

“AT TIMES IT FELT TO ME AS IF ONE GOOD JOURNALIST ON THE GROUND WAS WORTH A BATTALION OF TROOPS.”

—Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, former Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda

It has been 25 years since Rwanda slid into the abyss. The killings happened in broad daylight, yet many of us — individuals, media outlets, entire governments — turned away. *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond* revisits the debate over the role of traditional news media in Rwanda, where, confronted by the horrors taking place, international news media either ignored or — when they did pay attention — at times failed to fully grasp what was happening, and got the story wrong. Meanwhile, hate-media outlets in Rwanda were all too successful at laying the groundwork for genocide, and then actively encouraging the extermination campaign.

The global media landscape has been transformed since the 1994 Rwanda genocide. We are now saturated with social media, frequently generated by non-journalists. Mobile phones are everywhere. And in many quarters, the traditional news media business model continues to founder. Against that backdrop, it is more important than ever to examine the nexus between the media and the forces that give rise to mass atrocity.

Media and Mass Atrocity includes an extensive section on the echoes of Rwanda, looking at the cases of Darfur, the Central African Republic, Myanmar and South Sudan, while the impact of social media as a new actor is examined through chapters on social media use by the Islamic State, in Syria and in other contexts across the developing world. It also looks at the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide: the shifting narrative of the genocide itself, the evolving debate over the role and impact of hate media in Rwanda, the challenge of digitizing archival records of the genocide, and the fostering of free and independent media in atrocity's wake. *Media and Mass Atrocity* probes how journalists themselves confront mass atrocity and examines the preventive function of media.

Written by frontline war correspondents and academic researchers, brought together by veteran foreign affairs journalist and professor Allan Thompson (editor of *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* published in 2007), and with contributions from General Roméo Dallaire, BBC reporter Mark Doyle and Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Watson among others, *Media and Mass Atrocity* questions what the lessons of Rwanda mean today. In an age of communications so dramatically influenced by social media and the relative decline of traditional news media, are we any closer to saying “never again”?

**MEDIA
AND MASS
ATROCITY**

Centre for International
Governance Innovation

MEDIA AND MASS ATROCITY

**THE RWANDA
GENOCIDE
AND BEYOND**

Foreword

**ROMÉO
DALLAIRE**

Editor

**ALLAN
THOMPSON**

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FOREWORD

ROMÉO DALLAIRE

During the 1994 Rwanda genocide, in moments of despair, those of us who were on the ground in the United Nations mission I commanded often puzzled over the same question: what did the rest of the world know about the tragedy that was unfolding before us? What understanding of events in Rwanda were ordinary people back home and around the world gleaning from the news media coverage of the genocide?

In those days, we were early on in the era of 24-hour news and satellite television networks, led by CNN. And yet, during the nearly 100 days of horrific slaughter, CNN managed only once — just once — to broadcast actual news footage of a killing taking place, even though thousands and thousands of people were being killed in public every day. And that footage seemed to flicker across the TV screens and then disappear.

Perhaps the shocking images and stories from Rwanda didn't resonate because many people simply didn't understand what they were seeing. We knew so little about a place like Rwanda. Before the genocide, most of us

couldn't even find it on a map. And in the months leading up to the beginning of the killing campaign, there was virtually no media coverage of the 1993 Arusha peace accord, the UN mission in Rwanda and the rising tension.

In hindsight, there were warning signs of the impending atrocities, but they simply didn't percolate into the media coverage. Hardly surprising, then, that when the violence did erupt, many people just didn't understand what they were watching, or believed they were seeing another example of "tribal warfare" in Africa, and not a systematic genocide.

And while we struggled to understand how or why the outside world didn't seem to be moved by what was happening in Rwanda — despite the valiant efforts of a small cadre of brave journalists on the ground — we also witnessed the perverse and highly successful use of media tools by those perpetrating the genocide. While conventional news media somehow failed to fully grasp what was happening in Rwanda, or, at the very least, failed to capture the attention of audiences back home, hate media outlets in Rwanda dominated the airwaves and successfully delivered a vile message of hate that contributed to the killing spree.

