

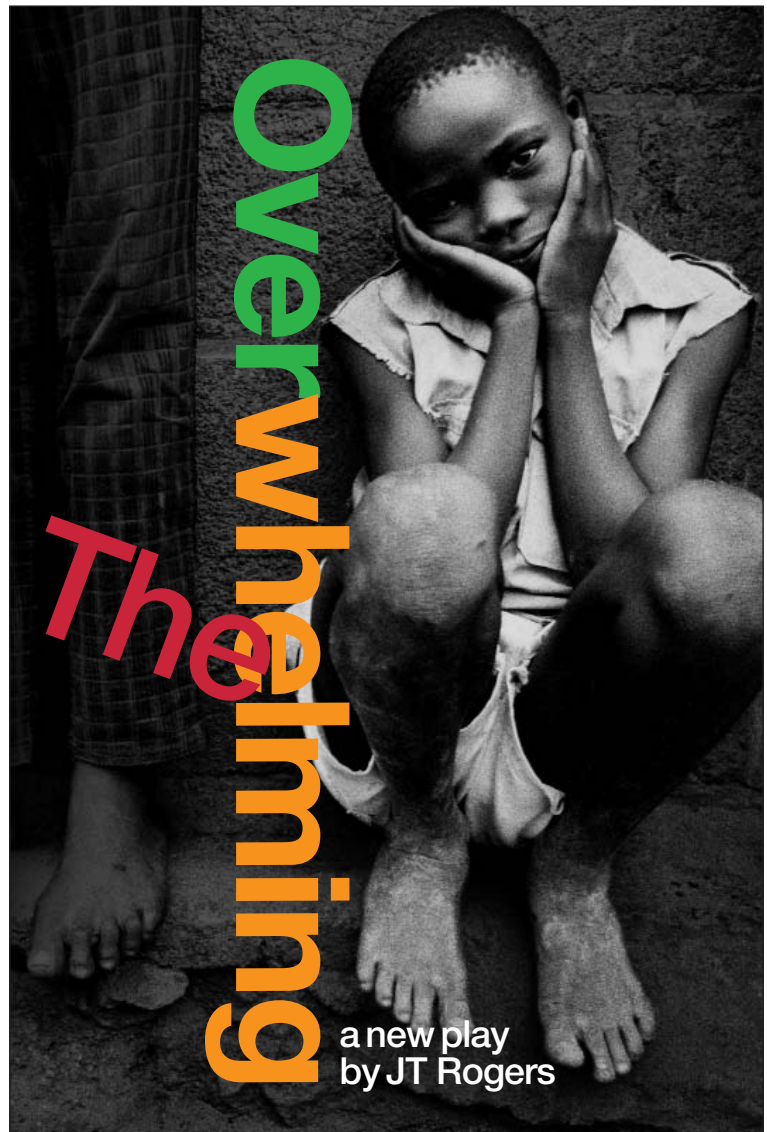
The Overwhelming

by JT Rogers

in association with Out of Joint

Background Pack

Introduction
Context of the play
Synopsis
Interview with JT Rogers, the author
Rehearsals
Interviews
Discussion points
Practical exercises
Written work and research
References and glossary
Resources on the Rwandan Genocide
The Aegis Trust
Bibliography and links



Young prisoner in Gitarama, Rwanda,
accused of genocide
photo: Getty Images

The Overwhelming
a new play by JT Rogers

Director
Max Stafford-Clark

Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

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The Overwhelming

CAST

Characters, in order of speaking

Charles Woolsey **WILLIAM ARMSTRONG**

Jack Exley **MATTHEW MARSH**

Joseph Gasana **JUDE AKUWUDIKE**

Jean-Claude Buisson **NICK FLETCHER**

Linda White-Keeler **TANYA MOODIE**

Geoffrey Exley **ANDREW GARFIELD**

Samuel Mizinga **DANNY SAPANI**

Rwandan Politician **LUCIAN MSAMATI**

Gerard **BABOU CEESAY**

Rwandan Doctor **CHIPO CHUNG**

British Red

Cross Doctor **WILLIAM ARMSTRONG**

Jan Verbeek **NICK FLETCHER**

Elise Kayitesi **CHIPO CHUNG**

Policeman **LUCIAN MSAMATI**

Woman in Club **ADURA ONASHILE**

UN Major **LUCIAN MSAMATI**

Other parts played by members of the Company

Director **MAX STAFFORD-CLARK**

Designer **TIM SHORTALL**

Lighting Designer **JOHANNA TOWN**

Sound Designer **GARETH FRY**

Dialect Coaches

**JEAN-PIERRE BLANCHARD,
MARY BLEWITT, KATE GODFREY,
GABO WILSON**

Assistant Director **JESSICA SWALE** (Out of Joint)

SETTING: Kigali, Rwanda, early 1994

The Overwhelming was originally developed in the US at Salt Lake Acting Company with support from the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program. The play was further developed with the support of PlayPenn.

OPENING OF THIS PLAY: Cottesloe Theatre 7 May 2006.

The 2006 tour:

5-9 September Oxford Playhouse
01865 305 305 oxfordplayhouse.com

12-16 September

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds
0113 213 7700 wyp.org.uk

19-23 September

Nuffield Theatre, Southampton
023 8067 1771 nuffieldtheatre.co.uk

26-30 September Liverpool Everyman
0151 709 4776 everymanplayhouse.com

3-7 October Library Theatre, Manchester
0161 236 7110 librarytheatre.com

The programme for the production of *The Overwhelming*, is available to purchase from all the tour venues and from the National Theatre's Bookshop.

T: 020 7452 3456 F: 020 7452 3457

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W: nationaltheatre.org.uk

To fully utilise the activities at the end of this pack, we recommend you purchase the script for *The Overwhelming* (published by Faber), which can be purchased from the National's Bookshop or from Out of Joint's website.

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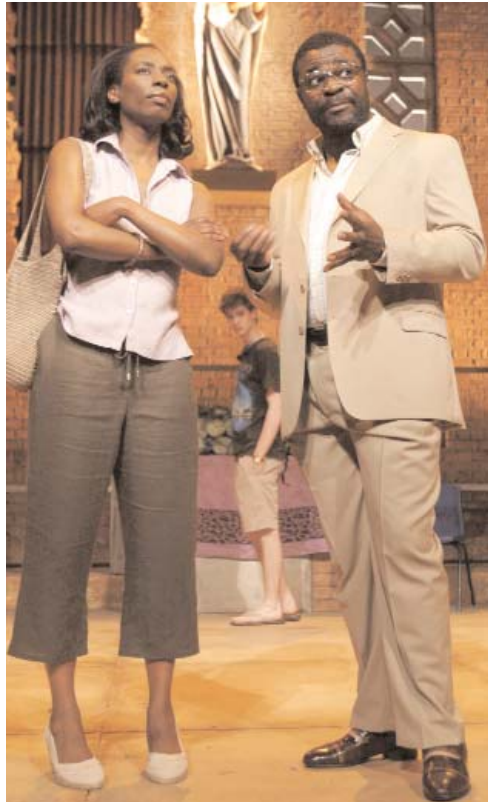
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Introduction



From left: Tanya Moodie (as Linda White-Keeler) and Danny Sapari (as Samuel Mizinga)
photo: John Haynes

The Overwhelming is set in January 1994 in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. In early 1994 the political situation was volatile and years of fighting between Hutus and Tutsis meant bitterness and anger were rife. The extremist radio station Radio Milles Collines regularly broadcast hate propaganda, encouraging Hutus to prepare to attack the Tutsis. Many believed that trouble was imminent. Nobody – except the organisers of the massacre – could have anticipated the scale of the horrific atrocities which were to follow.

The play begins when Jack Exley, a well-intentioned American university lecturer, arrives in Kigali to undertake research for his book. His study is a comparative analysis of grass-roots activists, an attempt to prove that low-profile individuals can have an impact in society, through selfless action and benevolence. The book comprises a number of case studies of people who have 'made a difference'. Recently, Jack has received a letter out of the blue from his roommate at university, Joseph Gasana, inviting him to Kigali. Joseph is a Rwandan doctor treating children with AIDS. Jack decides that Joseph would be the perfect central case study for his book and, as he has been threatened with redundancy if he does not publish his book soon, he decides to take the opportunity to visit. Renting out his US home, he moves his family – his son, Geoffrey, and second wife, Linda – to Rwanda for a semester whilst he meets Joseph. The play opens at Jack's arrival in Kigali; Linda and Geoffrey are to follow the next day.

Context: the Rwandan genocide

In the spring of 1994, approximately 1 million Rwandans were murdered by their fellow countrymen, whilst the West stood back and watched.

