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Many Hundred Thousand Bodies Later: An Analysis of the ‘Legacy’ of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Hundreds of thousand persons were killed during those months 1994. It happened. How it happened we know because, across the globe, 24-hours news outlets re-produced the event everyday, every hour. Why it happened has become a matter of scholarly analyses and it is already a part of history. And then? In this paper, I provide an account -- which is not so much an answer to this question but -, an exploration of the event, the first decision of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda which, according to the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Anan, was a “landmark decision in the history of international criminal law,” one which “brings to life, for the first time, the ideals of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” While the examination of the first event, the killing of 800,000 persons, will be central to this analysis, I am primarily interested in the second precisely because of how its ‘legacy’ (past and possible future determinations) has yet to be determined. In the symbolic and legal resolution of the first event, the killings, we find a deployment of cultural difference that announces the other side of the global juridico-symbolic programme consolidated during the past decade or so. That is, the same notion of cultural difference - intrinsic to multiculturalism and diversity – informing multilateral organizations (such as the UN, the WTO) and multinational corporations’ demand that governments implement legal reforms to include their racial/ethnic internal “others,” which are usually celebrated as consolidations of the human rights programme, the paper argues, has also been deployed to **explain** why many thousand persons were killed in Rwanda. Framed as a map of today’s global ethico-juridic programme, this paper engages international criminal law hoping to unsettle all too easy returns to universality, which sustains the human rights programme, as the sole foundation of collective existence.