Looking back, the events in Rwanda in 1994 now seem like a textbook example of what can go wrong when media intersect with mass atrocity events such as the Rwanda genocide. What lessons have we learned? Perhaps more important, given the dramatic changes in the media landscape brought about by social media and other technological advances in communications, what do the lessons of Rwanda mean to us now, a quarter-century later?

I am glad to have participated in a round-table event hosted by Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication in Ottawa, in early December 2017. *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond* was a three-day gathering of minds, bringing together journalists, media and genocide scholars and even an old soldier like me, to puzzle over this question: 25 years after Rwanda, what do we know about the role of media during mass atrocity events? In the immediate aftermath of the Rwanda genocide, discussions about media focused on journalists and news organizations agonizing over their failure to fully capture what was

happening on the ground. They also zeroed in on the role of hate media actors, such as Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines and the magazine *Kangura*. But because social media as we now know it did not exist in 1994, we focused instead on the role of traditional media — radio, TV, newspapers, magazines and wire services — in covering the genocide.

Today, in an era saturated by social media, we can begin to perceive the lessons of Rwanda through a different prism. We recognize the hate media radio broadcasts as they are echoed by their social media counterparts and, as traditional news media grapple with a radically transformed media landscape, populated by new, unpredictable actors.

This valuable collection revisits the case study of Rwanda, but also examines how media and mass atrocity have intersected in such varied settings as Darfur, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria and beyond.

A quarter-century after Rwanda, we still have so much to learn.



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The French philosopher Voltaire wrote, “We owe respect to the living; to the dead we owe only truth.” When confronted by the human species at its worst, journalists often struggle to find and define that truth, to give perspective to our world and to do justice to the dead. And increasingly, media professionals find themselves at cross purposes with others who use media tools and who also inhabit that space where media and mass atrocity intersect.

This collection, timed to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, explores the connections between media and mass atrocity. The project and the international round table that preceded it would not have been possible without the generous support and guidance of the Waterloo-based Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and its president, Rohinton Medhora. My thanks to all those at CIGI who helped with this project, but most notably to Publisher Carol Bonnett of CIGI Press, who has been a joy to work with and whose patience, perseverance and professionalism seem to know no bounds.

It is also important to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), through a Connections grant.

My thanks to Carleton University and the School of Journalism and Communication, in particular the school's leaders, Joshua Greenberg and Susan Harada, who have always supported my work. And I would like to single out Kyla Reid, the research facilitator in Carleton's Faculty of Public Affairs, who was an enormous help in drafting the submission that was eventually rewarded with a SSHRC grant.

I will be forever grateful to those who participated in the December 2017 round table at Carleton University and contributed their work to this publication, as well as to Nick Hughes, for allowing the continued use of the important footage he captured in Rwanda. The team that brought together the Carleton round table included colleagues Brett Popplewell and Nadia Hai, as well as a remarkable group of students from Carleton's School of Journalism and Communication, who helped to document the event on social media: Ebyan Ali, Karissa Gall, Liam Harrap, Dana Hatherly, Victoria Klassen, Maureen McEwan, Matthew Olson, Maggie Parkhill and Mugoli Samba. Their vivid account of that important international event can be found online at: <https://medium.com/media-and-mass-atrocity>.

To my friend Roméo Dallaire I once again extend my thanks for his ongoing moral support and, most importantly, for his continued determination that Rwanda should never be forgotten, even though conjuring up the memory of those events causes him pain.

My wife, Roula El-Rifai, and our son, Laith Rifai-Thompson, have both become personally involved in my work on the Rwandan file. I can't thank them enough for their love and support and for sharing in this passion.

