patronizing, but don't we have more of a responsibility? And so I was delighted when I
heard about the conference and started thinking that we can start thinking together about a way
of being more protective of underage girls in particular.

Louise Lopman, Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University: As
a sociologist who has conducted research in the sweatshops in El Salvador, I would say that
many of the issues you raised applies to researchers. I would contrast some of your thinking with
that of some media people who got 10- and 12-year-old girls to give Hard Copy a way to sneak
into sweatshops with video cameras. They went on national television with their story, with no
idea of the consequences for those young women, the threats of violence. They got the story out,
but those children were blacklisted, there were threats to their families.
That you emphasize mobilization I think is so important. Typically we don't think of that in North America as an active means for effective social change; in fact, we are seeing cross-border mobilization making change. Students at Brandeis are very involved in working conditions in sweatshops having to do with food as well as economic industry. And I would add to what you have talked about the notion of solidarity. Although you did not use the word, that is really the way that we can begin to think together – researchers, journalists, human rights activists – about what solidarity means and how that works towards bringing social change, especially for women.

Florence Graves: That's a very important contribution, Louise. I actually would like to ask Corinne a question: as a photographer, you were talking about all the photos you took and that sometimes you tried to interview the people. Did you get a permission form to take their pictures? What are the differences that you see from those two perspectives of journalism and as a human rights activist?

Corinne Dufka: I would probably add another layer to that question, which would be, “Are there different standards for both in the first and the third world?” With Reuters, in the first world we had to get consent forms for taking pictures of people within public institutions. But in Africa – even in Sarajevo in the middle of the crisis there – those things were seen as a very low priority to the importance of getting that story out. So you had people in very vulnerable positions, practically between life and death, and the most important activity was to get the word out about the type of immediate suffering that these people were being subjected to. But I think there was an additional layer of consideration. When given the potential for retribution from an authority like the government, for example in El Salvador, we had to be very careful about photographing people who are involved in the in popular movement, and certainly the rebels. So I think there's a sense of self-regulation on the part of conscientious journalists, especially those who spend longer in a country and care more about it and are subject to the knowledge of the consequences of that lack of care. It's quite informal, really, at least in my own experience in the journalism world – even more so in a time of crisis. Whereas as a human rights researcher, you take very in-depth testimonies from people, and a great deal of consideration is given to confidentiality. The first report I did after I went to Human Rights Watch was reconstructing this devastating offensive in Freetown. The January 6 offensive. After I spent the better part of three to four months documenting, taking in-depth testimonies from people about what had happened, we did the report, I wrote it up. It was in the editing process, and now my bosses said, "OK, so now can you send us the pictures?" And I said, "Pictures?" I realized I hadn't taken one picture, partly because, personally, it was too intimate to actually ask to take a picture of someone who had just told me about such profound losses. But I had to go out and then look for pictures. The picture that I sent was this line of amputees, just their stumps and a little girl who was amputated. We took quite a lot of slack from people in the humanitarian community for having sent a picture of a child who was amputated. She was about five. We won't get into all of the issues there, but the point is that there’s a lot more consideration when you're working with a human rights group about those issues than as a journalist.

Nina Cameron, Lecturer in Anthropology, Brandeis University: I wanted to pick up on something that Professor Green mentioned when she was talking about the lens going back and back and back, and agency at every level from the individual fighter to the choreographer of
these atrocities to the national government to the international community. In current academic discourse for the last 10 or 15 years, across many disciplines, agency and structure are contrasted, typically with agency residing in the individual and structure residing in institutions.

I wanted to then turn that back on something Ms. Dufka said, that connected with some of the conversation yesterday about the power of the words that we use. Sometimes, that power is something that we are not necessarily self-conscious of when we choose those words. There were two words that Corinne Dufka used that I wanted to underscore: one was “choice,” and the other was “voluntary.” The notion that when these fighters moved into their first conflict, that was not choice – that was force. And then they chose. It was voluntary. I find the use of those words problematic. Flip those words to a woman who is forced into prostitution, and then someone says she chose it. I think we should only use the word “choice,” we should use it self-consciously, when there truly is choice. Those words are very individually based and carry for our audience – not necessarily for the speaker – the notion that it is this individual's personal responsibility.

Susannah Sirkin: The rape issue, and in particular Josh's comments, made me think more about this. That, and thinking about our work in Sudan, because we're very engaged with the issue of widespread rape there and how to document it and how to help women at every level. I agree very much with Josh; no one is saying that it isn't incredibly important that rape be prosecuted and that women be enabled, empowered, if they choose to testify and want to go that route. It's our job to help that happen if that's what they want. At the same time, every country is so different, and we know that the tribunal did not protect witnesses very well initially in Rwanda. A lot of terrible things happened. In Sudan, I've been working very closely with Sudanese women who are trying to prosecute rape cases in Darfur proper right now, as well as in Khartoum. A woman there who is raped – or a girl – essentially becomes unmarriageable for the most part. We have to understand that. You could go in as a journalist, you could go in as a human rights worker and not know this. So there's a huge responsibility to know the laws and the culture. In Sudan, rape is basically not a legally prosecutable crime. You have to have, under Sudanese law, four male witnesses to a rape, or eight female eyewitnesses. Obviously, this has never really happened, and certainly in Darfur you're not going to have that. Instead, a woman is accused of adultery. So women who come forward under this legal system run the risk of being labeled – or even worse, prosecuted for adultery. You know, we parachute in. We may not know this. I myself have been working on rape in Sudan for quite a few months, and I didn't understand this fully until I talked to these women. Cultural understanding is really important anytime we go and do this work.

Maryam Elahi: I couldn't agree more. When you're found guilty of adultery, you'll be stoned to death. That's the huge risk that a rape victim could undertake in the Sudan.

Joshua Rubenstein: I think in this discussion it would have been useful to speak about how the human rights movement dealt with and continues to deal with the issue of female genital mutilation. We recognize it as a human rights violation, but we decided not to pursue it, not to pursue our work against it in the same way we work against outright torture, because we recognized there was a cultural dimension. We had to work with the groups in those societies
both in terms of suppressing it and educating people not to look for it. And that applies also to this issue of gender-based violence and rape.

**Maryam Elahi:** Yes and no. I think that the difference is, again, going back to the scenario we saw in Darfur. You do want to publicize it, you do want to mobilize action, you do want to condemn it, and you want to be right in the face of it – except you don't want to show the faces and names of the girls. Whereas with female genital mutilation, you know you're walking on eggs and you want to be a lot more careful in working with the groups and not being as out there in your condemnation.

**Max Perlitch, Class of 1952, Brandeis University:** My concern is, as you would look at Darfur, for example, our failure to really halt those human rights violations. Are we doing all we can as human rights activists to expose the perpetrators and those hiding as bystanders who might be permitting those kinds of terrible offenses? We speak for the victims beautifully, I heard that yesterday, and we are certainly doing a beautiful job in telling the story of the victim. But are we doing all we can to really learn from prior mistakes to now get movement by the perpetrators and international institutions like the United Nations, who are failing terribly to do what they should be doing? And what's your proper role in effecting that kind of response?

**Florence Graves:** We are going to be speaking to that a little bit later, but we are out of time. We all have a lot of questions, I know, that we would like to have addressed. Mark Auslander says they're going to talk a little bit more this afternoon about your very question. It's extremely important to address. So thank you for bringing that up right now. Maybe those who are going to be speaking this afternoon can make sure that they address that because it is, obviously, crucial. Thank you to the panel.
The second of three discussion panels held on day two of the conference (09/16/2005)

**Moderator:** Sally Merry, professor of anthropology, professor of law and society, New York University

Panelist Presentations:

*The Lost Girls: Whose Story is This?*—Aduei Riak, Sudanese refugee and advocate, Brandeis University

*Water Dropping from My Eyes*—Deirdre Giblin, asylum lawyer, International Institute of Boston

*Strange Fruit Hanging from the Tree of Life*—Kevin Sipp, artist, Atlanta, Georgia

Discussant Responses:

Marjorie Agosin, Wellesley College, visiting professor of Latin American studies, Brandeis University

Mark Auslander, conference co-organizer, assistant professor of anthropology, Brandeis University

**Introduction – Sally Merry:**

I would like to welcome you to the second panel today, called “Struggles over Voice.” I am delighted to be here as moderator and part of the Greater Boston Anthropology Consortium as part of the anthropology voice.

Our first speaker is Aduei Riak, who is from the Sudan and a student at Brandeis University. Our second speaker is Deirdre Giblin. She’s an asylum lawyer, she works for the International Institute of Boston. Our third speaker, Kevin Sipp, is an artist from Atlanta, Georgia. Some of you have already seen his work I assume, and others may have the chance later today. Welcome.

**PANELIST PRESENTATIONS**

**The Lost Girls: Whose Story is This?**

*Aduei Riak discusses the “Lost Boys” label that was applied to the thousands of Sudanese refugees who as children fled their country’s civil war, eventually being granted entry into the United States in 2001.*
I’m going to talk about the power of naming. I’m not an expert; I’m just a student and I’m just going to speak on my perspective and what I feel, and maybe there are some other people that share the same view with me. I’m just going to walk you through some pictures and then we can talk about it later.

[Riaik shows photo slideshow to audience]

The reason I showed you the pictures is to see the power of naming the Lost Boys. This name is derived from the Peter Pan adventure. Peter Pan’s story is not true; it’s fantasy. It’s an imaginary world. It’s a world that doesn’t exist. Somehow these names were given to young Sudanese men. I call them young Sudanese men, but in American view they are the Lost Boys of the Sudan. What did the name do to them? Why are they called the Lost Boys?

They were called the Lost Boys because of the pictures that you saw. Young people wandering, no parents, no guardian, no anything, and they were actually lost. They came to America and the media labeled them the Lost Boys of the Sudan. The label did do a lot of great things. It opened opportunities for these young men to get access to education. Countless volunteers across America tutored and mentored them, teaching them what they needed to know about life in America. Colleges, universities, opening their doors and giving them financial aid, here at Brandeis and many other institutions.

However, the name shattered other things. That silver star is behind those lost young men. They are real people just like you and I, and what did that name do? The name didn’t really include a person like me. I just met a person who said, “I met a young Sudanese Lost Boy.” When I said, “I’m part of them,” she responded in surprise because the name doesn’t say anything about the young women, and the struggles of young women. The message is, “We’re together, we’re the brothers.” The question is, “Where are the moms, where are the sisters?” The society couldn’t be made of only young men only could it? It wouldn’t exist. The American public and the media failed to ask that question. As a human rights activist, how can you tell a story of another person? Can you document it right and tell it the way it occurred? In this case they did a lot of good, but that’s not the way the story happened. There’s a lot to be told. In the pictures I showed you, you have to talk to each individual that will tell you their own story. It’s very hard to take an individual story and make it a collective story without making a mistake.

Will little Peter Pan ever grow up? Those young men are not boys anymore, and I’m not a girl anymore. Those young men are 24, 25 years old, and are in the real world. They could be in the corporate world, teaching, making laws, but they are still perceived as boys. Is that a fantasy? If you are a human rights activist telling another person’s story, you have to ask yourself, “Is this story reality?” When will the fantasy end? Do we hear much about them right now? Is it dying? Is the problem over? I continue to talk to some people back in the refugee camp, and they are still in the same situation. Nothing changes. There’s only 3,400 to 4,000 people brought into America. These are the questions that we have to ask ourselves when we tell other peoples’ stories. I am my own story to tell, and you have your own story to tell, but how can we come together and bring the collective story into one big picture and tell it in a way that will represent people that have the story to be told?
Water Dropping from My Eyes

Deirdre Giblin discusses the legal, cultural, and linguistic challenges faced by refugees who have fled their home countries and hope to gain asylum in the United States.

