

Leurs, H. Rob, Utrecht University, Netherlands

Covering Genocide Trials. From ‘Trial by Media’ to ‘Medi/Trial’.

The traditional idea of ‘trial by media’ should be complemented with the new concept ‘media/trial’, as illustrated by the case against the businessman Frans van Anraat, one of Saddam Hussein’s suppliers of poison gas. ‘Media/trial’ shows how actors deliberately combine both media and legal discourses in order to intervene in legal processes. The Public Prosecution Service has, in the genocide trial against Van Anraat, employed media strategies to influence the legal process. For example: partly because the Public Prosecution Service heavily stressed upon the weight of the crimes in the media, the lawyers of the accused party could find no expert witnesses willing to expose their professional image to negative representations. This moreover enabled the Public Prosecution Service itself to hear witnesses. Also, the Public Prosecution Service employed media (TV, magazines) as evidence in court. These and other media strategies make apparent that media and legal processes are not only parallel to each other, as in the idea of ‘trial by media’, but that media can be used to influence court cases.