WHO ARE HUTUS AND TUTSIS?

The terms 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' were first used informally to distinguish between the wealthier and poorer classes. The Tutsis (the elite) could become Hutus (the poorer workers) if they lost cattle or land, and vice versa. The Tutsis' association with power, wealth and supremacy explains some of the ingrained animosity towards them, especially as they have always been the minority (Rwanda is approximately 85% Hutus, 14% Tutsis and 1% Twa, a pygmy race who live in the forests). However, the two groups have never been culturally distinct: they share language, religion, traditions and villages.

DIVIDING THE NATION: THE HUTU/ TUTSI CLASSIFICATION

The main troubles began when Belgian colonists arrived in 1918. They divided the population into the two distinct groups and began classifying every individual as either Hutu or Tutsi. Unsurprisingly, this caused resentment amongst those named as Hutu, who felt they had been permanently assigned an inferior status. In 1926, the Belgians introduced compulsory identity cards, stating each individual's ethnic group. Children inherited their father's ethnicity (in *The Overwhelming* Joseph's children are Tutsis because he is). Identity was no longer flexible.

Under Belgian rule the Tutsis enjoyed greater opportunities than their Hutu neighbours – homes, jobs and educational opportunities. Preferential treatment was used widely in colonial times as a concept of 'divide and rule'. As a result, the Hutus grew increasingly resentful.

When the Tutsi king, Mwaami Rudahinga, died in 1959, he was replaced by a Hutu king. The Belgians now favoured the extremist Hutus who drove the Tutsis into an area called Bugesera, where water was scarce and provision was monitored. Many who were considered potential

enemies were murdered, leading hundreds of thousands of Tutsis to flee to neighbouring countries to seek refuge. This was the first of many massacres, purges and attacks over the next 40 years, pushing more and more Tutsis into exile. It is estimated that by 1965, half the Rwandan Tutsi population was living outside the country.

Under the extremist Hutu rule, differentiation between Hutus and Tutsis was made very clear in the classrooms and in access to all services and jobs. The Tutsi population who remained were extremely excluded in their own society. Their rights as citizens in the country were stripped to the minimum. The safety of their lives, families and homes was not guaranteed as waves of massacres took place and the international community did not respond.

RWANDA IN FINANCIAL CRISIS

In 1989 Rwanda was hit hard by a drop in the market price of coffee. As coffee was one of Rwanda's main exports, the effect on the country's financial stability was severe and many were left impoverished. In fact, the whole of the Great Lakes region was affected by the economic crisis. Neighbouring countries sheltering refugees from Rwanda pressurised the Rwandan Government to take back its own people. Under this pressure and the lack-lustre economy in Rwanda, the extremist Hutu government began to prepare its people for the complete destruction of the Tutsi population, fearing the impending return of the refugees.

PREPARING FOR WARFARE

Many exiled Tutsis began forming the RPF, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which aimed to overthrow the totalitarian regime led by the extremist Hutus. This would allow Tutsis and exiled moderate Hutus to return to their homeland. In October 1990 the RPF invaded from Uganda, and after much bloodshed, a ceasefire was signed in March 1991. Two years later, in February 1993, the RPF invaded again, this time making further progress. Tension grew continually.

Meanwhile in Rwanda, the Hutu army began

Context: the Rwandan genocide

training the *Interahamwe*, the civilian Hutu militia which aimed to destroy Tutsi civilians and maintain Hutu rule.

PEACE ACCORDS: A REALISTIC OPTION?

Under the pressure from neighbouring governments, in August 1993 Rwanda's Hutu President, Juvénal Habyarimana, agreed to the Arusha Accords. This peace agreement involved power-sharing between Hutus and Tutsis, and the amalgamation of the RPF and the Rwandan Army. This would mean that many prominent positions in the government and army would include Tutsis and was therefore extremely unpopular with radical Hutus who did not want any Tutsis to have access to power. Consequently, the UN sent troops into Kigali to oversee the implementation of the peace accords. But tension continued to grow and the underground training of the *Interahamwe* intensified.

BREAKING POINT

The beginning of the genocide was sparked by the death of President Habyarimana after his plane was shot down over Kigali on 6 April 1994. Several high-ranking government officials and the President of Burundi, who were passengers, were also killed. No one has ever been proved responsible. While it is probable that the radical Hutu government shot Habyarimana down for doing a deal with the RPF, the event was used as powerful propaganda against the Tutsi population. They were blamed for plotting to overthrow the government, thus proving that they were a threat to the Hutu population. As soon as the plane crashed, the news was broadcast through the radio sets which had been distributed by the extremist government. Clear instructions were given to act, to set up roadblocks and stop any Tutsis from escaping. Within two hours, the capital city was paralysed and the killing started.

THE KILLINGS BEGIN

Within hours of the President's death, a ruthless campaign of murder and violence swept through Kigali. All leaders of the Tutsi opposition were killed and the mass slaughter of Tutsis and

moderate Hutus began. The genocide was meticulously prepared; lists were handed out naming all Tutsis in every street with orders to kill them all. The *Interahamwe* set up roadblocks to ensure that no Tutsi could escape and killers moved from house to house, murdering every Tutsi they could find. It is estimated that thousands died on the first day. Yet whilst the *Interahamwe* continued to slaughter innocents, the UN did not intervene because their mandate was to monitor the peace, not to enforce it. Tutsis were killed in their thousands: there was no one to defend them.

INTERNATIONAL INACTION

On 21 April 1994, ten Belgian soldiers were killed by Hutu extremists. Adhering to their mandate of non-violence, the UN decided not to attempt to take action. Instead, they withdrew 2,250 of their troops, leaving only 250 in Rwanda. UN troops had been guarding churches, schools and other buildings where many Tutsis sheltered from the militia. As soon as the troops left, the *Interahamwe* entered and killed everyone they could find, often thousands of individuals. As the killing continued, the UN Security Council spent weeks and months debating what to do about the crisis. They condemned the killing, but chose not to use the term 'genocide' because they believed that international conventions would legally oblige them to intervene in order to prevent genocide.

In May, the UN finally agreed to send 6,800 troops into Rwanda, mainly Africans. But the mission was severely delayed while the US Government and the UN argued over who would fund the provision of tanks. A month later, with no sign of the arrival of the UN peacekeeping force, the slaughter continued. The US still forbade its spokespeople from using the word 'genocide', fearing there would be greater pressure to respond.

In July, the Rwandan army was finally defeated by the RPF, who set up an Interim Government of national unity in the capital. The Hutu government fled and hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly Hutus, poured out of Rwanda

Context: the Rwandan genocide

into refugee camps. Some were still in Rwanda, but most were across the border in the country then known as Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Within the camps, genocide leaders continued to organise militias to murder Tutsis. Some Hutus were killed in revenge attacks, and tens of thousands died after a cholera epidemic swept through the camps.

THE AFTERMATH

Since the end of the genocide, a small percentage of the perpetrators have been convicted and tens of thousands are still imprisoned. Hundreds of thousands await trial. However, many of the powerful figures behind the genocide have evaded punishment, using their contacts to flee the continent and now residing in safety in other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom. In Rwanda, the survivors, many of whom lost their entire families, communities and villages, struggle to live with the memories of what happened. The legacy of the genocide continues.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: EMPTY PROMISES?

By the end of July 1994, over one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus had been murdered, and many others left homeless and impoverished. In 1993, less than a year before the genocide began, President Clinton had made a speech at the opening of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum about the horrors of genocide in the Second World War, "Far too little was done. We must not permit that to happen again." Four years after the Rwandan genocide, in March 1998, Clinton arrived in Kigali to deliver another speech, this time apologising to the victims of the Rwandan genocide. The same words resounded, "Never again." During his visit, Clinton met several survivors, then boarded a plane and left, never having stepped outside the airport.

Synopsis: *The Overwhelming*

Words underlined in this synopsis are defined in the glossary on page 25

ACT ONE

“If the world were flat, this would be the edge”: Jack’s introduction to Rwanda

CHARLES WOOLSEY, an official from the US Embassy in Rwanda, drives JACK EXLEY from the airport to Kigali. Jack knows comparatively little about Rwanda, and, despite positive messages broadcasted in the West about peace agreements, the country is less stable politically than he had imagined. JOSEPH GASANA appears at the end of the scene, as he does regularly during the first act, speaking the contents of his letter to Jack. Each of Joseph’s appearances leaves a slightly darker impression: whilst early on he jokes about fame and the thrills of souvenir t-shirts, his later remarks express greater urgency, as Joseph writes of the hardships of his “struggle to be patient” (scene 23).