It’s very hard to be on a panel with Aduei, because I think the refugee voice is the most powerful voice. The more I practice refugee law, the less I have to say. I find my clients are the ones who speak, and the more clients I interact with the less I feel I have to say. But I will try and convey some of what I find in my own practice.

I want to backtrack to the last panel. We saw the video from the Women’s Commission of these two young girls, and I’m sure we could ask Aduei right now how many times has she given her story. How many times has she spoken individually and publicly? I spoke with another person here and I said, “Those girls in that video, my guess would be they’ve told their story many more times than around that one circle.” She said, “Probably five times.” I would guess more like 500 times. The refugees in these camps, and even when they come to the United States, are inundated with different people wanting their story. One of the speakers up here talked about how many NGOs there are. There are a lot of little NGOs, local ones, national ones, and on a weekly basis, as an asylum attorney in Boston, I can get a phone call from “20/20,” the Boston Globe, two graduate students, an undergraduate working on their senior thesis, and a couple lawyers in town who are meeting with the governor on an immigrant issue and they all want a story of a refugee. When it’s the Sudan being resettled, they want to know your Sudanese client. Recently, women and human trafficking has been a very popular issue. So I think the other perspective is how often these stories are told. Someone said the stories are obviously being told with the hope that action will be taken for it. Listening to the prior speakers, many of the statements ended with a question. The only questions I get to ask on a daily basis are of my clients. But my job is to speak affirmatively, and I do not have a lot of time to wonder about how to responsibly bring forth stories.

The legal term that I use everyday is “credibility.” I represent refugees who are not resettled here and who are also not part of populations, such as the Kosovars or the Sudanese, recognized by the international community and invited to different countries to resettle. I represent individual refugees who are not part of those groups, who flee here individually and seek asylum in the United States. They go through our court system. We appear before the Department of Homeland Security, either in an affirmative way, or before a judge if they are apprehended upon entry in the country or at some point in the future. The law says they must be judged to be credible in order to get their protection here. The challenge for me as a lawyer is to help the voices that come forward from the refugees to be shaped into what would be viewed as credible. The statistics show that about one quarter of refugees are successful in getting asylum here. That means one in four can potentially get asylum, although in many areas of the country it’s less than that, closer to 11 or 14 percent. However, with an attorney representing them, they are three times more likely to get asylum; the success rate jumps into the 70s. After practicing this for a while now, I believe it’s really about shaping the story. Helping the client give you their story, helping the client know what the standards of the law are that will qualify their story for asylum (whose standards are very complex and very detailed), and at the same time helping them maintain the originality of their story such that credibility is deemed believable.
So often times, especially in this field, I’m up here, and I stand out as being a white American woman. The only advantage about being a white woman in this field, dealing with people from all over the world, from different countries and looking very different from me, is that most of the judges we go before are white men and some white women, and they’re American. My job is to bring someone who comes from a completely different country, environment, and experience and put them before an American (who probably won’t be able to locate that person’s country on a map or a globe, never mind understand their accent, the nuance of their language) and help make their story be understood. The time that you get before a judge is very limited, and I’m used to just getting out my brief snippets quickly. So there’s the crux; presenting a voice that is genuine, keeping the client’s voice, but at the same time trying to encapsulate all these legal requirements to show that you were harmed in your country because of a reason.

Somebody else raised the question of what constitutes a human rights violation. There’s a reason for the violation, defined in our law under your race, your religion, your ethnicity, your political beliefs, or your social group. You have to translate all of that. The reason I came up with my title, Water Falling from my Eyes, is that at the end of the day, no matter how much you work with your client, their voice does ring true – or I should say rings through. Not necessary true as an adjudicator. Obviously, the success rate is fairly low; but no matter how much you work with a client, at the end of the day words will come out of clients’ mouth that are different from what you’ve ever heard before. When I started in this field and met an esteemed litigator at one of these American Immigration Lawyers Association conferences, she said, “Well what kind of immigration do you do?” I said, “I specialize in asylum refugee law.” She said, “I don't know how you do it. I can't take asylum cases. You prepare, you prepare, you go before the judge and your client sits up there and under oath and testimony all of a sudden you hear a completely different story.” She seemed put-off and exhausted by that. For me, it’s a constant testament to the fact that everyone does have their own voice, they have their own story, and no matter how much you try and impose your point of view, their story ultimately is going to come out and hopefully at the end of the day that will win their case for them.

In August, I had two trials. One of them was a man from Ghana, from which this presentation’s title comes. We had worked with him a long time to get his claim out. He had entered through the airport, right away told the inspector, “I’m here.” He said, “I plead with the United States to save my life,” and that is what the Department of Homeland Security documented as his credible fear. By the time we met him he was already in proceedings, already scheduled with the judge and we talked a lot to try to get him to understand where we were going to fit his claim into the asylum framework. As the judge listened to this client, at times he looked puzzled. The client was soft-spoken, had a thick accent, and often used words that I had encouraged him not to use. Words would come out of his mouth that the judge didn’t really understand. Now, as a lawyer what you try to do at that point is to ask a leading question and repeat what your client said. “You said that your family forced you to go to a fetish priest down near the river Nu, which you define as the River of the Spirits,” the very answer that your client just gave that the judge didn’t catch any of. But there’s only so many times you can do a leading question before you’re objected and the judge gets annoyed at you. Maybe every four answers you really get a chance to repeat what your client said in an American accent, very clearly. The judge barely looks at the client, but when you start speaking, he sort of registers what you said.
This client, as articulate as he was, had been on the stand for over an hour. Of course his accent is getting much thicker, his articulation is decreasing and he’s really slipping into his own language. The time the co-council that I was working with asked him “How do you feel when you have to tell this story again?” trying to really emphasize to the judge the mental trauma, the secondary trauma that this client suffers every time he has to retell the story, which has been at least two or three times before the judge when he came into the airport and at least 10 to 15 times with me to try to get the affidavit, the application filed, prepare him for testimony, and at least three or four times with our psychiatrist who’s going to examine him and really put forth a medical opinion that he suffered what he said he suffered. He said, “Every time I talk about it, water falls from my eyes.” I had never heard him say that before. He had never used those words. The lawyer next to me sort of looked at me, and I wrote her a quick note, “Ask in a different way.” Get it out that this is a very strong African man admitting that he cries every time he talks about this. He hadn’t yet cried on the stand, he probably wouldn’t. He needed to tell the judge that this is what happens when he really is in privacy and not on the hot seat. She asked it again and he said, “I have told my story and I talk about it, when I think about what happened, water falls from my eyes.” I knew in that minute that the judge had not heard it, twice; he didn’t understand what it was. This was just an interpretation of saying that he was very traumatized by it. He cried.

Ultimately, as much as you work on it, the voice comes through in the end. I don’t have a great ending for this story. We don’t have a verdict yet, but hopefully that will come through in the end.

Legally, credibility is the crux of the claim. Post-9/11 we’ve had the Patriot Act and the more recent Real ID act, which is really taking aim at asylum seekers. After 9/11, refugee resettlement was limited, understandably. They were trying to work on security breeches in the refugee camps and the interviews. But asylum seekers go through a very vetted process, which I’m often asked about. People think, “Oh, all you have to do is say you’re afraid to go back and you get asylum,” but of course it’s never that easy. It’s a very, very long process with a very high standard of proof, but at least our court system – apart from our government, and the Department of Homeland Security – has recognized over the years that credibility can be established by a refugee’s own testimony. Refugees do not arrive in the United States armed with affidavits in their hand. They don’t have arrest records. They don’t have release from prison records. They don’t have particular documents that will prove their case. They really need to tell their story in a credible way. The Real ID act has specifically targeted that credibility by saying that testimony alone is not enough, it should be corroborated. The courts used to say “where corroboration is reasonable,” but reasonable is not asking a refugee to ask their government, their persecutor, to give corroboration of what they say is true. They would have to go to their government and say, “Can you give me a record that you arrested me?” Although we laugh, that is truly what we face in this court system to get asylum. The Real ID act has said you should get corroboration. It doesn’t have a reasonable standard. It doesn’t take into account whether it’s easily subject to verification standard. Congress has put mandatory corroboration requirements for these asylum seekers. Because of this I would say that the larger struggle over voice right now, at least in this legal field, is certainly a question to be seen as we work in this new era of doubt being shed on an individual’s voice.
Strange Fruit Hanging from the Tree of Life

For the past ten years, Kevin Sipp has been the curator at the Hammons House museum in Atlanta, Georgia. A graduate of the Atlanta College of Art, he has exhibited around the country and abroad.

I’ll speak about my work and the title of the piece that I have up. For those have not seen the piece, it is entitled “Strange Fruits Hanging from the Tree of Life.” It’s a meditation. I have to talk about the piece by talking about what led up to the piece. My mother was a Civil Rights activist, and she taught me at an early age to love reading and to love knowledge. She was a bit of what one would call a “new age practitioner,” and because of that she would bring home books talking about various religious symbols, various religious groups, various traditions, and I would always inherit her books. Because of this, I also inherited a sense that there was a broader world than my African American experience and what I was going through as a young black man in America. I’m always thankful to her for that.

As I was growing up as a young artist, my mother was a singer and activist, and also a social worker. She placed foster kids in home and I came in contact with a lot of those children. My grandmother was a seamstress and a hell-raiser (as I put it), and my grandfather was a World War II veteran, a mason, and an African American man (as he put it) who fought for the country and didn’t get the rights he fought for. Very early on, I began to kind of create artwork that grandmother still talks about. I was always interested in how visual symbols migrated from one culture to another because of the books I inherited from my mother. I was interested in how certain symbols resonated across time and across cultures, and how they spoke to a deeper history that the official history often didn’t speak to. Those deeper histories were discounted, and usually the people holding onto these visual, often mystical, symbols were people who were marginalized. They were often people trying to seek a deeper mystical connection that went beyond the official church, the official mosque, the official synagogue, and traditional healing practices. They were trying to create a kind of global community that stepped beyond all the official b.s. A lot of my artwork was influenced by this.

I initially went to art school to become a graphic designer because I wanted to learn how to make books, the very type of books that inspired me when I was young – the various books of symbols, alchemical books with images that referenced the connections between different religions. But then I went into the printmaking room and I saw a man creating a lithograph. I had always wanted make lithographs, because many of the ancient symbols and the alchemical diagrams that I loved as a child were lithographs. So that very day I learned how to make a lithograph, I dropped my major in graphic design, and became a printmaker.

My teacher, Wayne Klein, loved my drafting ability, but in my early prints I was always doing symbols, always these alchemical symbols. My first year of college is when I came across the Muslim poet, Jalaluddin Rumi. I was also a big fan of San Juan de la Cruz, and began to do research into the Muslim and Hebrew traditions in Spain. Many of those who were Muslims and Hebrews converted to Catholicism and became this kind of new Catholic, which was an
international Catholic that had Hebrew and Islamic cultural traditions. I focused on San Juan de la Cruz because he was considered one of the greatest poets and mystics of the Catholic tradition and church, yet no one talked about his family history. His father came from a prominent Spanish family and his mother came from a family that was either converted Muslims or converted Jews. The poetry he created was based on this Islamic-Hebrew cultural tradition. I started creating artworks about Rumi and San Juan de la Cruz and began research into the mystical traditions of the middle ages, particularly sacred geometry and the Kabala. I started integrating these traditions with my own studies into the African traditions of the Congo. I connected Vai Vai with the Kabala, and with the images of Masonic traditions in alchemy, and started creating my own symbolic language and narrative.