And finally, I must thank Rosalie Uzamukunda, who had the courage to share with me, and the world, the story of how she lost the husband and daughter who perished on a dirt road in Kigali on April 11, 1994, among the first victims of the genocide in Rwanda. I dedicate this collection to

them — Gabriel Kagaba and his daughter Justine Mukangango — in the hope that we learn something from their passing.



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AIUSA	Amnesty International USA
ANCIR	African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting
API	application program interface
AQAP	al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AU	African Union
AVEGA	Association of Widows of the Genocide
BBTT	Boda Boda Talk Talk
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CAR	Central African Republic
CDA 230	Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act

CIGI	Centre for International Governance Innovation
CNLG	Commission nationale de lutte contre le génocide
CoH	Cessation of Hostilities
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
DM	direct message
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
FAR	Rwandan Armed Forces (Forces Armées Rwandaises)
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda
FGD	focus group discussion
FLIP	Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa
GAP	Gacaca Archives Project
GAR	Genocide Archive of Rwanda
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GIS	geographical information systems
GPS	geographical positioning systems
GRRP	Genocide Research and Reconciliation Program in Rwanda
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Criminal Court

ICG	International Crisis Group
ICID	International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	information and communications technology
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
ICTR	International Criminal Court for Rwanda
IDPs	internally displaced persons
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IS	Islamic State
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IWPR	Institute for War & Peace Reporting
JTT	Just Terror Tactics
KGM	Kigali Genocide Memorial
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
Liprodhor	Ligue rwandaise pour la promotion et la défense des droits de l'homme
MCO	Military and Covert Operation
MDR	Republican Democratic Movement
MIDO	Myanmar ICT for Development Organization
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MPJ	Maison de la Presse et des Journalistes
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières, Doctors Without Borders
NAR	National Archives of Rwanda

NCHR	National Commission for Human Rights
NGO	non-governmental organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PoC	Protection of Civilians
PR	public relations
RLB	Radio la Benevolencija
RNI	Radio Ndarason Internationale
RPA	Rwandan Patriotic Army
RPEP	Rwanda Peace Education Programme
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
RTL	Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SHR	Science for Human Rights
SMS	short message service
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition
TOW	tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (anti-tank missile)

UNAMIR United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UNESCO UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR UN Refugee Agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
UNMISS United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSC UN Security Council
USC University of Southern California
USHMM United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
USIP United States Institute of Peace
VPN virtual private network



INTRODUCTION

ALLAN THOMPSON

The grainy video captured by a journalist in the first days of the 1994 Rwanda genocide lasts but a few minutes, yet tells us so much.

Two figures kneel in the dirt of a Kigali street, arms outstretched to the death squad members who moments later would brutally beat them to death with clubs.

The footage taken by British cameraman Nick Hughes and described in detail in [Chapter 4](#) of this volume, tells the story of the final moments of two of the genocide's early victims, murdered before the unflinching eye of the camera.

The recording broadcast within hours by CNN and other major outlets also showed us the crime of genocide, even though most of us didn't fully understand what we were looking at.

And the fact that the rare footage marked one of the only instances of a journalist recording a killing during a bloodbath that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives speaks to the world's indifference.

Another episode in the centuries-old kinship between conflict and media.

Conflict and brutality have long been a part of human society. And for as long as people have been inflicting harm — or, at worst, committing mass atrocities — someone has been there to observe what happened and relay that information to others.

Centuries before the evolution of modern-day journalism and media, scribes and participants in conflict recorded or reconstructed horrific scenes of human atrocity. In 401 BC, the Greek writer and mercenary Xenophon led his soldiers on an epic retreat and described the fearsome enemies who decapitated their foes and gleefully carried the dismembered heads as trophies; the Jewish historian Josephus, in his 70 AD account of the siege of Jerusalem, wrote of a baby being cooked and eaten; the artist Francisco de Goya, in the early 1800s used lithographs — one of the first image reproduction technologies — to transcribe the savagery of the Napoleonic suppression of a Spanish uprising with images of mutilated bodies slung from trees.