Later, Jack and Woolsey converse over beers in the Milles Collines Hotel bar. Jack is concerned about apathy and he hopes the trip will “instill a sense of humility and... questioning” in Geoffrey (scene 3). He is shocked to learn that their waiter may soon be killed by militants, the first indication that murder is not uncommon here.

From left:
Lucian Msamati (as the UN Major)
and Matthew Marsh as Jack Exley
photo: John Haynes



“Welcome to Rwanda”: The Cocktail Party

At the party at the French Embassy the next evening a group gathers: LINDA WHITE-KEELER, Jack’s ambitious wife, who seeks interviewees for an article she is writing; GEOFFREY EXLEY, Jack’s tersely-spoken son; JEAN-CLAUDE BUISSON, a French diplomat, and SAMUEL MIZINGA, a government official, who offers to help Linda with her article. Jack speaks passionately about his belief in an individual’s capacity to provoke change, only to be interrupted by an aggressive Rwandan man who argues, in *Kinyarwanda*, that individuals here are suppressed by filthy cockroaches (scene 7) – Tutsis, who must all be murdered. Despite the Americans’ lack of comprehension, they are unsettled by his tone. Later that evening Jack attempts to bond with his son, who is still angry that his father left his mother for Linda.

“There is no Gasana here”: Jack makes a discovery

Jack goes to Kigali Central Hospital to meet Joseph, as arranged, only to be told that “We have no one by that name on our staff” (scene 9). Bewildered, Jack instead tries the International Red Cross Hospital, where a BRITISH DOCTOR tells him a rumour that Joseph’s funding has been cut, a sign that he may have been in trouble with the authorities. He advises Jack to beware of Rwandan bureaucracy, and suggests that Joseph, who is Tutsi, might well have fled the country: “Right now, if I were Tutsi? Christ, I wouldn’t stay here.” (scene 12)

“I wait for the Ping”: Linda and Geoffrey explore

Meanwhile, Linda and Geoffrey move into the house Mizinga has found for them, and discover that they have a live-in servant, GÉRARD. Mizinga takes them sightseeing, and advises Linda that he is the only reliable source of information: the UN are “strangers who do not understand what is happening here”. He turns her against the Tutsi RPF, “terrorists armed to the teeth”, and warns that the only way to stop Rwanda’s cycle of violence is “to wipe the slate clean and start again.” (all scene 14). Later, Linda is again advised against mixing with Tutsis, when a market trader presses her not to

Synopsis: *The Overwhelming*

buy vegetables from a woman who is, he says, “a filthy Tutsi whore, miss... She will poison you and you will die” (scene 15).

Geoffrey returns home to find Gérard reading a book written in English. Gérard pleads with him to tell no-one, in case he gets associated with the ‘rebels’, who are English speakers: “It is dangerous to be confused with those people” (scene 16). Geoffrey offers the book to Gérard as a gift, and their friendship begins.

“We can’t go back”: bad news

That evening, Woolsey phones the house with the news that Joseph’s clinic has been closed. Jack grows extremely worried. Later, when Linda answers the phone, the caller hangs up.

“There’s a party over here”: Geoffrey and Gérard bond

Geoffrey and Gérard spend time together, and when Geoffrey confides that his mother is dead, Gérard reveals his entire family was killed by Tutsis in Burundi. He is Hutu and fears that a similar fate will befall him.

“Nietzsche, Montaigne, Linda”: Linda looks for her ‘ping’

Meanwhile, Linda meets Jean-Claude, who resents the US presence in Rwanda, believing Rwanda is “our [France’s] sphere of influence.

Now, of course, you wish to have influence here and to supplant us” (scene 20). He believes the US government trained the RPF, now a dangerous guerrilla army. Finally, he warns Linda to be less direct with her questioning: “the straight road is rarely the one to walk” (scene 20), and advises her to seek any future answers only from him.

“Everything’s riding on this book”: Jack’s mission continues

Jack meets VERBEEK, a South African in Kigali researching human rights issues. He explains that financial and political strife have dominated since the coffee market crashed. He believes the UN’s imposed power-sharing agreements are farcical, because there is no democracy to support them, and no hope of democracy in this climate of violence and fear. Jack reveals that his job depends on the publication of his book.

“I am Elise Kayitesi”: the unexpected guest

Later that evening, in the house, Linda answers the phone to find again that there is no one there. A woman arrives, distressed and alone. She is ELISE KAYITESI, Joseph’s wife.

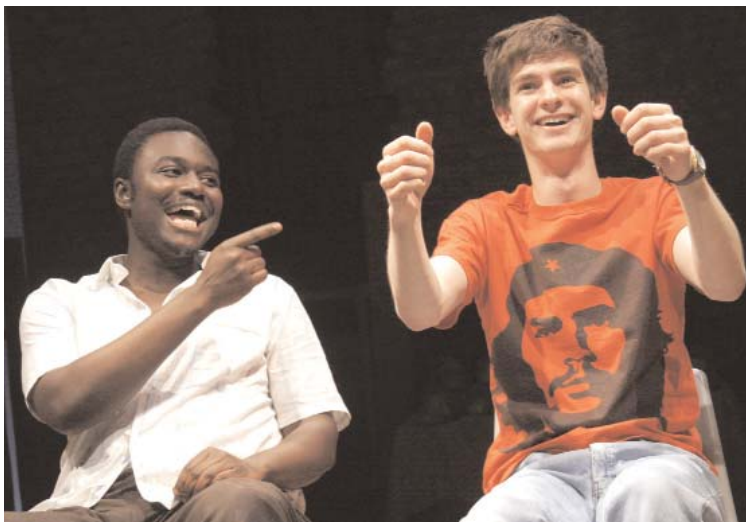
ACT 2

The same night, Elise explains to Jack and Linda that Joseph has been missing for over a week. Concerned for the safety of her children, she has sent them to stay with relatives in Butare (Elise is Hutu, but ethnicity is through the father). She begs Jack to alert the authorities to Joseph’s disappearance: being white and foreign he is more likely to be listened to. Elise reveals that Joseph has spent time in prison. When Jack later tells Linda that he neither knew about this, nor about Joseph’s family, she grows suspicious about Joseph.

“We are preparing to cleanse this country”: Jack goes to the police

The following day, Jack receives no help when he appeals to a policeman, a radical Hutu. Woolsey later chides Jack for not realising that he ought to bribe policemen if he expects help. He warns that something may have happened to Joseph: “You need to face facts: He’s a

From left:
Babou Ceesay (as Gérard) and
Andrew Garfield (as Geoffrey Exley)
photo: John Haynes



Synopsis: *The Overwhelming*

prominent Tutsi, doing work that made him stand out. The tall nails are the ones getting hammered here, Jack” (scene 3).

“Please do not let them die”: Elise enlists Linda’s help

Linda and Elise meet at the Milles Collines Hotel. Elise is concerned about her husband’s disappearance, but Linda is eager to interview her, and asks inappropriately direct questions about the dynamics of their Hutu-Tutsi marriage. After explaining the division of ethnicities as merely a “*fabrication politique*” imposed by the Belgians, Elise gives Linda a note with the names and address of her sons in Butare, asking her to ensure their safety.

“She’s not interested in your French”: Geoffrey makes a new friend

That night, Gérard takes Geoffrey to a local nightclub and, to the annoyance of a Rwandan Hutu man, introduces him to a WOMAN, Emerita, a Tutsi prostitute. She invites Geoffrey to sleep with her and leads him upstairs.

“A black African man. In this world, what is that?”: Jack’s rude awakening

The following day, Jack goes to UNAMIR to ask for help finding Joseph. The UN MAJOR there explains that no-one will assist him: if the UN weren’t prepared to investigate the deaths of ninety of their own officers, they will never agree to assist in an enquiry about one African man.

“To suffer and to suffer, and yet to struggle on: this is what makes life precious”: Mizinga’s influence grows

On an excursion, Linda enthuses to Mizinga about the beauty of Rwanda. He explains that she cannot truly appreciate life because she has never had to fight for what she has. He shows her RPF guerrillas, “sharpening their knives, preparing to murder us, steal our land” (scene 9). He claims they are supported by the UN. Finally, he tells her that Joseph is a killer of Hutu children... “giving medicine only to Tutsi, so that only our children would die” (scene 9).

“Something is happening”: The investigation darkens...

Jack meets Verbeek, who warns him that trouble is imminent. UNAMIR soldiers have found civilians massacred in a village, but Verbeek cannot report it to the authorities because he needs further proof. He warns Jack that Joseph’s name has been mentioned in connection with “serious business... Passing on information about weapons, caches” (scene 8). Verbeek is alarmed to hear that Linda has been speaking to Mizinga who, Verbeek reveals, is a dangerous Hutu extremist.