Over time, I created this body of linkages, which I called the internet pre-technology with these symbols. I began to create a series of works dealing with the marginalized philosophers, the marginalized mystics, and that’s when I came up with the title, “Strange Fruits Hanging from the Tree of Life.” I never did anything with it because I was always transforming it from the initial sketch of the Kabala Tree of Life. One day, I was doing research into the legacy of lynching in the African American tradition; while I was reading the book “The Tree of Life,” I drew a little hangman at the bottom of the tree. I looked at this symbol and said, “Whoa.” I realized I could do something with this as an artist, because I was struggling through my art with giving myself in service to the broader community, to a broader humanity. In my early years of art school, people thought artists couldn’t be political. The feeling was, “Our art is pure; it’s beyond these types of things.” There has always been political art but there was a time when teachers were teaching us art was beyond politics, that it couldn’t dirty itself with protest art. I never gave in to that. I always felt that, as an artist, it was a way that you could present a message and show that you cared about humanity. If I can create a work of art that broadens the dialogue between myself and another human being, then I have done something worth doing. I can’t get into the aesthetic force without feeling that I have to do something more with that aesthetic force, or it’s just art for art’s sake. I’ve never believed in art for art’s sake.

So I began to do a series of works based on the legacy of lynching – but not just lynching in the African American tradition; in the history of the world. I started doing research on the witch trials of the Middle Ages, and how women were being demonized and lynched by the church. I started doing research into the legacy of, as some people will see in the piece, this one Renaissance mystic, Giordano Bruno, and how he was lynched by the church. What I wanted to show was that this idea of the human shadow has always been battled by a human light, and how we must constantly understand that if we are going to change the world, we have to step beyond our own borders, our own experience.

This whole idea of empathy is very important, because I think that’s the root of the problem. How do you not give a damn about the world and want the world to give a damn about you? How can you expect the world to care if you don’t care for them? How do you illustrate that in a work of art? I wanted to start utilizing my works of art to give that message to the world. I began to move on from printmaking to doing assemblage art, and painting, and instillation, because I was able to create a whole world that would bring a person into the experience. I was doing research into carnival; carnival in the deeper sense, not the wanton party, but the idea that carnival was a communal art form where there was no separation between the person creating the
art and the audience participating in the art. That became a part of shamanistic ritual as well. There was no separation, because I always saw the artist as a kind of shaman figure; someone who’s going to basically illustrate the dreams and illustrate the nightmares of a people. You could keep those dreams and nightmares to yourself and never share them with the world, but then no dialogue gets accomplished. If you share your dreams and share your nightmares, you will usually find out that somebody else had those dreams and had those nightmares. In that, you can jump across borders, because no matter where you are in the world, despite your religion, despite your traditions, that heart beats the same. The metal cuts the flesh the same. You bleed the same.

The piece I have on display in the art show is entitled “Strange Fruits Hanging from the Tree of Life,” and it’s a meditation of the witch trials of the Middle Ages, the suppression of free thought in the figure of Giordano Bruno, the lynchings of African Americans, the lynching of peoples in the world, and how we find a way to give voice to those bodies that have been dismembered, disfigured – and as it was said yesterday, disappeared. I’ve always been interested in giving voice or resurrecting the voices of those disappeared. In this piece that’s on display I was very honored that the students of Mark Auslander would give their voices to the piece. That was important to me. I usually will create a sound component with the piece, so that it will basically emanate. I thought it was an opportunity to let other people meditate on their issues and give voice to their prayers, and then once again it becomes a communal piece. So for me, as an artist, I think there is an aesthetic responsibility in the human rights arena. What is often left behind in times of trauma are certain artifacts. How do you use those artifacts to illustrate a broader question? It’s therapeutic on one hand. Often times, when people go through trauma, they can’t speak but they will try to illustrate their trauma. We’ve seen it in many art forms in the past with children. How do you take to illustrating the trauma but using that to heal it as well? I’ve been dealing recently of course with the aftermath of what’s going on in New Orleans, and I have many artist friends who got out, some who may have lost family members, and as I talk to them they’ve talked to me about the idea of they can’t wait to create art to heal their community because what they remember most about New Orleans was this vibrant aesthetic community that was often ignored and often denied. I know a lot of us haven’t spoken about it specifically, but that has been the shadow overhanging a lot of the questions I heard in this conference today and yesterday. We talk about these human rights violations around the world, but I’m processing in my mind how I am going to aesthetically deal with the human rights violations that took place here in the deliberate mismanagement of my government. How they basically compounded a natural disaster and turned it into a deliberate tragedy for certain political gains, for certain economic gains. I’m curious to see how that’s going to be presented through my art, but also just through the human rights dialogue. So thank you.

DISCUSSANT RESPONSES

Marjorie Agosin

This is the first time I’ve heard the presentations, and I want to comment about how deep they are, how powerful and at the same time how overwhelming. Like Deirdre Giblin said, I find myself lost for the right words. I find that the idea of language is very compelling when we speak about human rights, as Deirdre’s example about an accent becoming thicker with trauma shows.
Sometimes people forget that in situations of great trauma, you forget your acquired language and go back to your mother tongue. I think that the idea of language is the idea of identity, and identity is power. Not to have a language is really not to have a sense of oneself. I don’t know how to solve this issue, but really to bring to everyone’s attention in a way to the sacredness of being able to speak your own language. Again, because I’m a poet, this is what really interests me.

Language is also tied to the idea of censorship, to the idea of having your tongue literally cut off — and we can move beyond that and speak about torture. When you are tortured, you have no language, you have almost a scream — no words. So I think the idea of language becomes very, very important, and I think as we’re speaking how difficult it is to represent pain, to speak about horror with imaginable language. I think that sometimes we use the resources of photographs because the image is… I don’t know if it’s easier, but you can feel it, you can grasp it more than language. At the same time, language has to do so much with the imagination, with an ethical imagination, and then how do you find the words not only to tell a story but to listen to the story? The idea of empathy becomes of incredible transcendence, not only as a witness of the story but as the receiver of the story.

Another point that I was very struck by was the possibility of healing through the arts. We have seen that in yesterday’s presentations and in today’s. I also feel how impoverished this society is, the United States, when it comes to the arts. For example, look at what happened with 9/11. There was very little poetry written about it. There was poetry, but not enough. How sad it is that we are so moved by the suffering of others, but not moved enough by the suffering of what’s happening in our own country. New Orleans is an example of how we create, out of poverty, shadows of invisible people. Poverty is also related to the whole concept of disappearances; when you disappear you become a shadow. You are not there, you don’t occupy space, and you have no physical territory. You are remembered by those that tell the story of the ones that are gone. You are remembered by language and you are remembered by memory. The point I would like to make is that without art to represent pain, you almost live in a society that is devoid of a voice, and this is why I find your comments so important about the artists from New Orleans who are going to come back and reconstruct this voice. The great challenge is to incorporate this voice, to hear the voice, and not to have this voice kept only in one’s community. If you look at the mainstream art, in many western societies it is very confessional, very personal, and is devoid of politics. With the death of public intellectuals like Susan Sontag, who speaks? Who has a platform in the United States to speak about this? It is so common to have images of people looting instead of people addressing poverty. What I’m trying to say is that within human rights, the presence of artists is going to be fundamental. It is already fundamental almost everywhere in the world: Palestine, Israel, the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Eastern Europe, it’s everywhere. I think that the greatest challenge is to make art a tangible reality in the United States.

Mark Auslander

As all three of you were speaking, I was thinking about fantasy, and language and fantasy. Not only in the sense that we colloquially use it – as something that is manifestly false – but as a profoundly human capacity to take a sense of the fantastical, that which we can only resolve in
our own psyches and our own social context. It is expressed in language and also, as Marjorie pointed out, we take it to that horizon where language seems to fall apart, where we need to move to other media, to find our way back to language, to the rebuilding of the world. I would suggest that fantasy in its fullest sense is, or should be, at the heart of the practice of human rights discourses in their manifolds and natures. Fantasy is obviously very dangerous, and we saw that certainly in the film that we saw in the previous session in which the Victorian colonial fantasies of European women discovering the dark continent and speaking largely for young African women in a film put many of those young women, ironically, at risk. And yet, fantasy is so central. One thinks of the iconographic history of human rights practice. One of the images most associated with Amnesty International is the matchbox. The single match from the matchbox, which has a whole story that goes with it, is a fantasy. It may well be grounded in a historical fact, but in the way that it lives it’s a fantasy in the notion of a matchbox that’s passed to a prisoner who at least knows that a single light can be lit against the darkness. For those of you who’ve looked at the cover of the program, Leigh Swigart and I and the committee ended up bringing in the important Nigerian and now American artist Victor Ekpuk. It’s an image well worth contemplating. Victor produced it when he was an editorial cartoonist having constant run-ins in an opposition newspaper with the former Nigerian military regime, and this is in reference specifically to a precise story of how the person who legitimately won the presidential election died in prison. It was a very important image at a particular moment in Nigerian history, and it speaks to us still because it reminds us of an absolute necessity of fantasy in its broadest sense. It gets more complicated, as Deirdre reminds us, when we go into the courtroom, a space that in principal is devoid of fantasy. What you described for us very beautifully is a sort of complex choreography in which everybody needs to be recruited into the claim that this is not a ritual space. This is a place where truth takes place. But it is an intensely ritual space in which all sorts of fantasies and narratives are being produced. I think we’re all becoming more sensitive to the inescapability of that fact.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND RESPONSES

Sally Merry: This emphasis on both fantasy and imagination, which are in some ways two sides of the same issue, is really important, because we see both the power of the imagination and the story and also the downsides of building on existing fantasies. I was particularly intrigued, as a person who studies the legal system, to think about what happens when you move into legal arenas with these kinds of stories, and how in fact it may be necessary to tell a story that violates the asylee’s own experiences in order to get the legal system to respond. This is a very painful and difficult process, which may in fact be characteristic of other situations as well. I think it’s possible that the Lost Boys frame, which of course builds on colonial notions of boys as well as the notion of Peter Pan, in some ways facilitated the American public accepting this population. What do we do with that very difficult dilemma? Clearly, these violations of people’s stories in order to fit into fantasy are also violations of the authenticity of their own experiences. There’s no easy answer to this problem, but I think violating the authenticity of people’s experiences is clearly problematic.

Marjorie Agosin: I’m interested in Tinkerbell and Peter Pan. I think Tinkerbell is able to perform miracles and magic when people believe in her; the idea of faith and belief is very important in our work. Belief is also part of the imagination. So even though Peter Pan doesn’t
grow up, I think that Tinkerbell is a very powerful symbol for us now, when we think of faith. Tinkerbell is quite courageous, but only when others allow her to be. So that’s empathy.

Ellen Schattschneider, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Director of Graduate Studies, Brandeis University: I have a question for Deirdre, in light of this conversation on fantasy of credibility. What you spoke to – which was corroboration, a level of proof that on the one hand seems common-sensical. – it’s about pieces of paper, it’s about dates in a book. There’s a sense of materiality to that proof. On the other hand, it’s simply other people’s stories; the victim is telling a story. Why is that any different, legally speaking, from the further ripples of appeals to proof? It’s a question from a layperson, and I’m not thinking directly about legal language specifically.