As modern journalism evolved in the last few centuries with the advent of the professional war correspondent, coverage of conflict and mass atrocity has often come to be regarded as one of journalism's most important pursuits.

When human beings are at their worst — as they most certainly were in the tiny central African country of Rwanda during the 1994 genocide — we need the institutions of journalism and the media to be at their best. Sadly, in Rwanda, the media fell short, despite bringing us horrific reports and images that echoed Xenophon, Josephus and de Goya.

It has been 25 years since Rwanda slid into the abyss. The killings happened in broad daylight, but somehow still didn't fully penetrate our consciousness. Confronted by Rwanda's horrors, international news media at times turned away, or muddled the story when they did pay attention by

casting it in a formulaic way as anarchic tribal warfare rather than an organized genocide. Hate media outlets in Rwanda played a role in laying the groundwork for genocide, and then encouraged the extermination campaign. The international news media not only failed to fully grasp and communicate the unfolding genocide, but for the most part also overlooked the war crimes committed during the genocide and in its aftermath by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which is still Rwanda's ruling party, leaving us with a skewed narrative.

Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond, revisits the important case of Rwanda, but importantly, also examines how the nexus between media and mass atrocity has been shaped by the dramatic rise of social media in the years since.

Some argue that looking at the meeting point between journalism and conflict affords us with an excellent opportunity to scrutinize the very institution of journalism itself.

In 2004, on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication hosted a one-day symposium entitled *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. That event brought together for the first time an international collection of media experts and some of the actors from the Rwandan drama; it also inspired a collection of papers that became a book called *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, published just over a decade ago, and available online in full at: www.idrc.ca/en/book/media-and-rwanda-genocide.

As the editor of that publication, I felt duty bound to draw attention to the role news media had played in the Rwanda events, not least because I was among the reporters who inadvertently downplayed the events of 1994.

For my part, I came to Rwanda late. Before joining the faculty at Carleton in 2003, I was a career journalist with the *Toronto Star*, and in the early 1990s I was writing about foreign affairs in its Ottawa bureau. It is to my everlasting shame that I did not volunteer to go to Rwanda in 1994. I first visited the country in 1996 to report on the repatriation of Hutu refugees from the Goma region of what was then eastern Zaire. But Rwanda does get inside you and, since then, I think I have been trying to some degree to

make amends for not having been there in 1994. Reviewing the *Toronto Star* archives, I found an article of mine published on April 9, 1994. I had forgotten ever having written it; perhaps it left my memory because it was such a dreadful piece of journalism. Written three days into the genocide, the article focused entirely on the evacuation of Canadian expatriates from Kigali and invoked every cliché of tribal conflict, chaos and anarchy.

When I finally did get to Rwanda in 1996, to report on the refugee crisis that was unfolding in the aftermath of the genocide, one of my main pieces of equipment was a large, bulky satellite phone, rented from a marina in Ottawa just before my flight to Africa. I had to carry it around in a large, insulated case. My driver in Rwanda referred to it as “the coffin.” I was able to use the satellite phone to report on the mass exodus of Rwandan refugees from Zaire back to Rwanda, in November 1996. I also reported on the massacre site we found in one of the abandoned refugee camps.

All this to say, in Rwanda in the mid-1990s there were no mobile phones and no social media. The internet was in its infancy. I filed my stories by dictating them to *The Star* rewrite desk over the satellite phone, or when I could get a landline in Rwanda, by connecting my computer using acoustic couplers.

How the world has changed. We are now saturated with social media, generated often as not by non-journalists. Mobile phones are everywhere. And in many quarters, the traditional news media continues to implode while social media seeps into the void.

Against this backdrop, it is more important than ever to examine the territory where modern media and mass atrocity intersect.