“Lists of Names”: Jack receives one shock... and then another

Jack is called to the police station, where he is shown Joseph’s faceless body on a gurney. Distressed, Jack goes to Woolsey, who urges him to drop his investigations, for fear of becoming too involved. Returning home, Jack finds Joseph there, alive – he had to fake his own death in order to survive. Joseph reveals that there are lists of Tutsis who are to be killed and he wanted Jack to come to Rwanda to help expose these lists, as he believed only a white man would be taken seriously. He urges Jack to put them “into the hands of people who will protect” (scene 13). Jack agrees, and hides Joseph in the house. When Geoffrey meets Joseph, he is sworn to secrecy.

“I’m just... what can I do?”: Geoffrey’s first challenge

The following morning, Gérard asks Geoffrey to take him and his family out of Rwanda to safety. Geoffrey has to refuse and seems increasingly unnerved by his situation. Gérard knows Jack is hiding a Tutsi.

“When you find yourself in a hole, Jack, stop digging”: dead ends

Jack leaves the house early to tell Woolsey about the lists. To Jack’s horror, Woolsey already knows but will not pursue it, and enlists Jack not to. Jack visits Verbeek, who warns that getting involved is extremely dangerous: he has seen what happens to those who try.

“Do not trust a husband who does not trust you.” Linda’s dilemmas

Elise tells Linda that her home has been

Synopsis: *The Overwhelming*

ransacked by people searching for something. She knows Jack has spoken to Joseph, which astonishes Linda, as Jack has not shared this information with her. Elise asks her to tell Joseph she is going to flee the country with her children. Linda goes to Jean-Claude to request protection for Elise, and hands the details of the family's whereabouts to him. Jean-Claude files the details before telling her that "Joseph Gasana is a terrorist with blood on his hands" (scene 18).

"I don't want to be here": Geoffrey's resilience is tested

Geoffrey rebuffs Joseph's suspicion that Gérard may not be trustworthy. He returns to the club where he realises that, like Gérard, all Emerita wants from him is to be taken to safety, despite his affections for her. She leaves and Geoffrey pursues her, only to find her brutally murdered.

"This will mean nothing to you soon": Jack faces the ultimate challenge

At the house, Linda is furious that Jack lied to her. Mizinga has persuaded her that Joseph is a dangerous terrorist, yet Joseph tries to explain that Mizinga is a Hutu extremist, one of the individuals behind 'the lists'. Joseph had been imprisoned and tortured for daring to speak out. He has probably helped the RPF but only by alerting them to where the opposition store their weapons. Suddenly there is a gun shot, the lights go out, and there is great commotion. No sooner does Geoffrey arrive and realise Gérard is missing, than Mizinga and the man from the cocktail party burst in, demanding Joseph. Linda, in total fear, offers them Joseph and the lists, and panics: "WE DO NOT BELONG HERE! THIS IS NOT OUR PROBLEM!" (Scene 22). Jack attempts to intervene but when they hold a gun on his son, he is forced to make a grave decision. Jack gives Joseph up to the men, sentencing him to imminent death. On leaving, Mizinga tells them that "this will mean nothing to you soon... All of this, it is so unimportant to you. You will go home and forget" (scene 22).

Joseph signs off his letter – as Jack's true friend – stating with painful irony that "The past here is an argument; the future, unknown. But today, in the present... I have hope."

JT Rogers on *The Overwhelming*

(In interview with Out of Joint)

OjO: What prompted you to write *The Overwhelming*? Did you want to write a Rwanda play, or did Rwanda's history provide the appropriate setting for the story that you wanted to write anyway?

JT: When the genocide occurred, I was riveted, appalled and confused, knowing nothing of the region or the background of the conflict. So I started reading and asking questions. When I find myself asking questions about a subject I can't find clear answers to, this often leads me to wanting to write about that subject. From the beginning I wanted to tell a story that a Western theatre audience would invest in. If I was going to write about the politics of a place deeply foreign to almost everyone watching, then the form of the play would need to be something that they could sink their teeth into.

But I didn't know how to approach a subject so vast. How does one "write" about "a genocide" without diminishing the scope of events that are unimaginable to those who were not there?

My ah-ha moment was choosing to set the action right before the genocide. This way I could focus on a very specific story, while the spectre of what is to come knocks on the door, louder and louder as the play progresses. Letting the audience imagine the unimaginable seemed the most dramatically effective choice, and the most ethical.

How does *The Overwhelming* fit in with your other plays? What interests you as a writer?

I'm a fiction writer rather than a memoirist. I write about what interests me in the world, often using the writing of a play as a way to learn about something new: the history of Rwanda in *The Overwhelming*, microeconomic theory and the founding of New Amsterdam, now New York City, in my plays *Madagascar* and *White People*, respectively.

Each time I try to write something as different as possible from my last work. I am interested in what I call the defining moment, an event where a person's life, everything they know and believe, is called into question and where the actions they next take will define the rest of their

lives. And I'm interested in asking questions that I, and I hope the audience, don't already know the answers to before the curtain goes up.

You visited Rwanda with Max. What did you learn, and how has that influenced the play? When you wrote the original draft, how did you know so much about the build-up to the genocide?

I had never been to Rwanda. This, to put it mildly, was a hurdle. How was I going to write about a country I did not know, with dialogue in two different languages (French and Kinyarwanda) I did not speak? I read 10,000 pages of history, fiction, memoir, academic articles, government reports, and also studied maps and street plans. Then I set down a rule that scenes could only take place in locations that I felt I could accurately convey without having set foot in Kigali. After writing a draft, I contacted Rwandais genocide survivors in the States who were incredibly generous with their time, translating passages for me, pointing out what I had gotten wrong, and suggesting what I might want to look into further. Their enthusiasm for the play and excitement about how accurate its details were humbled me.

Then, getting to go to Rwanda with Max was remarkable. To see the landscape I'd only seen in pictures was surreal. While interviewing there, we tried to focus on what people thought and knew during January and February 1994, the time period of *The Overwhelming*. What we were told and what we saw caused me to make numerous small changes throughout. What was most instructive was to feel palpably how small and interconnected Rwanda is. We heard more than once, "Here everyone knows everyone, and everything about you." And how this could give rise to claustrophobia and terror. As for what I heard from people about what they experienced during the genocide, these are things I will never forget.

The rehearsal process

Max Stafford-Clark, the director of *The Overwhelming*, is known for his 'actioning method', and for the importance of research as part of rehearsing. Rehearsals for *The Overwhelming* were characterised by a drive to understand as fully as possible the Rwandan genocide, in order to do justice to both the text and those represented in the script. The first two weeks of the six-week rehearsal period were committed to 'actioning', before attempting to move the play. Throughout the process, Max used a variety of exercises and activities to help the actors develop their characters, experiment with the dynamics of the text, and gain understanding of the world of the play.

This chapter describes some of the techniques they used, with examples of their practical use in rehearsals. These methods can be applied to any text and help make rehearsals both stimulating and enjoyable.

1. ACTIONING

Before each scene is blocked (setting the movements), the actors sit at a table and 'action' each line. This process involves working through the script and finding a transitive verb for each line (something you can do to the other actor – amuse, excite, probe etc). This helps the actors pin down their motivation. For more details of how the actioning process works, read exercise 1 in Practical Exercises on page 21. After

Max Stafford-Clark in rehearsals,
with Nick Fletcher
photo John Haynes



actioning, a script may look something like this (actions are in bold in brackets):

ACT 2, SCENE 14.

(GEOFFREY and GÉRARD in the car, the next morning. GEOFFREY is driving.)

GÉRARD (**reprimands**) Slowly! Slowly! / (**advises**) These dirt roads, you will crack the chassis! (**scolds**) You should not go driving when you are angry, Geoffrey!

GEOFFREY (**satisfies**) Sorry. Forgot. Sorry. (Snapping at him) (**rebukes**) Look, I'll be more careful!

GÉRARD (**lectures**) A woman should not speak to you like that.

GEOFFREY (**deflects**) Don't worry about it.

GÉRARD (**mocks**) Stand in your way, try to block you from going out. (Waving his arms) (**amuses**) Jumping about like some chicken!

GEOFFREY (**halts**) I said it's cool!

GÉRARD (**quizzes**) Cool?

GEOFFREY (**appeases**) Yeah.

GÉRARD (**probes**) Cool...?

GEOFFREY (**teaches**) Means good.