Deirdre Giblin: We have a psychiatrist who will do an evaluation. We do that because, as I tell my clients, as a lawyer in the courtroom, I have no credibility, really. What we will do is also get a medical professional in the room because doctors are still given a measure of credibility, because they do have all these standards. In that sense, why are their stories different from when you peel back the layers? It’s because at some core level, the clients themselves are not believed. The clients can tell their stories, but as long as the psychiatrist or the physician says, “I’ve examined these scars. They are consistent with the story of being whipped with electrical wires.” “I’ve met with this person three or four times and their discussions and their headaches and their crying and their sleeplessness are consistent with having suffered the trauma of rape that they talk about.” It is very discouraging on an individual basis for clients that they really are not believed, but we are going to garner also the anthropologists in the room. My hat’s off to you, because anthropologists are really some of our best experts in these cases. They were able to go into the jungle and really meet and find out what was going on in a particular country. As a refugee lawyer, as a refugee agency, we have the world coming to us. I really rely on experts to help me understand a claim, to help me recognize validity. When I first meet with a client, it’s really a gut feeling that what they’re telling me rings true and can establish a claim. From there I start peeling back the onion, and it’s certainly with the help of experts who’ve done years and years of research in any country. So perhaps that can answer the difference.

When I moved from civil private practice as a litigator into the asylum, the immigration court, I felt like Alice in Wonderland falling down the rabbit hole. The court system is so completely different from a criminal system or a civil system. If you go into a family court, you have a family court judge who wants what’s best for the issue. You always have two sides fighting it out, and the judge is the arbitrator who is going to hopefully at the end of the day make everything fair and come up with a good decision. In the immigration court, what I found is that most of the judges were political appointees and former Immigration and Naturalization Service prosecutors. I would go into a courtroom and it really felt like two against one. So what I tell my client is that my role is to be the one kicked. They are going to kick me and my role is to protect the client, because the questions are going to come at them in a very disbelieving, harsh, skeptical manner. So the fantasy analogy is actually so much more relevant than I ever thought it would be when you first spoke the word.

The other thing that’s interesting is when you bring a client onto the stand, you normally try to ease them into it. You start with questions like, “Where are you from,” and “Tell me about your
family” in a normal court. For a refugee, those questions often are the crux of their claim, and there are really almost no easy questions to start with. You’re often dealing with cultures where clocks and dates and calendars are not a very relevant situation. One of my cases in August involved a woman from Liberia whose home was invaded in the middle of the night by men looking for her husband, and she and her sister were brutalized and raped. She was pressed to say when this happened, was it night or day, is that 11 pm, is it 2 am, etc. She said “1 am,” and then by the time she put that in her affidavit and came to testimony, she said, “Was it 3:00? Yeah, around 3 am.” The court listed that as being “inconsistent.” It’s Liberia in the middle of a war with no electricity, no clocks, no flashlights. You don’t look over and see a digital clock. It’s just surreal, really, some of the encounters.

Max Perlitch, Class of 1952, Brandeis University: I’d like to bring up the question that ended the last panel, using Kevin to respond primarily where he did comment on what was happening in Louisiana and what he senses has been a conspiracy of our government in some way to obstruct and lead to problems in the proper administration of just services to everybody in Louisiana. My question, framed within the broader scope of this wonderful conference dealing with speaking truth to power, is: Are we all really doing everything we can to expose what that power is and where it fails to really respond? Are we really looking at the perpetrators of some of these abuses and really confronting government, church, and whoever else may be failing to hear the cry that’s coming from a panel such? How do we get them to hear more effectively?

Kevin Sipp: I wrote down last week that I thought the characters of Kafka’s novels were running FEMA in the sense of the castle, in the sense of the bureaucracy, in the sense of if you spread accountability across a broad enough field it reaches the point where nobody is accountable. That’s what I often see happening. On the previous panel, they talked about agency and accountability, and you looked at what was going on. I was saying to myself, “What’s going to happen is it’s going to spread so thin that it gets blamed on an anonymous bureaucrat. Some cog in the system who you can’t ever really name and find.” In this sense they did have the gentleman resign, Brown, who was running FEMA, but you know he’ll be taken care of somewhere else. How do we jump into action? As an artist I get to be frustrated with the art world at times, because I say to myself “I can paint a picture about it, I can create a work of art about it, but I need to do something more tangible.” How do I get that message out in a more tangible manner that makes people act? I have to start within my personal sphere. I did do some relief work before coming up here this week. I’m just building up to say that I think it’s very important to collect the data. We talk about fantasy, but I’ll also bring in the term “myth.” We create these mythic stories, and in the past these mythic stories were used to mobilize entire cultures. They were not just fantasy. They were national psychic portraits of a people, and through those mythic stories people were able to form some type of structure where they could respond in a certain way. In this culture, what I’ve seen happen over the last few years is we have dismantled some mythic structures that helped us move forward, and we have re-integrated some past hateful mythic structures that destabilize the country. When you look at the language of conservative politicians talking about Iraq and the language they use, “insurgents,” “barbarism,” they often tend to forget that they at one point were insurgents in the South here in America. There were barbarians in the South, there were terrorists in the South, and in the North and the East and the West. You realize that people create these fantasy narratives about their own history to make themselves not act. They can feel comfortable with not acting because they are
the good guys who did not commit any type of atrocities in the past, and they are coming to bring light to the rest of the world. What happens, unfortunately, is they have to lie and create their own fantasy of what the American story is. They have to create their own fantasies and myths about what the American story is to make themselves feel elite and feel good, and it damages the language, it damages the dialogue. When you look at the way people were reporting the tragedies that were happening in New Orleans, some people were described as looters, some people were described as very resourceful people trying to find food for their families. There were looters, there were rapists, but there were also a lot of heroes. Then you watch the news and you see that New Orleans was two-thirds African American, but are the voices that are being talked to on the media two-thirds African American? No. The media will find other families to speak about how they got out, and the very people who were victimized the most will get sound bytes. There is no one bringing them to a news media room, sitting them down and asking them to tell their full story about what trauma they went through.

Florence Graves, Director, Brandeis Institute for Investigative Journalism: Aduei, you talked about the Lost Boys of Sudan, and obviously you were beneath that. Is your concern that the media were not addressing the Lost Girls of Sudan? I wish you could talk about that and the impact that it may have had on the girls – including the girls who are still in refugee camps. Is it that the story has been done and so the media have moved onto something else and are not addressing continuing problems?

Allison Taylor, Graduate Student in Anthropology, Brandeis University: I’m a clinical social worker with a lot of experience working with trauma. One of the themes of this conference is ethics, and one of the things I keep hearing over and over again on this particular panel is the experience of telling one’s story and how it can be re-traumatizing to actually do the telling of the story. I also noticed Aduei chose not to tell her story today. One of the things I hope that people would talk about and think about is the sense of agency in choosing, when, how, and where to tell one’s story, and the ethical issues around safety and around re-traumatization in that process.

Elizabeth Goldberg, Assistant Professor of English, Babson College: I was struck in listening to the panel and the previous panel by how crucial gender is – the women and girls in the story that Aduei told, and then listening to Deidre and thinking about asylum seekers who are imprisoned upon entering the United States, and the female genital mutilation piece. How do we talk about gender, and cover that in some way as a legitimate claim by which persecution might be made? What is the difference between the Ghanaian man who announces coming off the plane, “I am here to plead for my life,” and ends up in your office, Deirdre, and someone who ends up imprisoned for months, years? I think there’s a deep connection here between the race of the stories of girls that Aduei brings so powerfully to our attention and this issue of asylum and what happens to asylum seekers.

Aduei Riak: Two questions that were asked, maybe three, were on the story of the Lost Boys. What effect does it have on young women, and when does one choose to tell their own story? I guess I can just combine the two. I will begin with the story of the Lost Boys and how young women come into play. Statistically, there are 4,000 young Sudanese people across America. Out of 4,000, there are only 89 girls, and I can tell you how they made it to America. The way they
came was because they either had a male cousin who was involved in the process or they had a brother who was involved in the process, and that’s how they got here. I happen to be very lucky because I have a male cousin, otherwise I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you guys. Basically, when we came to this country the media said, “the Lost Boys,” and then no one thought, “These boys, do they have moms? Do they have sisters?” No one ever asked that question. People magazine, Time magazine, TV shows, “7th Heaven,” no one ever asked. Are there girls? Are there women involved in the civil war? That is the big question. The power of naming the Lost Boys, the fantasy, the whole thing clouded the name. You see the Lost Boys, you relate to Peter Pan, because everybody knows it. That touches everybody’s heart, because you see these young men struggling to survive, and the next thing you do is something to help them integrate into American society. Now that the name is not seen in the news, they are at a loss. They were at a loss when they came to America. There was an article by a freelancer in Phoenix, and she did research about how well the Lost Boys were doing in this country. It turned out that a lot of them are alcoholic, because that’s the only way that they can find comfort. It’s a totally different culture. English is a problem. The job and high hopes that you were looking for are not here, so it’s totally a different place. Now that they’re not being talked about in the news, they are left in the dark, and they are even lost. So, actually, they were using the name “lost” at the wrong time. It should be used right now, because this is the time that they are completely lost.

On the question of when does one choose to tell the story, that’s a very tough question, because I have a story to tell. When Deirdre talked about people collapsing or crying and not wanting to talk about what they went through, I can truly relate to that because what happened in my life is very strange. Having to go through it and talk about it over and over again hurts. People believe that seeing a psychiatrist and talking about issues heals. It might not be the case in other cultures. Cultures are different; practices are different. Apparently in Western view, if you have a deep problem you have to talk about it and that’s how you get over it. In other people’s minds, that’s not the way it works. The more you talk about it, the more it hurts and the more it becomes bigger and bigger. So, some people choose not to talk about it. I am open about my story. I can tell it, but there are some times that I just get sick and tired of it, and that’s normal. There’s nothing wrong with it.

Deirdre Giblin: The Sudanese resettlement was one of the more difficult resettlements that people categorized in the last few years, and it certainly did not go as smoothly as a lot of people had hoped. In general, there is a bit of that fantasy that we are saving people: we’re inviting them to come here, we’re giving them a better life, they’ll be grateful. The reality isn’t that, usually. For instance, in this particular population, a lot of the young men were under the understanding that they would come here and receive school and education and get on their feet. Basically, our resettlement program gives you three months to find a job with agencies like ourselves that help you with ESL, help you with literacy, help you form a resume, and go out to interviews. But it’s tough out there, and so a lot of these young men ended up in low-skill jobs that they weren’t very happy with, housed in housing that is not stellar. Any student in this room knows how difficult the Boston housing market is. So there are a lot of realities there. By the way, our agency right from the get-go did not use the term “Lost Boys.” We certainly received a lot of cultural training about how that was not an appropriate use of the title. A lot of the young Sudanese men that we’ve resettled and who have been resettled across the nation are starting to return home in order to get married. That is what they’re finding, and so that is sort of one of the topics that we
haven’t touched upon is that all these young girls who did get left behind are now having an opportunity to come here again. You want to look at some gender issues; they’re being married off to come to America because our immigration is based on family. The majority of people who immigrate here come as family members, and a spouse certainly qualifies. These young men are taking money home and trying to pay dowries, and the cultural issues are just enormous when you talk about resettlement.

Just to follow up on gender in asylum: when I mentioned that there’s the legal standard, the basis for asylum here is you’re showing you have a well founded fear of returning to your country because of past persecution or fear of future persecution. It really is on the basis of five grounds. Some people call it political asylum, because traditionally it’s been based on politics, but really that’s not the title. Politics is one of five reasons, along with religion, your ethnic background, your race, and then social group is sort of where we’ve been pushing the boundaries for the last decade or so, and gender has been part of that boundary-pushing.

