

# Ben Rawlence

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About this Person

**Nationality:** British  
**Occupation:** Writer  
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## PERSONAL INFORMATION

Married Louise Hogan, 2014; children: two. **Education:** University of London, B.A., 1998; University of Chicago, M.A., 1999.  
**Addresses:** Home: Wales.

## CAREER

Writer. Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, NY, global security and cooperation coordinator, 2000-02; Liberal Democrats, London, England, foreign policy advisor, 2002-04; Civic United Front, Tanzania, policy advisor, 2004-05; Human Rights Watch, Africa, senior researcher, 2006-13. Contributor to *From Our Own Correspondent*, BBC Radio 4.

## WORKS

### WRITINGS:

- *"All the Men Have Gone": War Crimes in Kenya's Mt. Elgon Conflict*, Human Rights Watch (New York, NY), 2008.
- *"Bring the Gun or You'll Die": Torture, Rape, and Other Serious Human Rights Violations by Kenyan Security Forces in the Mandera Triangle*, Human Rights Watch (New York, NY), 2009.
- *"One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure": Violations of Freedom of Expression and Associations in Ethiopia*, Human Rights Watch (New York, NY), 2010.
- (Editor) Neela Ghoshal, *"Hold Your Heart": Waiting for Justice in Kenya's Mt. Elgon Region*, Human Rights Watch (New York, NY), 2011.
- *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War*, Oneworld Publications (Oxford, England), 2012.
- *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*, Picador (New York, NY), 2016.

Contributor to periodicals, including the London *Guardian*, *London Review of Books*, *Huffington Post*, and the *Prospect*.

## SIDELIGHTS

Ben Rawlence is a writer and researcher. For seven years, he worked as a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, focusing on politics in the Horn of Africa. Prior to this appointment, he worked as an advisor for the Civic United Front, a political party in Tanzania, as well as the Liberal Democrat Party in the United Kingdom. Rawlence studied Swahili as an undergraduate at the University of London and received his master's degree in international relations from the University of Chicago. Through Human Rights Watch's publishing arm, Rawlence published three books and edited another.

In 2012, he released *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War*. In an interview with Chuck Sambuchino for *Writer's Digest*, Rawlence described the book, stating: "*Radio Congo* is the story of a four-month journey through the war zones of Eastern Congo in which I talk to people about how they are surviving after (and in some cases still during) the fighting." His trip takes him from Goma, which lies near the border with Rwanda, to Monono, a small town in the province of Katanga, and through other towns, including Baraka, Kalemie, Moba, and Mitwaba. He notes that his fluency in Swahili helps him to feel more comfortable traveling in rural Africa. Among the difficulties he comes across on his journey is that many locals do not know how to get to the next town, so it often takes time to determine his travel arrangements. Rawlence takes a boat across Lake Tanganyika, where he describes people's cell phones ringing incessantly in the early morning, as calls made before six o'clock are free. He visits several radio stations in the Congo, explaining that the stations often provide mostly foreign news, rather than news from their own country. Rawlence encounters many foreigners, including a group of American former soldiers who have been hired to train the national army of Burundi. However, he desires solely to get to know the Congolese people. He later meets the Banyamulenge people of the Mulenge Hills, who had been connected to the Rwandan Tutsis, as well as the Batwa, a pygmy community. He also explains the corrupt mining system in the Congo.

In a review of *Radio Congo* on the *Royal African Society* Web site, Magnus Taylor suggested that others who have written about Africa "rarely write about it with the same intelligence and empathy as Ben Rawlence." A writer in *Kirkus Reviews* described the book as "a distressing but important read." A contributor to the *Economist* suggested that the book contains "a series of intimate and entertaining portraits."

Rawlence draws directly on his experience with Human Rights Watch in *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*, portraying the deplorable conditions of the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya. Rawlence reflects on his own experiences working in the United Nations-run camp, and he also profiles nine refugees who live there. Rawlence discusses the plight of two lovers, Muna and Monday, who are constantly accosted because one is Muslim and the other is Christian. Nisho, another of Rawlence's subjects, is a porter who travels between Kenya and Somalia. Guled, upon whom much of the book is focused, is a young man from Mogadishu who grew up playing on the crash site where two American Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in 1993, the same year Guled was born.

These stories "will resonate with readers long after they finish the book," a *Publishers Weekly* critic announced. Cara Anna, writing in the *Miami Herald*, was also impressed, asserting that Rawlence "writes so closely that you feel as though you're following his subjects on foot through the dusty chaos of half a million people. ... This is the rare nonfiction book that pulls you into another world. The camp, even the weather, are characters of their own." As Katrina Manson put it in her *New Statesman* assessment, *City of Thorns* is "an absorbing book, full of heart, though shot through with bitterness towards a system that has condemned refugees to life in 'an open prison in the desert.'"

## FURTHER READINGS

### FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

#### PERIODICALS

*Economist*, July 14, 2012, "War and Peace: Life in Congo," review of *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War*, p. 75.

*Kirkus Reviews*, November 15, 2012, review of *Radio Congo*.

*Miami Herald*, September 11, 2015, Cara Anna, review of *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp*.

*New Internationalist*, June, 2012, review of *Radio Congo*, p. 44.

*New Statesman*, February 19, 2016, Katrina Manson, review of *City of Thorns*, p. 48.

*Publishers Weekly*, October 1, 2012, review of *Radio Congo*, p. 83; August 24, 2015, review of *City of Thorns*.

#### ONLINE

*Huffington Post*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> (September 24, 2013), brief author biography; (September 19, 2016), Curt Goering, author interview.

*Jamii Forums*, <http://www.jamiiforums.com/> (February 10, 2013), review of *Radio Congo*.

*Open Society Foundation Web site*, <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/> (September 24, 2013), author biography.

*Royal African Society Web site*, <http://africanarguments.org/> (September 12, 2012), Magnus Taylor, review of *Radio Congo*.

*Writer's Digest*, <http://www.writersdigest.com/> (November 28, 2012), Chuck Sambuchino, author interview.

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