GÉRARD (**presses**) Like hot?

GEOFFREY (**satisfies**) Exactly.

GÉRARD (**checks**) Cool is good and hot is good?

GEOFFREY (**pleases**) Yeah.

GÉRARD (**entertains**) Fantastique! When I go to America I will say (**pinning**), "This is cool," and "That is hot," (**amuses**) and I will sex all the women.

The rehearsal process

2. IMPROVISATION

In such an episodic play, where action moves quickly between characters and scenes, it can become difficult to weave together the threads of action and make sense of the intricacies of each character's movements. Max planned improvisations which 'filled in the gaps', showing us the linking parts of the story which we don't see on stage, in order to give the actors a clear idea of their own actions.

For example, we improvised a scene in the house the morning after Joseph appears. The script tells us that Jack leaves the house early to tell Woolsey about the lists, but we wondered how he avoids telling Linda about Joseph. Each character was given an objective – Geoffrey's was to borrow the car, Linda's to speak to her husband, Jack's to avoid Linda – and we played out the action. In the improvisation, Jack manages to slip out of the house by asking Gérard to take tea to Linda in her room, when he has said he would. Linda, unsurprisingly, is furious when she realises Jack has left, and takes out her anger on Geoffrey, who merely wants to borrow the car. The next time we see Geoffrey and Gérard, they are driving off, and Geoffrey has just argued with Linda. Spontaneously, during the improvisation, the

circumstances of the argument were revealed, and the time gap filled in. This allowed the actors to gain a much stronger idea of their own movements and motivations.

3. STATUS GAMES

From the first day of rehearsals a brown leather wallet sat on the rehearsal table, unclaimed. It wasn't until the second week that its purpose was revealed: it held a set of playing cards belonging to Max. The cards were used in rehearsal to experiment with the intensity of scenes. For instance, having rehearsed Linda's conversation with Elise at the Milles Collines Hotel (Act 2 scene 4), Max decided that it would be far more interesting if Elise was angrier with Linda for asking highly insensitive questions and assuming she understands Elise's predicament. Max asked Chipo Chung (the actor playing Elise) to choose a card at random, and not reveal it to us. She chose a 4, so portrayed Elise as a little frustrated, but anxious to please. Chipo then picked another card – an 8. This time she played Elise as more and more frustrated at Linda's offhand comments, until her speech blaming the West for 'doing nothing' was delivered with more vexation and intensity than ever before. The scene became infinitely more powerful, and the new dynamics were agreed upon.



Matthew Marsh and Tanya Moodie
photo: John Haynes

The rehearsal process

4. RESEARCH

• Books, videos and speakers

It was imperative that we all understood the context of the play. On the first day we arrived in the rehearsal room to find a mountainous pile of books. To the surprise of those actors who hadn't worked with Max before, we were each designated chapters from various books, and asked to prepare talks in groups of three or four.

We chose favourite extracts and quotes, dramatising elements and summarising others, trying to give the entire company an overview of each text. In addition, we watched several documentaries and films, and various speakers came into rehearsals to share their experiences with us, including David Belton, Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, Steve Crawshaw, Lindsey Hilsum and Fergal Keane. Despite the fact that much of what we learnt will never be seen in the final production, the information and awareness of the subject informed everyone's approach to the text, and enabled the company to bond together through collective learning and experience.

• A Trip to Rwanda

One of the most interesting pre-rehearsal elements of research saw JT Rogers and Max travel to Kigali to gain first-hand experience of the country, its people and its history. Regularly during the rehearsal process they would tell us stories of survivors they had met and show us photographs of places they had visited, many of which were locations in the play. The photographs directly influenced the set design in terms of colour, ambience, textures and cultural reference points. Their first-hand experience gave the rest of the company some insight into life in Rwanda twelve years on.

5. RE-ENACTING INTERVIEWS

Inspired by the research, several of the actors took the initiative and found relevant people to interview outside the rehearsal room. On returning, they took on the roles of their interviewees and we asked them questions. This was particularly interesting when three actors had visited a Hutu refugee who had moved to London, as the resulting character was played by all three simultaneously!

Interviews with the Company

CHIPO CHUNG: The actor playing Elise Kayitesi and the Rwandan Doctor

You've worked with Max before, on *Talking to Terrorists*, a verbatim play exploring the way in which ordinary people are driven to commit extraordinary atrocities. Can you tell me how the rehearsal process on *The Overwhelming* compares, considering the script for *Talking to Terrorists* is constructed from real life testimonies, whereas *The Overwhelming* is a fictional play based around real events?

Max is very interested in research. He likes getting people who have really experienced the circumstances of the play into rehearsals. We've had lots of speakers in for *The Overwhelming* rehearsals, and as *Talking to Terrorists* was based on a series of interviews, there have been a lot of similarities. However, the research itself for *Talking to Terrorists* became the play. There was a direct transmission of material from the interviews to the stage, even to the extent that the set design reflected elements of our rehearsal room, where the interviews were conducted. The script for the *The Overwhelming* was completed long before rehearsals began, although the playwright was very flexible about making updates as we discovered new ideas and facts. The territory is quite similar in the sense that both plays are concerned with international relations and the West's impact on other cultures. They both straddle tricky material because they are based on fact, and a lot of the events in *The Overwhelming* really did happen. However, I think there is a certain freedom that you can get from fiction, and the characters in this play are all fictional. There was a real responsibility in *Talking to Terrorists* to stay absolutely faithful to the interviewees, as it was word-for-word, which was quite restricting in some ways. In *The Overwhelming* there is greater freedom to use drama, to tell a very important truth, which is liberating. Sometimes I think a greater truth can be told through fiction.

Which elements of research were most helpful to you in terms of developing your characters? Which has been most useful in contemplating what life might have been like

for a Tutsi woman prior to the genocide?

As I have never visited Rwanda, and came to the play with a relatively superficial understanding of what happened, I found the book-based research to be extremely helpful. Understanding and analysing the situation is very important. What happened is such an aberration, and the circumstances in which it occurred so chaotic, so actually sitting down and focussing on the history, on who the ethnic groups were, what the power struggle was about, and on the cultural background, was the most useful for figuring out who my character might have been. With any character, you have to think about their class background, their dreams and their aspirations. Understanding their environment is extremely important. I think JT has written his characters very responsibly, portraying them all – from both ethnic factions – as three-dimensional individuals. They are all complex and interesting, and demand a great deal of understanding in order to do them justice.

You play two different characters – Elise and the Rwandan Doctor. Could you describe how you, as an actor, approach the challenge of playing two roles, and clearly differentiate between them as young Rwandan women?

That's something that, at this stage in rehearsal (week three of six), I am actually finding quite difficult, mainly because my two characters have a similar class background, one being a doctor, and the other a doctor's wife, meaning that they both come from a certain level of privilege. There won't be a vast difference in their accents. However, as far as the emotional intent of the characters is concerned, they are very different, because they have different agendas. One of the greatest challenges for us as black actors in Britain doing this play, is to hone in and be very specific about this very tiny country that none of us has been to. Africa is a huge continent and, naturally, figuring out the sound of a particular place, with all its cultural implications is difficult, and interesting. You feel a great responsibility to get it right. A centralised, Francophone African voice will sound about right, but you would like Africans to be able to sit in the audience and say confidently 'that sounds like a Rwandais.'

Interviews with the Company

What do you think happens to Elise at the end of the play? Is it clear from history what is likely to have become of her or do you think there are various possibilities?

I think the seeds are planted to tell exactly what happens to Elise. We know she leaves Kigali and flees to collect her children from Butare, hoping to get out of the country. However, Linda unwittingly gives the information of her whereabouts to the wrong people, and because her husband is a target, I think, en route – either at a road block, in Butare, or on their journey towards the border – they would have been stopped and killed.

TANYA MOODIE: the actor playing Linda White-Keeler

Max asks his actors to 'action' each of their lines before the company gets up on its feet. How does this help you as an actor?

Human beings are driven by their desires from moment to moment. Therefore, there is always a reason behind anything that is said by a person, whether in real life, or in storytelling. What we say and how we say it can bring us closer to what we want. For example, at this moment, I'd really like my husband to bring me a cup of tea, so I have to ask him. I have to choose a way of asking him that will get him to do this. Getting a cup of tea brought to me is my 'objective', and how I say "Darling, can you bring me a cup of tea?" to him is my 'action'. This action is therefore put in the form of a transitive verb – an active verb that will have a direct affect on him. Such as "I charm him", or, "I stroke him" or "bolster him".