When you talk about gender, the courts feel more comfortable saying “Well, we’re not going to open up the door for all women in this position,” and they love to hang their hat on religion. Let’s say a young Muslim woman from Morocco claims that she was harmed when she went outdoors without a male escort, or when she chose to wear something that was not approved by her society or not cover her head. The way that the courts have really seen that is as a religious issue. It’s because that’s Muslim and she’s not following Muslim customs. It’s not a gender issue for her country. That really is the fantasy; when we go into court, we do hang our hat on something different, something more acceptable, something that’s already been precedential.
AUDIENCE, EFFICACY, ETHICS

The third of three discussion panels held on day two of the conference (09/16/2005)

Moderator: Leigh Swigart, conference co-organizer, associate director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life, Brandeis University

Panelist Presentations:


Human Rites? Truth and NGO-ization in Northern Sierra Leone—Rosalind Shaw, associate professor of anthropology, Tufts University

Telling the Story of Soviet Dissidents—Joshua Rubenstein, northeast regional director, Amnesty International

Discussant Response:

Zolani Ngwane, assistant professor of anthropology, Haverford College

Introduction - Leigh Swigart

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our final session on Telling the Story, power and responsibility in documenting human rights violations. It's my pleasure to be able to moderate this final session, entitled "Audience, Efficacy, Ethics," which is very central to this topic that we have been attacking over the last few days. Even though this is the final panel, these issues of audience, efficacy, and ethics have come up continually. There has not been a single presentation in which some sort of ethical dilemma, some sort of issue of how to reach an audience, who the audience ought to be, when documenting human rights violations works best, has not come up. In a way, this final panel will allow us to confront head-on those issues that we all seem to be collectively very interested in analyzing.

It's a great honor for us to have with us here Sanji Monageng, who is a commissioner with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. She's come all the way from Botswana to join us. She will be on the Brandeis campus for several days next week, addressing different classes and appearing in different fora. She'll also be speaking at Physicians for Human Rights and at Boston University. She will be addressing the question of the role of international arbitration in the experience of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Our second presenter, Rosalind Shaw, is an associate professor of anthropology at Tufts University and also a member of the planning committee of this conference. She will be speaking
to us on human rights, truth, and NGO-ization in northern Sierra Leone.

Our third presenter, Joshua Rubenstein, is the Northeast Regional Director of Amenity International USA. He has been involved with human rights for 25 years as an activist, scholar, and journalist, with particular expertise in Soviet affairs. A Fellow of Harvard's Davis Center for Russian Studies, he has made many research trips to Moscow and other cities in Russia, and he has lectured and written widely on the Soviet human rights movement, including a series of lectures in Russian at the Mendelev Institute in Moscow in the fall of 1990 and in the spring of 1991.

Panelist Presentations

The Role of International Arbitration: The Experience of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Sanji Monageng discussed the development of the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the guiding force behind the Commission, and the challenges the Commission has faced as a quasi-judicial body charged with the promotion and protection of human rights across the continent.

The participation of Commissioner Sanji Monageng in Telling the Story, and the conversations it engendered, has resulted in an exciting human rights project entitled Know Your Rights!

Know Your Rights! is a collaborative project of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the West African Research Center/Association. It aims to translate and disseminate critical information on human and peoples' rights in selected African languages, thereby making this information available to those who otherwise would not have access to it. The principal sources to be used are the legal instruments of the African Commission. Know Your Rights! was inspired by a recognition that the broader African population cannot be aware of the charters that their states have signed onto as long as these documents exist only in European languages.

For more information on the project, visit the Know Your Rights! page of the Center's site.

Human Rites? Truth and NGO-ization in Northern Sierra Leone

Rosalind Shaw examines Sierra Leoneans' perceptions of and reactions to the externally organized truth and reconciliation commission that was intended to bring about healing after Sierra Leone's long and bloody civil war.

My paper concerns how external and local actors create objects of intervention in situations of mass violence and their aftermath. Narrative testimonies from survivors of such violence, collected by journalists and human rights organizations, disseminated in the media and in U.N. and NGO appeals, and recorded by transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions and war crimes tribunals, have become critical to the production of intervention during and after the violence. But an exclusive focus on survivors telling their stories can paradoxically silence other forms of voice. In this paper, I examine how the primary preoccupation with narrative testimony after the war in Sierra Leone's truth and reconciliation commission and in an NGO-led
follow-up project often marginalized survivors' own priorities and processes of postwar repair and recovery.

For most of Sierra Leone's eleven-year civil war, which began in 1991 and officially ended in 2002, the international community turned its back. The story of what was happening in Sierra Leone, the massive displacement, the use of amputation and other forms of mutilation, the abduction and forced conscription of child combatants, the slave labor, the widespread sex and violence, was often molded by media reports that represented Sierra Leone's civil war in terms of irrationality, magic, and pre-Enlightenment barbarism. I call that genre "ju-ju journalism."

Following the U.S. invasion of Somalia and the Rwandan genocide, articles such as Robert Kaplan's "The Coming Anarchy" in 1994, basically the model for ju-ju journalism, helped to buttress U.S. isolationism and international inaction. When the international community did finally intervene in force in 1999, with the largest U.N. peacekeeping operation in the world and the arrival of hundreds of international organizations, it did so partly in response to stories about and by Sierra Leoneans. And I'm thinking here of Sorious Samura's video "Cry Free Town," and the testimonies in Corinne Dufka's human rights watch report about the RUF/AFRC and the 1999 invasion of Freetown.

Stories have saved lives in Sierra Leone. But by the time the war was officially over in 2002, the situation was different. Many communities developed their own techniques for re-integrating ex-combatants, and most survivors of the war, an overwhelming majority according to my research in northern Sierra Leone, didn't want to talk about the violence any more. They had a great deal to say, on the other hand, about their priorities for repairing their lives. But for many international and even local initiatives for postwar reconstruction, survivor stories were often the only forms of voice that counted. Practitioners and scholars alike tend to equate stories with voice, empowerment, catharsis and nation building. In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), it was assumed that narrative testimonies, written as statements or given orally in the commission's hearings, would restore voice, establish accountability, foster reconciliation, prevent a recurrence of violence, address victims' needs, and help rebuild Sierra Leone. I'm going to give three excerpts from conversations in different contexts in northern Sierra Leone that illuminate how an exclusive concern with narrative in the TRC silenced the expression of other forms of voice.
Conversation one:

In 2003, the third year of my research project on practices of social repair and re-integration in postwar Sierra Leone, I was conducting research on the TRC district hearings. I wanted to pay attention not just to what was going on in the front of the hall, but also to what people were saying when they hung around outside without going in. I also wanted to find out what people thought in places where the hearings were not held, and where the TRC was present mainly in radio broadcasts. In Lunsar, a northern town that had previously undergone occupation by the IUF, two young men run up to my vehicle. They'd heard that I was asking people about the TRC and the issues facing youth. And they told me that they wanted me to hear their views and those of their friends. They led my research assistant and I off to a palm wine bar on the side of the road, where fifteen men sat on wooden benches under the shade of trees behind the palm wine seller's house. They ranged from young to middle-aged. Several had had some secondary education and most had no formal employment. They launched into a debate over the TRC and continued that debate over the next two days, and I returned for our annual seminar. I'm going to read some excerpts from these discussions that relate to the issue of testifying, telling one's story before the commission. And I'll do this to represent different peoples' voices:

“The TRC is too public.”

“When they want to dig about the past, the TRC is digging up problems. It will being problems.”

“I support the TRC, even though it comes too early. We will know exactly what caused this war. Plenty of things happened. The TRC comes out with secrets so that history will not repeat again.”

“These things repeat if you talk about them too much.”

“We don't want the TRC because the TRC is only word of mouth, but if you will give me what I've lost, then the TRC will hold water. How will I go and talk on the radio about what they've done to me when I get no benefit from it? I get shame. I don't want to let people know what they've done to me.”

“We all decided not to talk to them. The President talked to us, forgive and forget. Then they said to come and take statements, but no benefit. We discussed this before they came, we decided to avoid them.”

“If Mr. A talks about Mr. B's evil deeds, Mr. B can take revenge.”

I asked whether they agreed with the TRC's argument that telling their story would bring "kol at," which is Creo for "reconciliation." I asked, "The TRC says that no sooner do you tell your story and blow your mind than you feel relief. What do you think?"

“I will get a free mind, but not kol at if I don't get assistance.”

“If you can make your living you will feel better.”
“If the TRC comes to mend my leg, talking by itself isn't going to help.”

I asked them, “Do you know why the TRC came?”

“The TRC came to mock me. They [the rebels] have taken all I've got. The TRC says if anyone has anything to say, come and talk, but if I don't get benefit, I won't talk.”

“For my part I'm leaving it alone, I'm not going to talk. The TRC should have come with more counseling than talking. I don't talk publicly. How can they get truth from that statement? In public, you don't talk about everything. But counseling is face to face, no witnesses there. It is a secret. In the TRC, public address is a problem. Thousands of people will see you, they put you on the radio, it's not good. They open you up to a lot of things. The RUF can come and kill you, can loot you.”

“When you talk about what happened, you feel worse, not better.”

There's enough in these comments for at least an hour of unpacking, but I just want to flag four points.

• First: security. People know that neither the government nor the international community will protect them from potential retaliation from perpetrators if they testify before the TRC. Large numbers of ex-combatants, including those who committed horrific violations, have been incorporated into the army. A future military coup is entirely possible. People told me, "It's better to suffer once than to suffer twice."

• Second: healing. Healing depends on the capacity to first of all, rebuild, and second, to forget. Healing is popularly equated with forgetting. The past can return if we re-tell it. Going back out to Alison's point about re-traumatization during testimony. The TRC often attacked this widespread understanding of healing as forgetting, instead of adapting it and building on it, which would have been relatively easy to do.

• Third: many people, especially those who went through the process of testifying before the TRC, those who were educated young people, those who were active in churches, did in fact internalize the TRC's message that telling your story to the commission would help you to heal and to rebuild the country.

• Fourth: most people, including those who'd internalized the TRC's message that telling their story would bring healing, viewed the telling of narrative testimony as part of a reciprocal relationship rather than an end in itself. Almost everyone who testified in the district hearings I attended ended their testimonies with pleas for the material assistance that would help them rebuild their lives. "Why would I testify if I don't get benefit?"

Conversation two:
In 2004, I returned to northern Sierra Leone for my fourth visit, to trace some of the men and women who had testified at the TRC's Bombali district hearings in Makeni a year earlier, including those who were amputees and other war wounded. By then, many of the war wounded had been provided with houses in special settlements, usually off a road two or three miles outside a major town or city. In the three settlements outside Makeni, war-wounded residents were pleased with the houses themselves as structures, but found it very difficult to earn a livelihood so far out of town, especially as their mobility was often limited and they were far from the networks of social support in their home communities. Adama was a middle-aged woman who lived in Makama, an amputee settlement of fourteen identical cement houses built in two neat rows off the main highway. During the war, the ex-AFRC junta amputated both her husband's hands. He died from his wounds. They amputated Adama's left hand and she lived. She was raising three children and making a garden behind her house, growing cassava and corn and processing palm oil to sell. During one of my visits, I asked her about testifying before the TRC.

Rosalind: When you talked to the TRC, how did you feel?

Adama: When I was talking I felt bad, but when I finished talking I didn't feel bad any more because everyone knew what had happened to me.

Rosalind: What did you think would happen after you talked?

Adama: I expected that when I talked, people would know my problems, and that I would sit in my house and see people coming to help me.

Rosalind: Has this happened?

Adama: No. The TRC told the government to help us, but up to now there's no help.