On the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University once again turned its attention to the linkage between media and genocide. Carleton partnered with the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies in late 2017 to host a three-day round table called *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond*, which spawned this publication.

The *Media and Mass Atrocity* collection revisits some of the key issues of the media-genocide nexus in Rwanda and in the aftermath of the events of 1994: the shifting narrative of the genocide itself; the evolving debate over the role and impact of hate media in Rwanda; the challenge of digitizing archival records of the genocide; and fostering free and independent media in atrocity's wake.

Social media tools can be used to inform and engage, but also — in an echo of hate radio in Rwanda — can be used to demonize opponents and mobilize extremism. We are left with many troubling questions, still unresolved despite the passage of time since Rwanda.

What role do media play in alerting the international community to looming mass atrocity? Could more informed and comprehensive coverage of mass atrocities like Rwanda help us to mitigate or even halt the killing because of an international outcry? How do we assess the impact of modern hate media? What is the role of the media and journalists themselves in trying to resolve or prevent conflict? What do the lessons of Rwanda mean now, in an age of communications so dramatically influenced by social media?

This collection — 27 chapters in all — begins with a foreword and introductory chapter from one of the main actors in this drama, retired Canadian General Roméo Dallaire, who was the commander of the doomed United Nations peacekeeping force in Rwanda. In his chapter, Dallaire argues that media can be used as a weapon by combatants in a conflict, but should also be deployed by those who seek to prevent or stanch the fighting. Dallaire's focus is on how the UN mission that he commanded failed to use news media tools effectively, even as proponents of the genocide dominated the airwaves with their hate radio messaging.

THE RWANDA CASE

The section on the Rwanda genocide continues with first-hand accounts from two journalists who reported extensively on the ground in the spring of 1994 — Mark Doyle, who was then with the BBC and Catherine Bond, who reported for the *The Times* (of London) and other outlets. Doyle tracks his reporting during the crucial opening days and weeks of the genocide,

making frequent reference to BBC transcripts of his reports and, in the process, pins down the usually ephemeral nature of radio reportage. Bond reviews some of the key moments of international media coverage of the events and takes issue with the careless, almost casual way the genocide is sometimes described as a spree of madness, as anarchy, a description that fails to convey the “relentlessly methodical and unpitying manner,” in which the killings were carried out.

In a chapter called “The Genocide Video,” I chronicle the back story of one of the most important pieces of news media footage gathered during the genocide, the video captured by Nick Hughes, who trained his camera lens on the death throes of a man and woman who were killed on April 11, 1994, in the Kigali neighbourhood of Gikondo. (Only in the course of editing this publication would I learn that reporter Catherine Bond was standing next to Hughes while he captured that important footage.)

Scott Straus, professor of political science and international studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, challenges the almost paradigmatic notion that hate media in Rwanda sparked extreme violence. Straus’s chapter, first published in the journal *Politics & Society*, contends that there is little social scientific analysis of radio’s impact on the genocide and mobilization of its participants. Straus refutes the conventional wisdom that Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines broadcasts were a primary determinant of genocide, and concludes that radio alone cannot account for either the onset of most of the genocidal violence or the participation of most perpetrators. The result, for Straus, is a much more nuanced view of a complicated event.

Filip Reyntjens, professor of law and politics at the Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp, Belgium, rounds out the Rwanda section with a polemical examination of the information and communications strategy deployed from the genocide to the present day by Rwanda’s ruling party, the RPF. The choice of Reyntjens as a contributor to this section will undoubtedly spark some controversy and will raise questions in Rwanda about giving a platform to authors who are vocal critics of the RPF and President Paul Kagame. The inclusion of

Reyntjens' work is not meant to provoke his detractors, but rather to provoke discussion about the role of news media in settings like Rwanda.