These verbs may seem similar, but if you try saying "Darling, can you bring me a cup of tea?" with each of the different ways of saying the verbs, you'll find each has its own colour, like the subtle mixing of paints on an artist's palette. I may choose to play with an action like "I bully him" or "I henpeck him", but I'm not very likely to get my cup of tea! This makes the playing of a scene potentially like the movement of a symphony: each action played could be likened to the notes of music in each bar. Each bar is the objective, and the overall symphony is the play. It also makes the text easier to learn, as I'm not just learning words by rote, but also by the sense with which I say them.

What has been most valuable for you in terms of rehearsal methods – books, improvisations, documentaries or speakers? Actioning, as I explained before, has been the most useful rehearsal technique. Improvising situations around the main action of the play has also been very useful to give certain character choices a context in which they were made. Max had also lined up an impressive list of people to speak on our subject matter. My mantra is basically "Homework, homework, homework."

From left:
Tanya Moodie (Linda) and
Chipo Chung (Elise Kayitesi)
photo: John Haynes



Interviews with the Company

Before I began rehearsals, I had already read three books on the genocide, scoured the internet, and seen three films and an incredibly comprehensive documentary. It is important for me to take 100% responsibility in terms of contributing to the value that I gain from the creative process. In that way, I can find value in anything.

Which are the most difficult moments in the play for you as the actor playing Linda, and how do you approach them?

I think finding the balance between Linda's natural youthful exuberance and her intellectual weight has so far proved to be a riddle. Youthful exuberance comes naturally to me, but the energy surrounding Linda's academic circles is not something I've personally encountered. I trust Max's taste and judgement completely, so when he finetunes my performance, I do as I am told, even if I haven't quite grasped the reasoning behind his suggestions. Kissing Matthew Marsh is also pretty hard because he has five o'clock shadow and I get whisker burn!

Linda gets easily swept up by what people tell her in the play: she is 'taken in' by Mizinga's lyrical speeches. At the end, we know that Joseph is killed, and that, probably, so are his wife and children. To what extent do you think we should blame Linda for their fate?

When you grasp the absolute enormity of the

subterranean tectonic movement of this volcanic eruption of greed, anger and stupidity, fuelling a killing spree of nearly a million people in 100 days, then you will be able to grasp the meaning of the play's title – overwhelming. I think Linda is a regular person who gets completely overwhelmed by a torrent of evil that none of my generation in the West have most likely ever had the misfortune to experience first hand. In a genocide, happy endings, narrow escapes and have-a-go heroes are a great improbability. Joseph's death is sadly inevitable, and at that moment, his life could potentially cost the lives of the Exleys as well. No-one would win in that situation. As for Elise and her sons, Linda believes she is doing the right thing by her to prevent their deaths. Unfortunately, she doesn't understand that she has gone to the wrong person for help.

Linda and Jack's relationship seems to worsen as the play progresses. What do you think is likely to happen to them when they return to America – how will her life have been affected?

Ah, the million dollar question: Will they dump each other? They'd already been through some big emotional upheavals before the play that I don't feel they had the chance to work through together. And then the genocide... You know, I think Jack and his son need some time to build on their relationship. I feel Jack and Geoffrey have the building blocks to be steadfast friends for life after this. Maybe once Jack and Linda have assimilated what has happened to them as individuals, they too might have the tools for a great friendship.

Danny Sapani and
Tanya Moodie
photo: John Haynes



Interviews with the Company

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG: the actor playing Charles Woolsey and the British Doctor

Do you think *The Overwhelming* has a particular message for its audience?

The play provides a terrifying snapshot of a society on the brink of the most horrific and insane maelstrom; a world going mad, in which any semblance of basic, common humanity is rapidly disappearing. Seen through the eyes of the play's central character, a well-intentioned, intelligent and articulate Western academic, this hellish vision vividly asks how such a state of affairs could possibly have come about, and by implication, I suppose, what is the extent of our own ignorance of, lack of interest in and culpability for the Rwandan and other genocides. Perhaps the message of the play is that it is crucial that we – all of us – address this question before yet another genocide breaks out. Lindsey Hilsum writes of Rwanda, "...because we denied its history, the genocide had no meaning. We knew nothing, so we could do nothing."

The Rwandan genocide took place in 1994. Rwandans are still struggling to deal with the repercussions, but as far as the Western media is concerned, it is an event of the past. Why is it important for us to do this play now,

in England, in 2006? Should the audience be making links between this and other contemporary events?

Genocide is currently taking place in Darfur, unchecked and unobserved. Denial of the Rwandan genocide is widespread amongst the perpetrators, many of whom are being sheltered by Western governments. The US ambassador was recently recalled from Turkey for calling the Armenian genocide what it was. Since the end of the Second World War, and particularly in the last 20 years, the frequency of genocides has risen. Genocide is likely to increase and have an ever greater destabilising effect on our world. Its relevance has never been greater.

Max employs various activities in his rehearsals, to expand actors' understanding and perception of their characters. As an actor who has never worked with him before, which exercise helped you most in developing your characters?

Max has two methods which I find most helpful. Firstly, 'actioning'. It gives a very concrete focus to your role in any given scene, a solid basis from which to develop a scene's nuances and a sort of emotional score to guide you through the emotional dynamics of a scene. Secondly, the emphasis on status. Max is very rigorous about examining the relative social status of various characters in any scene. This provides an invaluable guide to one's relationship with other characters.

Woolsey is one of the first characters we meet. Jack's many conversations with him provide us with a means of tracking Jack's progress. However, there is more to him than that. JT's characters often represent the views of a wider group in society. Why do you think JT wrote Woolsey as he did, and who does he represent for the audience?

Woolsey is a US diplomatic official in Kigali prior to the genocide in 1994. As well as providing a useful foil for Jack in terms of exposition and placing Jack's journey in a context, he represents for Jack, and for the audience, the US government and, by implication, the other major world powers who stood by and did nothing.

From left:

Lucian Msamati (Rwandan Politician),
William Armstrong (Charles Woolsey),
Danny Sapani (Samuel Mizinga),
Tanya Moodie (Linda White-Keeler),
and
Nick Fletcher (Jean-Claude Buisson)

photo: John Haynes



Interviews with the Company

Finally, what do you consider the greatest challenge for you as an actor in *The Overwhelming*?

The challenge of my job is to find the right balance of character, intensity, humour, pace and energy which allows the writer's words to speak for him.

A view of the brick wall of the church: Tim Shortall's set
photo: John Haynes



TIM SHORTALL, DESIGNER

The National sent Max and JT to Rwanda to research the context of the play, several months before rehearsals began. JT took a great range of photographs during the trip, which I can see have influenced your design. How did these images help you compose your ideas for the set?

The photos were extremely influential, in fact the whole design is based very strongly around some of the images they sent me. Although the complete pack of pictures left a very powerful impression, I was especially struck by a few particular images, and have incorporated these into the design – specifically the Madonna on the stark brick wall of the church (see picture, left), the strange blue and white lattice 'fencing' making up the dividers in the Bar, combined with ubiquitous plastic garden chairs, but in bright yellow, and the rather bizarre hoardings seen on the roadsides (in this case I used one advertising water, as it is obviously the source of life!) Also, the bright red earth, seen everywhere in the photos, I have used as a walkway around the main playing area.

Max heavily believes in research and commits a great deal of time to investigating the 'world of the play' before rehearsals begin. How did the balance of responsibilities work between you, considering he is a very creative director? Are there particular elements of the design which he has some responsibility for; how did you work as a team?

I hope the balance of influence between Max and myself has worked well. On his return from Rwanda, he had a very clear idea of how he saw the structure of the design in a way that would be useful to him, ie, a central playing space, surrounded on three sides by walkways where people could 'lurk', these spaces would be defined by semi-transparent fencing or a mixture of various items and objects which made up the ramshackle nature of the 'barricades'. We went through various versions of the model, each time refining the design. I really enjoyed these sessions, as it did indeed feel very collaborative, and although I had initially provided Max with exactly what he had

Interviews with the Company

asked for spatially, when we started tearing the models apart and reducing them to key elements that we both thought important, I felt the design became a joint vision. We did not necessarily always agree, but it was an exciting process to reduce so many, sometimes conflicting, ideas down to the current design, which I hope will work both aesthetically and more importantly as an appropriate space for the play.

***The Overwhelming* has over forty scenes – potentially a designer’s nightmare! How does your design accommodate these scenes, and how has the episodic nature of the play affected your ideas?**

When a play has as many scenes as this one, you have to keep it moving, which means that there cannot be an interruption of the action while a scene-change takes place. This was really the single most important premise of the design, to maintain the ‘flow’ of the play at all costs.