Rosalind: Has the TRC helped you get a cool heart? [This was one of the claims of the TRC jingle.]

Adama: I got a cool heart, but only a little, because from what they put on paper to pass on to the government [the TRC report], I haven't seen any result. If I get help, I'll forget about the war. But if you don't have help, you remember the war all the time. Now I remember because no one helps me. What happened to the paper carried to the government? Right now we're taking care of ourselves.

The people whom Adama expected to see after she told her story to everyone were NGO and government people. The Adama narrative testimony should be part of a reciprocal relationship, kind of a moral relationship. Telling her story was not just truth telling for its own sake; by participating in this national and international forum, she felt that she'd become part of a circuit connecting her to the national and international resources that would help her heal and forget.

Conversation three:
In 2004, UNDP launched a reconciliation project as an attempt to redress the TRC's perceived neglect of reconciliation processes. In the words of one person associated with this project, there was a lot of truth and a lot of commission, but not much reconciliation. The UNDP project was well conceptualized as a locally driven project, directed by religious leaders who had been active in reconciliation initiatives throughout the war. UNDP partnered with the inter-religious council of Sierra Leone and provided funds for single reconciliation events. The funds were just under a hundred dollars each, or two hundred and fifty thousand Leones, to be determined by local communities themselves. In practice, little outreach was possible because of transport and logistical constraints. And young men who sought an entry into NGOs – I could call them human rights entrepreneurs – often ended up determining the form of those events. In Bombali district, several of those events consisted of hearings in which survivors were directed to come and tell their stories once again in the central meeting place. I followed up on those events and their outcomes during my 2004 visit, with the approval of the inter-religious council. I've only got time to talk about one such event and one victim, whose murder the event addressed. This took place in a small town called Puntun, where one man, Yaya Conteh, had been killed and another man stabbed very seriously in an RUF attack in 1998. Since that time, Yaya's family has not had the money to perform the funeral ceremony that should ideally be held forty days after burial, which includes a large sacrifice and marks the proper transition of the deceased into the other world. The program, titled "Reconciliation through Public Hearing," was initiated by a young son of the town called Gibril, who now lives in the regional capital Makeni and was the brother-in-law of both victims. I'll begin my conversation with Yaya Conteh's brother Alfa, who had not been present at the program. He'd been away during Gibril's initial planning visit, and during the event itself.

Rosalind: Did anyone tell you about the program?

Yaya: No. Khadiatu [Yaya's widow] told me afterwards that people had come. She said they had asked her how Yaya died.

Rosalind: If you had been asked to choose to make One Word in this town ["One Word" is another word for "reconciliation"], what would you have wanted?

Yaya: How to make one word in the town? What do you do when someone dies? Bury him and pull a sacrifice.

In the meantime, a group of people including Yaya's widow's sister Isatu had joined us on Alfa's veranda.

Rosalind: What would you choose to bring one word in this town?

Isatu: The sacrifice, because when we pull the sacrifice, we pray for him. Sometime where he is, God will feel sorry for him. If he is comfortable or if he has problems, we don't know.

Gboli (a sub-chief in town): We have nothing to do except bear it.

Puntun was the home of the Section Chief, Pa Alimami Fofana.
Rosalind: Did Gibril tell you about the program – before the program?

Pa Alimami: He told me one week before the program to inform all the section. That program will be coming to us to know if we had any problems during the rebel conflict.

Rosalind: Did he ask you what kind of program you would like?

Pa Alimami: No.

Rosalind: If you could have had the program you wanted, and the money to do it, to bring kol at and One Word, what would you have chosen?

Pa Alimami: With that money, I can call all the family [of Yaya] to bring food. They can cook and all eat together (in the sacrifice). If any money is left, we would give it to Yaya’s family.

Rosalind: If you had had that choice, would you have chosen the sacrifice or the hearings?

Pa Alimami: The sacrifice, because of the death. To pray for the one who has gone to the land of the dead.

Rosalind: If you don’t pull the sacrifice, what happens to the ones left behind?

Pa Alimami: That is why we pull the sacrifice. To help the one that died be happy. This will help the ones who are left.

My point here is not to blame people like Gibril, but to look at what overrode the original conception of UNDP’s reconciliation project as locally-driven. Here is a war-torn country with a high level of poverty, and a process of rapid U.N.-ization and NGO-ization. International organizations become the source of the most attractive jobs, divert the most skilled national staff, inflate local wages, and create a two-tier system of expatriates and local workers, with "trickle-down" from the top to the lower tier. In this context, the language of transitional justice became a highly marketable and rapidly expanding form of knowledge that many educated young people sought to convert into both employment and positions of leadership, often creating new forms of exclusion. Both the model of reconciliation as deriving exclusively from narrative testimony and the act of telling narrative testimony itself needs to be situated in this political economy of post-war reconstruction. The equation of stories with voice masks this political economy and the power relations that derive from it.

**Telling the Story of Soviet Dissidents**

*Joshua Rubenstein recounts some of the research he conducted for his book Tangled Loyalties: The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg, which sheds light on the complexities surrounding the*
When I first began researching Ilya Ehrenberg, I knew only that he was considered to be Stalin's favorite journalist and was assumed to have betrayed his fellow Jews and other writers during the purges of the Stalin period. As I conducted my research, numerous dissidents would tell me how Ehrenberg had inspired them, helped prepare the ground for the Soviet human rights movement. That seemed to contradict the myth that had surrounded his career in the west. I spent 13 years on the book, I interviewed a hundred people who knew Ehrenberg. I was in the archives both in Washington and in Moscow. It turns out we're dealing with a person who, in the course of a lifetime, had been a member of the Communist Party, quit the Bolsheviks, was an anarchist by temperament, was a poet and a Bohemian in Paris, and then became a kind of emissary for the regime in the west. This was, of course, held against him. So how was it possible to live a life where you can be both an anarchist and a Bohemian and a favorite of the Soviet regime, and someone who prepares the ground for the human rights movement? All of this challenges our assumptions about what it means to be an accomplice, to resist and to survive.

In the west, these categories mean one thing; in Eastern Europe, in these very grave dictatorships, they mean something else entirely. For example, people would say to me, "Why didn't Ehrenberg protest when his fellow writers were arrested and disappeared? Why didn't Ehrenberg protest when his childhood friend and high school buddy Nikolai Bukharin – one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution, a member of the first Politburo – was Stalin's primary victim during the purges in the 1930s? Ehrenberg was sent to the trial on Stalin's personal orders. Ehrenberg knew he was innocent. Why didn't he protest?" It's very simple; it was a choice of life or death. He could have protested, he could have held a placard up for two seconds in Red Square, and been spirited away, and no one would have heard and he would have died. He made
a decision that he needed to live with clenched teeth. But to live with clenched teeth means you then become vulnerable to all the rumors that surround someone who survives in that kind of atmosphere.

Ilya Ehrenburg

In the late '60s – and now the Soviet period moves from the carnivorous phase to the vegetarian phase – Andrei Amalrik was a leading dissident in Moscow. Many of his fellow dissidents were being arrested, and there were actually western journalists reporting that "maybe Amalrik is an informer, and that's why he's not under arrest." And Amalrik publicly responded to that accusation by saying, "Rather than wonder why I'm not arrested, and coming up with these ideas that maybe I'm an informer and I'm morally compromised, they should be celebrating the fact that, at least for now, there's one more free man in Moscow." Of course, his number came up, and he was arrested and sent into exile. One of the primary allegations against Ehrenburg that circulated during the Cold War was that it was said that he was the only member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee to have survived, while the others were rounded up, secretly tried, and secretly executed. There were people who came forward and said, "Yes, I saw those defendants in labor camp, and they told me that Ehrenburg came to the trial and testified against them."

Another man came forward and said Ehrenburg was taken to the trial by a limousine from his apartment in central Moscow, gave testimony, and returned by limousine.

All of this was a myth or a deliberate lie, because in the late '80s under Gorbachev, the transcript of this secret trial, held in the confines of the Lubyanka Prison, was released. So we learned that there weren't 25 defendants, there were only 15 defendants. They weren't all Yiddish writers, only five were Yiddish writers. And the main defendant was a leading member of the Communist Party. But the mythology in the West was such that we had to regard the trial and this episode as one totally directed against Yiddish culture. It would compromise our assumptions about Soviet life and repression if we knew that one of the main defendants, in fact the person most held responsible for the work and the misuse of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, was Solomon Lozovsky, who was a long-time member of the Communist Party and had met Lenin and Stalin in 1905. That kind of contradicted the image of the martyrs that we were supposed to have around the history of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Secondly, there were no witnesses against them outside of members of the committee themselves, because the defendants testified and were cross-examined by the other defendants. Ehrenberg never appeared at the trial; it was held in secret, he knew nothing about their fate. And yet, because of the Cold War, it was acceptable for people in the West to circulate these kinds of rumors and there was no
way to hold them accountable. So, to try to tell the real story, to get the documents, to go and talk to family members who, although they were not personally at the trial themselves still knew a great deal about what happened during the war and Ehrenberg's role, was very important. Especially dealing with these kind of dictatorships where access to documents is very difficult, and you often have to wait until there's a change in regime before you get closer to the truth.

Now, how do these kinds of assumptions affect our understanding of the Soviet human rights movement? It was 40 years ago – in fact, forty years ago this September, in 1965, when two Soviet writers were arrested, Andrei Sinyavski and Yuri Daniel. Their arrests led to the first public protest during the Brezhnev period in the defense of human rights, and eventually the emergence of emblematic figures: Andrei Sakharov, who had designed the Soviet hydrogen bomb and became a leading dissident figure; the writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn; Yuri Orlov, a physicist who founded the Moscow-Helsinki watch group; and Anatoli Sharansky, who today is a leading political figure in Israel. How is it possible for the Soviet human rights movement to emerge? And how, in the post-Stalin period but still during the Cold War, were the assumptions of the Cold War affecting our understanding of the movement? Well, in very concrete ways. The assumption in the West was always that if they were opponents of the Soviet regime or critics of the regime, that meant they all shared our values. We tend to paint anyone critical of the Soviet government as basically a reflection of ourselves. And it didn't occur to people that in a country like the Soviet Union, where you have well over a hundred different nationalities and ethnic groups, different religious groups, people entering the dissident movement who are workers, others were scientists, some from remote areas of the country, many from Moscow or Leningrad, that in fact they would see all of these problems in a very different way. And secondly, if they were willing to stand up to a regime like this, then perhaps there might be something, say, idiosyncratic about them. The fact that you're willing to put yourself at that kind of risk doesn't mean that it deserves a psychiatric evaluation, but that there might be something a little quirky, a little quixotic – a little willingness, even, to be a martyr. Could that be at play here? Because it was almost certain that you would at least be harassed, kicked out of your job, if not arrested. Keep in mind, Stalin had only died in 1953. Amalrik commented that the regime was still in power in part as a dividend from the weight of terror that Stalin had inflicted on the society. And who is to say that that kind of terror would not return? So for people to be willing to demonstrate and circulate petitions, to write articles, to challenge the regime publicly, took an enormous amount of courage, and one might, I think, fairly say a certain degree of quixotic posturing.