AFTER MASS ATROCITY

Simon Cottle, professor of media and communications at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, Wales, reflects on what's changed in the world of humanitarian crises and communications since the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Cottle revisits some of the key findings and arguments from *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. He concludes that today's more complex and rapidly changing communications environment can open up new possibilities for progressive intervention prior to, during and following such murderous collective events.

Mark Frohardt and Paula Orlando, of the media development organization Internews, explore how interventions involving media can discourage further violence and contribute to building a culture that promotes some sense of justice and sustainable peace in countries where mass violence and atrocities have occurred. Looking at case studies in Rwanda, Colombia and South Sudan, Frohardt and Orlando conclude that the most effective way of working toward reconciliation and non-violence is by fostering a culture of critical engagement among the population.

Paul Ruksha, Digital Content Development Team Leader at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda, writes about what it means to digitize a genocide. One of the many challenges facing a society coming to terms with genocide is to ensure that the history of the event is documented, that witness and survivor testimonies are recorded and catalogued, along with the documentary and media-generated evidence of the events. But perhaps equally daunting as the challenge of making sure this vital information is gathered and retained is finding a way to make it available to researchers and to the public at large.

ECHOES OF RWANDA

The Rwanda genocide sparked the usual calls of “never again” and yet, in the years since, the world has witnessed numerous mass atrocity events that could be called “echoes of Rwanda.” The chapters in this section apply a media lens to the cases of Darfur, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Yazidis, Myanmar and South Sudan, while harkening back to Rwanda.

j. (james) Siguru Wahutu, a Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society visiting fellow, explores the little-examined question of how African media cover atrocities on their own continent. Looking at African media coverage of Darfur, he relies on interviews with journalists in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa in addition to his prior work on African media and Darfur. For Wahutu, the answer to the chapter’s motivating question “who tells the story of African atrocities to African audiences?” is simple: not Africans. Wahutu’s chapter title borrows from a direct citation from one of his interview subjects, who said, “we have failed as a continent.”

Joachim J. Savelsberg, sociology professor at the University of Minnesota, also examines media coverage of Darfur by looking at patterns of media representation of the conflict. He draws upon his Darfur media data set, based on content analysis of more than 3,000 articles and editorials from newspapers in Europe and North America, to probe when reporting on Darfur began, its intensity, the depiction of suffering and how the framing changed over time. Interviews with African correspondents and other journalists provide a second source of data. One of Savelsberg’s conclusions is that after initial neglect, peaks in reporting followed political initiatives, especially the UN Secretary-General’s linking of Darfur to Rwanda.

Media consultant Michelle Betz focuses on the work of journalists in another African setting for mass atrocity, the CAR. Based on her own extensive interviews with journalists from the CAR, Betz explores what it means to cover mass atrocity in your own country, rather than as a foreign correspondent. “[U]nlike their international colleagues, as both witness and victim, they have no escape from the traumatic environment,” Betz writes, in a chapter that puts a human face on the challenges local reporters face in covering conflicts in their own community.

Journalist Michael Petrou examines the media strategy of the Islamic State through its use of slick online magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* and its notorious snuff videos of hostages in orange jumpsuits being brutally executed. Petrou cautions media in other countries against amplifying the Islamic State message through the re-broadcast or publication of the group's posts, which are specifically designed to be clickable. Petrou implores journalists to work harder to expose the Islamic State's manipulation and selective interpretation of Islam, rather than holding a mirror up to its online atrocities. "Reporting on the Islamic State and the mass atrocities it commits is no different than most other good journalism," Petrou writes. "It requires skepticism and curiosity, extensive research, a commitment to finding diverse and legitimate sources, and a desire to inform and serve the public rather than simply capture its attention for a moment or two."

Alan Davis, Asia and Eurasia Director of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), explains how hate media online in Myanmar — primarily on Facebook — grew out of a history of hate media prior to the explosion in internet access of recent years. Davis, who designed and led a media monitoring and reporting project on hate speech in Myanmar for IWPR, argues that the international community could and should have been better prepared and intervened sooner to reduce the impact of this hate media. He also attributes some of the hate media to the lack of media professionalism in a society accustomed to decades of oppressive censorship.