Naturally this means simplifying all the elements, and for example using furniture that is multi-purpose, ie, non-specific to an individual location, so a chair can be used many times in different scenes, and even in different ways, like putting two chairs together to make the car, for example.

Max is very skilled at doing this, so I had every faith that it would work in production, and that an audience will quickly attune to the playing style of the piece.

The set and costumes not only provide colour and cultural context for the play, they also reflect the themes and ideas inherent in the narrative. How are the themes of *The Overwhelming* reflected in your design?

I am trying to evoke a ‘landscape’ that is both raw and basic, and most importantly, very fragile (echoing the political structure of the country), which is why I have made the side structures so flimsy in construction. I wanted them to give the appearance of solidity and protection, in the way that the ‘authorities’ in Rwanda at the time (the UN, the French Embassy, the Police, the

hospitals, all the organisations that Jack and his family initially turn to for help) appear to offer protection, when in fact they are either powerless or have no intention of providing that help. A sense of trust misplaced to the highest degree.

One of the main design features is the walkway which surrounds the stage on three sides, and is divided from the central playing space by a fence. Why is this such an important feature?

The outer walkway is a kind of dividing-line between apparent safety and obvious danger – the menace of the ‘jungle’ coming through the fencing is an example of how, visually, the threat of something encroaching on apparently everyday life is part of the design. I hope it will also be used for people to ‘lurk’ in, especially in the night scenes.

The set is extremely powerful, as it provides both a stunning visual backdrop for the action, and accommodates many of the dramatic features of the play- ‘lurking’, spying, crossed intentions, fast-paced action, and quickly shifting locations. However, the set does have to change slightly to fit into the different theatre spaces on tour, meaning a few elements will be removed or shrunk. What, for you, is the one element of the set which most characterises the feel of the play, and which is most important to retain?

For me, the most powerful visual image is the Madonna on the blood-spattered brick wall. People clung to their faith, ran to the churches for protection, but they were slaughtered even as they prayed. Where was God when this atrocity tore their country apart?

Discussion points

1. What is the focal issue in *The Overwhelming*?

Is it specifically the Rwandan genocide, is it the relationship between the developed and developing world, is it loyalty and ethics, or is it something else? Argue your case.

2. During the genocide, ten Belgian UN soldiers were captured and brutally murdered. Some consider General Dallaire, who was in charge of the UN troops, to be at fault because he chose not to intervene. However, if he had been proactive and used force to bring the perpetrators to justice, he would have breached his mandate from the UN. It could be argued that he would have been morally compromised whichever decision he took. Under what circumstances would you consider it morally right to go against those higher in command than you? (see also the notes on Major General Dallaire on page 25 – he did not have the means to fight the Rwandan army)

3. In the final scene, Linda exclaims that the troubles in Rwanda are “NOT OUR PROBLEM!”

To what extent would you agree with the statement, “It is the moral duty of the West to become involved in other countries’ affairs, if there is a significant threat to innocent civilians”? (see notes on page 26 about the Responsibility to Protect)

4. When Linda and Jack confront Joseph about his involvement with the RPF, he says “I gave information! That is all!” The information probably concerned the location of the opposition’s weapon caches.

i. Consider whether this kind of indirect assistance is guiltless. To what extent might we judge Joseph as being ‘spotless’?

ii. Linda later hands information to Jean-Claude which will probably be used to seek out and kill Elise and her children. How guilty is Linda? Who would you judge most harshly for their actions?

5. Consider the issues of loyalty and betrayal in the play. It could be argued that most of the central characters betray one another’s trust at some point during the action. Consider the relationships of:

i. Jack and Linda

ii. Linda and Elise

iii. Joseph and Jack

iv. Gérard and Geoffrey

v. Mizinga and Linda.

What motivates each character’s behaviour and/or actions?

What risks does each character take, and why?

6. How important do you think it is to understand the Rwandan situation before seeing the play?

Practical exercises

1. ACTIONING

(A group exercise)

Try Max Stafford-Clark's 'actioning method' for yourself. Choose a favourite extract from the play, each take a part, and then read it aloud, listening carefully for the tones and dynamics of the scene. Then go through the scene line by line, and choose an appropriate transitive verb for each statement (a transitive verb must be something you can actively do to another character, eg I scare him, I pin him, I amuse him, I sober him). Read each line aloud and see which verb you feel is most appropriate. Then return to the beginning of the scene and read your lines, now stating your chosen action before you speak each line. Notice the shape of the scene, where the climaxes are, how the tone changes. You may want to change your actions to help the scene build effectively. For instance, in a speech where you intend to scare the other characters, you may begin with 'unsettles', 'sobers', 'unnerves', 'warns', 'grips' and then 'frightens', in order to allow the hostility to build up. Once you are happy with your actions, try performing the scene without reading them, but keeping them in mind. See how focussed you can make your performance, and consider how the actions have helped.

2. CONTEXT

(A group exercise)

Consider the atmosphere of apprehension and strain which was rife in the months before the genocide. Rwandans knew that trouble was imminent and that prominent Tutsis had begun to disappear from their posts. Set the room up as the Kigali Central Hospital, and each choose a hospital role, from clerical to management. Two people should play Mizinga and the unnamed Hutu extremist. Improvise a normal morning at work, with each staff member doing their duties. You are then called to a meeting by the Hospital Administrator. Mizinga and the man then proceed to explain that Joseph has been removed (look at the script for hints as to why). Improvise the rest of the scene – what happens now? Who might ask more questions? Who does this unsettle? Who is next? What is the most dramatic outcome?

3. STATUS

(A group exercise)

Max Stafford-Clark is particularly interested in the balance in status between characters. Choose a scene from the play and allocate each character a suitable status level between 1 and 10 (1 being the lowest). You may choose to use playing cards to experiment with this, selecting a card randomly from the pack to designate your status. Consider how your voice, physicality and movement might be affected by your status. Attempt to play the scene, rigidly adhering to the allocated numbers, and then choose new numbers. Note how the dynamics of the scene can change completely depending on which character is 'running the scene', ie has the highest status. Then consider giving your character a status shift within the scene. Perhaps, for instance, in Act 2 scene 19, Geoffrey's status moves from an 8, as he confidently chats with Emerita, to a 4, when he realises that she has no interest in him as a boyfriend and merely wants to be taken to safety. Consider the whole relationship between Geoffrey and Gérard and how it shifts in status within the course of the play.

4. INTENTIONS

(A group exercise)

As a variation, using the same principle of the 1-10 scale, choose a scene and decide your character's objective, or intention (what they want from the action). Then use the number system to decide the strength of your character's intention. For instance, on a scale of 1-10, how much does Mizinga want to impress Linda in Act 1, scene 5? How worried is Gérard when Geoffrey discovers his ability to speak English, in Act 1, scene 16? This method can help you find interesting balances in the dynamics between characters. Note, as you experiment, whether the scenes are more powerful if the characters have similar levels of intention, or disparate.

5. INTERVIEWS

(Individual and group exercise)

During rehearsals, actors were often sent off to interview people who had direct experience which related to the play – for example survivors

Practical exercises

or representatives of Human Rights Watch. On returning, the actors were asked to act the role of the interviewees, whilst the rest of the company asked questions. The actor playing the interviewee must stay in character throughout, answering all questions.

Afterwards, if they had added any details which were not in the original interviews, they told the company. Choose one issue you are interested in, either from *The Overwhelming* or elsewhere, and find someone who is happy to express their opinions on it (someone that would preferably inform your understanding of the issue better, a teacher, perhaps, or a local MP.) Interview them, and then perform, as closely as you can, the person's character, whilst being 'interviewed' by your classmates.

Written work and research

1. During the play we hear extracts of Joseph's letter(s) to Jack. In the final scene Joseph reprimands Jack, saying "Letters are read! People are watched! I wrote everything to you – between the lines." Considering Joseph's need for secrecy, and Jack's intention of persuading Joseph to be the subject of his book, write an imaginary letter from either Jack or Joseph, to the other, preparing for the trip. You may choose to write Joseph's first letter to Jack, inviting him to Kigali, or Jack's reply, enthusing about the trip and warning him of his changed family circumstances. Pay careful attention to the hints provided in Joseph's monologues.

2. This play might be considered to be 'political', in that it deals with international relations, but it has been written in a very balanced manner: it does not attempt to impose a particular viewpoint on the audience and asks questions rather than providing answers. Research the definitions of 'agitprop' and 'political theatre' and either:

- i. Rewrite one of the scenes from a specific political stance, attempting to persuade the audience to your moral perspective,
- or,
- ii. Consider the question, How effective can theatre be as a vehicle for provoking social change?