So when I began interviewing people and reading the documents and reading some of these authors' self-published literature, it became clear that in fact these people did not agree with each other. There was a famous incident when one dissident figure was leaving to go to Israel in the 1970s, and at the going-away party, they actually put up signs in the apartment for the different groups to congregate. So the Baptists would be in this corner, and the Ukrainian nationalists would be in this corner, and the scientists would be in this corner, and the Jewish refusniks would be in this corner. And some of them talked to each other and some of them had very little to say to each other. They were all part of a broad movement of dissent within the country, but they all had very different goals in terms of wanting to leave the country, looking for legal reform, wishing to stay in the country, looking for a greater national autonomy for their own groups, like Ukrainians or Lithuanians, and those who were the central figures in the human rights movement saw their role as to protect everyone.
Today, Sharansky is remembered as a Jewish figure. In fact, on the eve of his arrest, he was giving all of his time to the broader human rights movement, so that when he was arrested, Jewish organizations in the West, especially those connected to the Israeli government, were very reluctant to come to his defense. They had a general policy of only defending those who were Jewish activists looking to be involved in the Jewish national struggle, which was the immigration movement. And Sharansky was spending all of his time with dissidents, many of whom were not Jewish and were not interested in working to leave the country, but rather were working for internal reform. And this was initially held against Sharansky by some Jewish groups, who of course like to forget this now because he's become such an iconic figure. That part of history has been neglected. But this was also a very important part of my research, to document both how these groups disagreed with each other and some of the personalities involved and the conflicts between these personalities – like Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, who had tremendous respect for each other and got to know each other personally in the 60s and 70s, but at the same time understood that they were approaching the problems of their society from completely different directions and saw completely different solutions to those problems. Sakharov was a voice of Western liberalism, for European multi-democracy, multi-party democracy; Solzhenitsyn was really coming out of a 19th-century Slavophile tradition of deep suspicion for democracy. Many of the critics of the Czar were critics not from the point of view of democratic reform but of some mythology about Russian nationalism, and Solzhenitsyn was echoing some of that today. Russian Slavophiles in the 19th century also had a deep suspicion of capitalism, and they didn't want to see capitalism flourish in Russia and the Russian empire, because they took Dickens' description of capitalism in England very seriously, something we in the West of course have tended to forget.

My concluding remarks in looking at these three episodes are: first, there's a great deal of overlap between our understanding of the Soviet Union and our misunderstanding of the Soviet Union during the Stalin period, and our misunderstandings of the country and its culture during the post-Stalin period as well. We've allowed the myths of the Cold War to affect our judgment and how people behave in these very extreme situations. When it came to Ehrenburg, there were four great cultural survivors of the Soviet period: Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, Dmitri Shostakovich and Ilya Ehrenburg. Only Ehrenburg's moral stature was ever in question, in part because it was assumed that he didn't face repression, he wasn't arrested, he was allowed to travel, he did have a tremendous number of privileges. But when you go and you speak to people, to many victims, he was the first person they came to for help. If they had believed that he had blood on his hands, is it likely they would have approached him? That kind of theme runs through the work I was doing, and we tried to reach a more subtle and deeper understanding of what it meant to survive – not just physically to survive, but to morally survive in those kinds of extreme situations.

Discussant Responses

Zolani Ngwane

I think that the best place to start for me would be to say that if at the end of this panel, you are still at a loss about audience, efficacy, and ethics, then you understood the panel very well. For me, it is a panel that highlighted most importantly the question of ambiguity, of ambivalence, of the ways in which what we are searching for is not standing out there waiting for us to discover
it. And, the ways in which we are as implicated in the construction of the problem as we are indeed in the search for solution. So, as a way to frame my shortsighted understanding of the panel, I want to use that figure of Ehrenberg as a kind of heuristic device to ask some questions, because for me this is a figure that indeed forces us to look deeper at the whole question of implication. What does it mean to occupy that position? Is it in fact not the position which is, in the final analysis, occupied by all interpreters? Are we interpreters or are we not? That's the question that's going to go into some of the things that we need to be aware of as we think about ourselves in relationship to documenting a human rights abuse. I imagine Ehrenberg, in the way in which Josh talked about today, as a figure that collapses those two notions of interpreter and translator into one. In our world, there are those people that exist at the interstices of self-constituting big narrative. And those people who occupied that ethically compromised, ethically implicated space became, in that sense, not only translators but also interpreters of survival for people around them. Those are indeed the voices that somehow become lost.

We are here basically to look at the way of understanding the world, which has come down with the notion of narrative. There is this notion of a narrative as being a story plus its telling; experience is a sort of raw data, the encounter between the world and the senses, which has to await the intervention of reason to transform it into knowledge. Another way of looking at it, which I think Rosalind was touching upon, is the sense of narrative as the core incidents of body and voice. This is where the question of testimony carries this ideological burden for us – for our imagination, to a large extent. The presence of the suffering person, the presence of the violated body at the same place and time of its voice, of its testimony, is that which then burdens our tools of representation. Our photographs, our films, our notepads as it were, are overburdened by that question.

What is lost, then, by our conception of human rights as the embodiment of voice, as the coincidence of body and voice? That's one of the questions that have been coming up through the day, and one that poses important ethical questions for the ways in which we document human rights all over the world. That, to me, is sort of a way to sum up the ways in which we have to look at ourselves as somehow implicated. Our challenge is to be more critically conscious of this form of implicatedness and how it limits our ability to represent what's happening, as well as sharpening our ways of understanding the world around us.

There are two things that came up again that tie Rosalind's presentation and Sanji's. One is the notion of institutions – local institutions in the form of internal truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs), and interstate institutions such as the African Commission – and how both of those seem to hinge around a certain notion of intervention. There is this intervention into the narrative space of individuals, within a nation-state, and there is this intervention into the boundaries of a state by this trans-state body of African commissioners, with all those in-built constraints – for instance, you have to apply for passports and permits to get into a country to investigate it. On the other hand, you have to have all kinds of rituals within the country to hold a TRC. To what extent are these kinds of institutions merely states performing to themselves? Who is the audience for a TRC? In terms of South Africa, how could South Africa ever imagine itself except as narrated by the TRC in its acceptance by the rest of the world? The TRC in South Africa never really looked at the possible conditions for the tellability of the stories that emerged from it. If you were to really watch it, watch all of the testimonies, you would see the ways in which it's signaled at the very limits of language when it comes to issues of human rights. The
sheer absence of narrative on the part of many victims, who collapsed into tears, are extremely inarticulate on the one hand. On the other hand, you had the perpetrators who often were whispering in the ears of their lawyers around them, flanking them; they had so much narrative it wasn't funny. That is why, as Rosalind was pointing out, when people would talk about the TRCs, they'd always emphasize the reparations that never came. The things that would have ensured the material conditions for their going on, or starting afresh, that never ever really happened. Perhaps the question is, are these good places to look for local voices about the possibilities of the future? Or should we go beyond the TRC as self-constituted, to the other places?

The other thing that really impressed me today was the presentation by Aduei, on the power of naming. A lot of people have already responded to that and very helpfully reflected on this notion of ambiguity. The Lost Boys became this kind of frame that on the one hand became helpful in raising consciousness in the United States while at the same time petrifying a history of a people who were evolving over time, and kept them in the same space. The corresponding concept in South Africa is that of the Lost Generation, which usually meant young people of the 1980s who did not go to school, were throwing stones all the time, and became politicized and could not imagine the possibility of their own futures. That goes to the question of how society becomes so self-cannibalizing, and how this self-cannibalization becomes generationally inflected and gender-inflected. Those young boys who become child soldiers themselves, if you look at the history of their perpetration of violence, are themselves products of other forms of abuse. It was the same kinds of things in the Lost Generation in South Africa. Except, of course, they grew. But today that same concept remains in place, and it's being used by the government to label a new group of young people "victims of HIV," as a way of the government excusing its own implication in their production. They still are the Lost Generation of the 80s. There is no particular history to their loss. That's the danger of these kinds of catch phrases. When you talk about human rights, you are talking about paying attention to the historicity of narratives, to the historicity of these kinds of framing devices themselves. That's part of documenting human rights. But those are also part of the ways in which we become implicated in petrifying peoples' histories. That also carried through in Deirdre's own testimony. In a way, she represents this kind of implicatedness I'm talking about. She has to "interpret" her clients' answers, and say, "Well, your honor, my client really means this," in a sense. It is that compromised position in which one has one foot in one regime and another foot in another regime that produces our documentations of human right abuses. I really like the image that came out of that, emphasizing the compromised notion of documenting human rights. Not because I don't think we're heroes, but because I think that our heroes in our imaginations are usually located elsewhere than in the places we find ourselves, more often than not.

All of those presentations really talked to the problem of imagining a story that remains true to an original experience. That's usually the problem we have; we want to bring people to a TRC because we want to have a narrative that will remain true to what actually happened. But not the kind of story that gets told in response to every new set of circumstances.

In the movie, you saw Lori there with a notebook in one hand, driving through this landscape and imagining that if you just clipped off the few trees that remained then she would be on the moon. What does it mean to be on the moon, really? Perhaps for her, it means to be in this desolate, uninhabitable place, where for someone else it would mean to be away from trouble.
And for someone else, it probably would mean to be closer to God. Again, every form of intervention brings with it and imposes a certain universe of imagination, a fantasy that often has to engage with other locally existing fantasies. But we're never able to look at that intersection; we are carried into someone else's story through the fantasies and imaginations of someone else. That is the challenge.

Questions, Comments, and Responses

**Corinne Dufka:** The Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inherently different from that in South Africa, Chile, El Salvador, and in other places. In those places, you had death squads. You had people who were committing violations in secret. The efficacy of the TRC in those places was unmasking, unearthing truths that were hidden. In Sierra Leone, the commission of abuses by the RUF, the AFRC, and the government was particularly designed to terrorize the population as a means of control. Therefore, the TRC in Sierra Leone should have indeed been tasked with unmasking what it was that gave rise to the war in Sierra Leone, unmasking some of the issues that I talked about earlier – the poverty, the inequitable distribution of resources, the betrayal of the people that they were to be serving – to be looking at those issues which I like to think of as the blind spots within the consciousness of the Sierra Leonean people. What they least needed was for the TRC to become a forum for victims. I think, unfortunately, that the commission to a certain extent lacked a little bit of vision.

What I heard in a number of the voices, Rosalind, was that in Sierra Leone, reconciliation was undermined by fear. When people said, "We really must forgive the rebels," what was really behind it was blackmail because they were afraid that if they didn't do that, the rebels were going to come again and kill them and perhaps perpetrate other abuses. So, sometimes, I think an outside voice is needed. Sometimes I think the most poignant and observant articles about American culture, about my own culture, come from people who are British and French and who have come from outside my own culture to be able to make more critical and accurate and visionary observations about us. Similarly, I think in Sierra Leone, there are blind spots in that culture. Often, when the Sierra Leoneans talked about war, it was as though it were a natural disaster, instead of saying, "This is us. This is something about us."

**Rosalind Shaw:** I completely agree with your first points. Given that there really was very little popular support to bring the TRC to Sierra Leone in the first place, I think that could be the first thing that people could look at. Do people actually want the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or do they want prosecutions? It seemed to me that, although Sierra Leoneans were also very ambivalent about prosecutions for security reasons, that was something that made sense to them, more than the TRC. In Afghanistan, they actually went to the amazing measure of asking people what form of transitional justice they wanted. People said, "Prosecutions." Only 5 percent wanted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission – although Karzai, who had blood on his hands too, wants to make sure they get a Truth and Reconciliation Commission instead.

In Sierra Leone, people stayed away in droves. And clearly it was very problematic as to why people did testify, and it raises issues of coercion. However much they were told, "No, there's no money, we won't pay you," here was a TRC with its Toyota Land Cruisers. People must have thought, "Of course they're going to give me something." But, given that the report was actually written largely on the basis of the statements, rather than the public hearings, we may think of
some other mechanism to investigate the causes of the war, other than a Truth and Reconciliation Commission broadcast on the radio.