3. It could be argued that this play takes the form of a classic thriller in which a mystery is slowly unfolded, element by element. With this in mind, try to pinpoint each revelation as it happens (eg, the discovery that Joseph does not work at the hospital). Plot these revelations in a chart to reveal the line of action in the play, either on a graph or a timescale, and consider how the writer has used tension and suspense to involve the audience throughout.

4. Using the internet, newspapers and other resources indicated in the bibliography and notes that follow, find out about the UN and its course of action in Rwanda. What lessons can be drawn from the UN's 'failure to act' in Rwanda? Should the responsibility to act rest solely on the UN? Who makes the decisions in the UN? Who sits on the UN Security Council? If

you were offered the job of UN Secretary-General, how would you go about deciding what the UN should do about the situation in Darfur today? Consider the notes on the Responsibility to Protect and the web-cast discussion located on the Aegis website (www.aegitrust.org). What recommendations do the panelists make about protecting the lives of people who are under threat of destruction by their own state?

5. What can *you* do, what can ordinary people do to help protect people or rebuild the lives of survivors when they are in distant countries?

References and glossary

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BURUNDI

A country bordering Rwanda, where civil strife had also been characteristic and Tutsis and Hutus were divided. Both Hutus and Tutsis had been killed in large numbers by extremists from both ethnic groups, and when the Tutsi-led government in Burundi attacked Hutus, Rwandan Hutu extremists used this to scare the Hutus of Rwanda into action. This is reflected in Gérard's experience.

BUTARE

A university town in Rwanda which was at first considered safer for Tutsis than Kigali, where the killing had started. However, the killing soon spread there too.

CDR

The *Coalition pour la Défense de la République*; a Hutu extremist party of which Samuel Mizinga is a member.

FABRICATION POLITIQUE

A French term meaning a fiction created for political reasons. Elise calls the Hutu/Tutsi divide a "*fabrication politique*" because she believes it is not based on anything concrete, it is a politically-motivated concept.

INTERAHAMWE

The Hutu civilian militia – everyday citizens who were recruited and trained by the Rwandan radical government and were responsible for many of the Tutsi killings.

KINYARWANDAN

The principal African language spoken in Rwanda.

RPF

The Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Rwandan rebel army which gathered strength and recruits outside Rwanda, largely from Tutsi refugees. Its aim was to reinstate the refugees in their rightful homeland. Tutsi people had been fleeing to neighbouring countries since 1959 to escape persecution from the extremist Hutu government.

UNAMIR

The UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION FOR RWANDA (the official presence of the UN in the country). UNAMIR was originally established to help implement the Arusha Peace Agreement signed by the Rwandese parties on 4 August 1993.

REFERENCE NOTES

DARFUR

In his interview on page 15, William Armstrong mentions the genocide in Darfur.

Between 2003 and 2006, Africans have been killed and driven from the region of Darfur. This is a large-scale military operation targeting the men, women and children of Darfur's African population. The Government of Sudan has armed Arab militia (Janjaweed) who terrorized and burned African villages, with the support of the Sudanese army and airforce. Now 2.5 million Africans are living in temporary IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps, where humanitarian organisations are providing food and medical care for the victims.

Humanitarian assistance is important, but it does not stop people being killed or allow them to go back to their homes. The African population needs to be protected from the Arab militia and the forces of its own Government. The international community can give this protection. Troops from other African countries are there to provide some protection for Darfur's vulnerable population, but wealthy nations have not provided them with the money or equipment they need to be effective. By lobbying MPs and Government ministers, writing in newspapers to raise awareness of the crisis and encouraging people to write to their MPs, the Aegis Trust has been putting pressure on the British Government to support the African Union and UN to provide protection for the African population. Only once protection is provided will the African population be able to return to their homes.

GENERAL DALLAIRE

With reference to discussion point 2 on page 20.

General Roméo Dallaire was one of those who stayed behind to help in the genocide.

In the event, he was not provided with sufficient resources to halt the genocide when it began in April 1994. Despite the lack of support and the limitations of his force, General Dallaire made untiring personal and professional efforts to

References

protect and save those he could. He was asked to leave on three occasions, but chose to stay – along with a volunteer force formally under UN command – in order to preserve human life.

Dallaire explains his dilemma in his book, *Shake Hands With the Devil*. Apart from the moral decision as to whether as a senior soldier he should disobey orders from his UN superiors, he only had enough ammunition for a 30-minute firefight anyway, because the UN mission had so few resources. He could not have taken on the Rwandan army even if he had wished to do so.

In 1993, he was given command of the UN Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda (UNOMUR). This mission was integrated into the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) in October 1993, and Dallaire was appointed Force Commander.

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

In September 2005 all the nations at the UN's World Summit signed a document agreeing that they had a collective responsibility to protect civilians at risk of genocide or other crimes against humanity. Yet during the following year, the crisis in Western Sudan continued and those same nations failed to protect the people of Darfur.

Resources on the Rwandan Genocide

AVAILABLE FROM www.aegistrust.org

To obtain copies of these books, DVDs or CD Roms e-mail shop@aegistrust.org

We Survived, the accounts of 28 survivors of Rwanda's brutal 1994 genocide, was published on 8 April 2006, the anniversary of the start of the 100-day slaughter.

A Guide to the Genocide in Rwanda, 2004
A richly illustrated guide with over 300 pictures of the genocide and survivors. It mirrors the text of the exhibition in the Kigali Memorial Centre.

The Holocaust and Genocide CD-ROM contains over 350 pages of resources on the Holocaust, Balkans and Rwanda. Fully interactive for classroom use or individual research. Published January 2004 by Hodder Education.

Shooting Dogs Resource (2006), based on the film produced by BBC Films, is produced jointly with Film Education. The first module created by the Aegis Trust contains detailed information on the genocide in Rwanda and brief notes on the Holocaust and Darfur. The DVD of *Shooting Dogs* will be released in July 2006 and you will be able to obtain it from shop@aegistrust.org

Rwandan Survivors (poster exhibition)
The set comprises six A1-size full-colour posters, including the personal testimonies of five Rwandan survivors. Historical context is moulded around each story, linking key aspects of the genocide, its precursors and aftermath to the personal experience.

Wasted Lives
This hard-hitting 15-minute presentation examines three specific genocides that have taken place in the 20th century – Armenia, the Holocaust and Rwanda. The film is intended to stimulate questions about our understanding of genocide, and raise awareness of its repetition. It asks how we might learn to prevent genocide. Ideal for upper secondary schools, public commemorations and informal educational events, *Wasted Lives* provides a meaningful way to address the wider issues of genocide on

Holocaust Memorial Day. A full colour 64-page book accompanies this film.

Will Genocide Ever End?

Edited by Carol Rittner, John K. Roth and James M. Smith

Will Genocide Ever End? contains short essays and comments by experts working at the cutting edge of some of the most difficult territory of human social interaction. The contributors come from a variety of disciplines, experiences and areas of professional expertise, but they share one personal concern. Over many years, all have observed genocide and its dark dimensions, and more than anything, they hope their expertise will never again be necessary.

Genocide in Rwanda: Complicity of the Churches? (paperback)

Edited by Carol Rittner, John K. Roth, Wendy Whitworth, 2005, Paragon House

This anthology of essays and resources raises disturbing but essential questions about the response of Christian churches to the genocide in Rwanda.

The Aegis Trust

The Aegis Trust is the leading UK-based genocide prevention organisation. Based at the UK Holocaust Centre, it is also responsible for the Kigali and Murambi Memorial Centres in Rwanda, where it plays a vital role in helping Rwandan society to commemorate the victims of the 1994 genocide and educate a new generation about the dangers of ethnic division. Documenting the history of the genocide, recording survivor testimony and filming local court hearings that form part of the post-genocide justice process, Aegis also helps survivors – in particular, orphans and widows, who lost not only their loved ones but also their means of living – to rebuild their lives.

Aegis Protect Darfur Campaign

The Aegis Trust runs a campaign in the UK, drawing lessons from the Rwandan genocide, to encourage everyone to help change the policy of British and European Governments in order to protect the people of Darfur.
www.protectdarfur.org

For more information about Aegis, or to find out how you can support its work or become a member, visit www.aegistrust.org.
If you would like to visit or know more about the Holocaust Centre, see www.holocaustcentre.net for information.

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Bibliography and links

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3. *Sometimes in April* (HBO 2005)
4. *Ghosts of Rwanda* (Documentary; PBS Paramount, 2005)
5. *Our Future Lost* (2005) and *Not On My Watch* (2004), two short awareness-raising films by Aegis Trust.