Regarding your second point about reconciliation: Since I've looked at Sierra Leone historically, I think that the emphasis on forgiving and forgetting in Sierra Leone right now is actually a function of centuries of insecurity. If you have warfare, if you have raiding, if you have constantly shifting alliances, all of this driven by slave trade, by the colonial legitimate trade, then you're going to have a lot of situations in which you have former fighters incorporated into your community, often those who used to be your enemies. Are you going to speak truth to power in that instance? No. You're going to want to begin again with a clean slate. So, paradoxically, a culture of insecurity has promoted a culture of reconciliation. I think it's much more than just reconciliation as a form of blackmail. That did exist. There were certainly people who, as I stated, said it's better to suffer once than to suffer twice. Let's forgive and forget. But there were also communities who developed their own forms of reintegration and their own forms of coexistence, who incorporated their own youth, who had committed violations against them. And the statement-taking and the hearings coming to town were profoundly disruptive of these previous arrangements. For that reason, too, people stayed away from the hearings. So, we shouldn't just read silence as a product of silencing. There are many diverse reasons why people are silent.

Stephan Edwards, Ph.D. student in Anthropology, Brandeis University: I just have two questions. One is one for Mr. Rubenstein. You mentioned, at one point, the cultural figures in the Stalinist era who managed to survive the purges and all the rest of the violence. You mentioned three or four people, and Ehrenburg was one of them. It seemed to me that the individuals you mentioned had a sort of a musical or a literary reason for being kept around, a cultural sort of significance for the Soviet regime. I was wondering if you came across in your research any reasons why Stalin and the successive regimes kept him around. It seemed like Ehrenburg walked a really thin line in terms of his existence.

Josh Rubenstein: I appreciate the question. I also appreciate Zolani's comments on what I shared with you. It's a complicated story, and what I presented earlier was the barest detail, really. Ehrenburg was well known in the West, and this may have had some constraining influence on Stalin. There are all kinds of rumors about why the others survived. Akhmatova, her poetry was well known although it hadn't been published for a long time; she was credited with some famous poems during the war, as if that would matter to Stalin. Why Pasternak? It's said that he had translated some Georgian poets into Russian and Stalin appreciated that. But who's to say? There are a lot of disputes about Shostakovich today, whether he was a dissident, whether he was a conformist. He was both. And a lot of the rest is pure speculation.

As to Ehrenburg, my conclusion in the book was, in the end, his life, unlike the others, depended on the will of one man, on Stalin. And for complicated reasons, people understood that. And so, for example, when Ehrenburg's arrest was publicly announced in 1949, he was not arrested. Unlike other people, he actually wrote to Stalin for an explanation. So, Ehrenburg was willing to play the few cards he had at moments of vulnerability. He wrote to Stalin in '38 when he was not allowed out of the country to return to Spain. He was covering the Spanish Civil War. He got word back, "No, we're not letting you out, you must stay here" and they took his passport away. He wrote to Stalin again saying, "No, my place is in Spain." And this is in the very dangerous
months after Bukharin's trial, and Ehrenburg was allowed to go back to Spain. There are many of these very unusual moments where others would have stayed at home, and quietly Ehrenburg said, "I need an answer here." Paradoxically, that might have enhanced his survivability. But the bottom line is that if Stalin had died a few months later, Ehrenburg might have been arrested in that final purge of Jewish figures.

Again, it's a complicated story. Ehrenburg was more prepared than anyone else in the country for the post-Stalin period, and he immediately became outspoken for reform, which is what led to the dissidents looking to him as a representative figure. Until the emergence of Solzhenitsyn in November of 1962 with "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," his first published story, Ehrenburg was simply the most controversial, most iconic figure in the country. Everything he said became the ground for controversy and debate. His first novel, "The Thaw," which lends its name to that period of Soviet history, people say he wrote in order to introduce one word into Soviet vocabulary, "otyepel," "the thaw." And the regime never forgave him for that. He organized an exhibit of Picasso in 1956. Picasso was his lifelong friend. In Moscow, it was the first exhibit of the Soviet period. He wrote a 1,200-page memoir, which the regime tried to suppress, and he engineered its publication over the objections of Khrushchev, who was the dictator of the country. Now, how do you do that? It's a very complicated story.

Stephan Edwards: I actually have one more thing, too, to ask Professor Shaw. As we move toward tackling issues of human rights and mass violence, and your discussion about the limitations of narrative, and the limitations of traditional paradigms that we've been discussing about reconciliation, do you see modes or different kinds of structure in the future for addressing reconciliation outside of the narrative paradigm that we've been working with right now?

Rosalind Shaw: They already exist. People are already using them. All over Africa – in Mozambique, in Sudan, in Sierra Leone, in Senegal – people have developed their own strategies of reintegration and reconciliation or coexistence. I think there's now starting to be a groundswell of practitioners, activists, and scholars involved in transitional justice, who are starting to question the received wisdoms, the traditional paradigm. They know that one way in which we have to rethink this kind of traditional tool kit of transitional justice is by looking at what people are already doing and building on that.

Woman: I'm an international student from Russia, from Babson College, and I'd like to ask a question of Mr. Rubenstein. During the times of Stalin, in Russia, a lot of people were scared to speak, so I was wondering about your own reaction and perception about people who you talked to. Were they eager to talk to you? Were they eager to share? Or were they scared?

Josh Rubenstein: That's a very good question, because it had to do with the research I was doing. I like to tell people I began under Brezhnev and finished under Yeltsin. In the 1980s, I was there several times while Brezhnev was alive; then we got to the Gorbachev period. Gradually, people became more willing to speak, even to a microphone, but even more importantly, I had access to documents. I had full access to the archives by 1990. Probably if I had gone earlier, I could have, but certainly by 1990. And not only to the literary archives, but also at the Lenin library, I was also brought newspapers that had stamp on them for the special archive, the special shelves, which means they were not to be given out. But a scholar could come, a Russian scholar or an American student, and ask to see those newspapers, mainly from
the civil war period, when Ehrenburg was criticizing the Bolsheviks in Moscow. I was able to read those things, right from the Soviet archives. The Soviet Union only collapsed in '91. So, I found people to be increasingly willing to speak to me and be candid with me and not worry about microphones or being overheard.

Sophie Freud, Heller School graduate, retired professor of social work, Simmons College: I want to thank you for rehabilitating Ehrenburg, who was one of my admired authors in my youth. I'm surprised how many people seem to know him. I thought I was the only one.

In our government now, everything is divided between good and evil; it's just a relief to hear that ambiguity is still recognized as we did in these last two days. I want to express my appreciation for recognizing that.

Susannah Sirkin, deputy director, Physicians for Human Rights: I just wanted to make two observations. One of them relates to Corinne's discussion about Sierra Leone. I think it's really important to get a much deeper understanding from the populations that have gone through these traumas as to what people want. But I also think it's really important to separate what process is important for individuals and what process is important for the collective, the society as well as the history of the country, if you will. We did a study in Sierra Leone, one of the only random samples gathered of internally displaced women. It focused on sexual violence, on those who had been raped or abused by the RUF. We surveyed 900 households. We asked about what people wanted in terms of the response, whether they wanted prosecutions or truth commissions, whether they wanted to tell the story or not tell the story, whether they wanted to forgive or forget, and so forth. We found at least half did want something to happen to the perpetrators. Then, it sort of peeled off from there; we did find a significant proportion that did want to forgive and forget, or put it behind them. It was too traumatic. They just wanted to move on, have peace, get it over with. That was definitely a portion, but it was a minority, in fact. And then we found, by extrapolation, that as many as 10,000 women of the group that had been sexually violated in the course of the war wanted the opportunity or would be willing to tell their story in a court of law. And this is the hard thing, because if you say at the end of the day, "Well, we're not going to have a truth commission, we'll just have prosecutions," there's no way you can really prosecute every perpetrator, and those women will never all be able to tell their stories in court. So, there have to be other ways. But I want to endorse the complexity of this conversation and the importance of going to the people more and more in surveys. The International Center for Transitional Justice and University of California at Berkeley have just done a study, and they've actually surveyed whole populations as to what should be done. But to me, being in human rights for more than 20 years, seeing what happens to countries or societies that only forget is something that scares me. We know this also from the aftermath of the Holocaust. So even though individuals have a right to not tell their story and to forget, if everyone forgets, it's probably a bad thing because we know how this is likely to engender repetitions or pass festering wounds on, perhaps to another generation. I think that it's something that we have to think about.

Rosalind Shaw: First of all, I'd like to thank Physicians for Human Rights for their extraordinary report on sexual violence in Sierra Leone. That was an extremely important report. And of course, those who told their story to Physicians for Human Rights were not doing so in public, and their identities were protected. The kind of investigation that Physicians for Human
Rights did and the huge importance of that is, I think, completely undeniable. On the other hand, some of the claims that the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions tend to make and tend to get passed on as articles of faith, there's very little evidence behind them. There is very little evidence that Truth and Reconciliation Commissions act as some kind of national catharsis. There's very little evidence that they enable a nation to heal. There is very little evidence that memory, in any way, prevents the recurrence of conflicts. In fact, memory is just as likely to undermine coexistence as it is to promote coexistence. I think so many of the claims made about both the collective and the individual consequences of truth commissions really require proper investigation.

Dan Terris, director, International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life: First of all, I'd like to congratulate myself for persuading Leigh to take on the leadership of this conference, and congratulate Leigh for persuading Mark Auslander to join her, and then congratulate both of them for persuading such an extraordinary group of people to participate in what I think has been an extremely rich two days of conversation. Listening to this last panel on audience, efficacy, and ethics made me think that in some ways, this conference has really illustrated vividly the enormous gulf between how a story is told and how a story is heard. That is, of course, one of the incredible complexities and challenges of this whole field.

We've brought up this whole question of who owns a story, and we talked a lot about the ways in which so-called victims tell their stories and then don't necessarily have ownership of how it is heard, how it's re-told. We talked about the ethical problems regarding underage victims of gender-based violence and the ways in which they lose control of their own story even as they're speaking it. But we've also highlighted, I think in very powerful ways, the ways in which those who are telling the story, whether journalists or representatives of NGOs or anthropologists or anybody else, have a hard time keeping control of the stories that they think they are able to communicate. We heard this, literally, with regard to Physicians for Human Rights; they don't even own much of the evidence they have collected, and the stories they want to tell are in some ways constricted by sheer matters of ownership.

We've also talked a lot about the ways in which things get seen once they become public. Corinne started us off yesterday by showing us her photographs of the cholera epidemic that followed the Rwandan genocide, and she talked about how those are reinterpreted and imagined as testimony, as evidence, of the genocide itself. Once these stories become part of this larger public domain, how they're heard and how they're thought of isn't necessarily the way that they're first documented and presented. This is most powerful and most troubling in the ways in which stories that are told with one kind of imperative can so easily be integrated into the existing world views of those that are hearing them and processing them. In regard to the stories about the so-called child witches, we talked a lot about the ways in which those stories might be integrated into a worldview that saw Africa as a wounded continent, a dark continent, a primitive continent. But there are dozens of other ways in which stories can also be integrated into our existing worldviews. We all do this, whether we are integrating these stories into a worldview that says that these things can be attributed to particular bad guys – whether that's Charles Taylor or Saddam Hussein or Fidel Castro – or a worldview that says that many of these things can be traced to U.S. expansionism and to capitalism. Stories that start with one kind of imperative may end up in an entirely different place. Maybe for our next conference, with might think not only about how stories are generated and the complexities of that, but the specific dynamics of how
they create change, whether they create change, and what the complex interactions are between those that tell them and those who listen.