Theo Dolan and Will Ferroggiaro's chapter documents PeaceTech Lab's work to create a lexicon of hate speech being used online in South Sudan. The goal is to identify and contextualize the particular kind of language that's likely to cause violence. An online survey was conducted over a period of several weeks in 2016 and respondents were asked to name a word or phrase they had seen online that they considered to be offensive and inflammatory and likely to contribute to violence. They were asked what language was used, to provide an English translation, an explanation for why they considered the word or phrase to be offensive and inflammatory, and also to specify where they saw the term in use. The resulting lexicon of hate speech terms — described in detail in the chapter

— has been incorporated into PeaceTech’s ongoing monitoring for hate speech. PeaceTech has developed predictive analytics capabilities in hopes of developing early warning data to assist peace-building and humanitarian response groups by issuing warnings about likely outbreaks of violence based on the online use of hate speech.

JOURNAUSM AND MASS ATROCITY

This section returns to the central role of individual journalists when confronted by mass atrocity and suffering. Paul Watson, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the 1993 civil war in Somalia and found himself, a year later, thrust into the bloody mire of Rwanda, leads off the section with a chapter that speaks to what he calls the foreign correspondent’s “love affair with war.” Watson tracks his own conflict reporting experiences in Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda, and also draws parallels with the media-military experience in Vietnam. Watson contends that war correspondents have a singular mission to get at the truth.

Anjan Sundaram, author of *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship*, a searing critique of media policy in Rwanda, puts forward what he calls a post-colonial model of international news, looking at the contributions of stringers and local journalists in central Africa. Sundaram makes a case that biased and incomplete portrayals of the region are linked to Western correspondents continuing to appropriate the labour of stringers and local journalists. By diminishing the contribution of these “subaltern journalists,” the international news system facilitates authoritarian leaders such as Rwanda’s Paul Kagame in advancing their own media agenda.

Lauren Kogen, a journalism professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, looks at the reporting of humanitarian crises to assess to what extent, and how, the news provides information on long-term solutions. She looks at US media coverage of one particular distant crisis — the 2011 famine in East Africa — and compares it to coverage of a domestic crisis — the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the United States — to uncover the differences in how the news media describe local and distant suffering. While both of these examples relate to disasters, not mass atrocity events, the patterns that emerge from the coverage are entirely

relevant to a discussion of the intersection between news media and mass atrocity. Kogen found the coverage of distant suffering to focus on short-term relief over long-term development, that causes of the crisis were disconnected from the solutions, that the tone of the articles was consistently negative and that human-interest stories displaced coverage regarding any solutions to distant suffering.

SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW ACTOR

The impact of social media as a new actor is examined through chapters on social media use by the Islamic State, by actors in the Syrian civil war and in other contexts.

Geoffrey York, Africa correspondent for Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper, leads off this section with an examination of the impact social media has had in conflict zones across the continent. York notes that in many African countries, social media has helped to expand freedom and empower citizens and challenged the traditional state-controlled monopolies of information. But at the same time, social media has had dangerous and worrisome consequences. It has facilitated new forms of hate speech against ethnic minorities or opposition groups. It has allowed the spread of false information that misleads and distracts the population. And it has allowed authoritarian governments and powerful business interests to intimidate and harass dissidents and others who challenge their authority, including journalists, opposition politicians and civil society groups.

Nadia Hai, a Ph.D. candidate in communications at Carleton University, looks at how individual or "lone wolf" attacks are framed by Daesh, or the Islamic State, in its online magazine *Rumiyah*. She focuses on how Daesh frames individual attacks, not only as part of a wider military and communication strategy against an enemy, but as a ritual for uniting other believers in their cause. Like the propaganda used to foster past mass atrocities, *Rumiyah* calls for more violent attacks on individuals the authors have deemed "other" or enemies — the main target being individuals residing in Western countries. Utilizing their own narratives and mainstream media frames, the authors of *Rumiyah* pull together

seemingly random attacks and imbue them with greater meaning as a larger struggle.

Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, a Ph.D. candidate at the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, also examines the Islamic State's media strategy. Moving beyond its eye-catching cinematography, he looks at the heart of the group's media machine in order to lay out a clear typological outline of the Islamic State's production and dissemination strategy. He notes that despite an initial foray into user-generated content, the production of Islamic State propaganda has been centralized into a highly vertical hierarchical and centralized structure. Primary distributors operate together as a network organization. But the strategy also incorporates unaffiliated sympathizers, who can best be understood as an associative cluster who disseminate propaganda horizontally. In other words, it is suggested that the Islamic State propaganda machine is simultaneously both vertical and horizontal.

Stephanie MacLellan, a senior research associate at CIGI in Waterloo, Ontario, looks at the challenges social media can pose in the developing world. She argues that underlying instability, weak media landscapes and populations largely made up of inexperienced internet users — most relying on mobile phone connections — can exacerbate the effects of rumours and calls to violence transmitted through social media. MacLellan stresses that this doesn't mean that efforts to expand digital access in the developing world should be discouraged — the benefits for education, economic growth and human rights far outweigh the risks. But special care needs to be taken to meet the needs of local populations adapting to new forms of digital media, especially where social tensions exist.

Nick Monaco and Carly Nyst collaborate in a chapter on so-called "patriotic trolling," the use of government-sponsored or government-endorsed hate mobs to harass and silence perceived opponents of the state. Monaco is a researcher at the Digital Intelligence Lab and in the ComProp Project at the Oxford Internet Institute. Carly Nyst is an expert on technology and human rights. Their chapter sets out how these smear

campaigns can take on the scale and speed of the modern internet with pinpoint personalization from troves of personal data afforded by cheap surveillance technologies and data brokers. They acknowledge the ongoing debate over the degree to which disinformation and government-orchestrated smear campaigns villainizing the Tutsi ethnic group contributed to the Rwandan genocide. But they argue that it is undeniable that disinformation and hate campaigns at scale are a means of sowing seeds of discord that can form a fractured and fractious populace, and ultimately lead to larger conflicts. In this light, state-sponsored trolling campaigns can be viewed as akin to hate and smear campaigns leveraged against particular ethnic groups in the twentieth century.

Chris McNaboe, developer and manager of the Syria Conflict Mapping Project at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, describes the remarkable insights that stem from tracking the web of online interactions that envelop the Syrian conflict. McNaboe's premise is that online interactions leave data trails for researchers and present an excellent opportunity for observing these social changes. And in the case of Syria, the use of social media over the course of the conflict has been so prevalent that there appear to be more minutes of video posted online than there have been minutes of real time. In addition to these videos are countless tweets, blog posts, Facebook posts, activist reports and more. Combined, this online activity offers an unprecedented view of ongoing conflicts. Mediators and humanitarian organizations wishing to respond to the conflict have been able to map and monitor the changing front lines, evolving relationships between actors, the status of vulnerable civilians, the flow of weaponry, atrocities and, more recently, violations of ceasefire agreements. While the social media lens is not without its imperfections, McNaboe argues, the growing use of social media has changed the way the world engages in and responds to conflict.

PREVENTION

In a final section, the preventive function of media through the use of advanced digital technology as well as radio programming in the Lake Chad Basin and the Democratic Republic of Congo is explored.

Steven Livingston, a professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, Washington, DC, collaborates with Alice Musabende, a Ph.D. candidate at Cambridge University, UK, in an examination of whether advances in media technology and our ability to document war crimes and human rights abuses have any preventive value. We now see, often in close to real-time, atrocities that would have been lost to the world only a handful of years ago. But Livingston and Musabende ask whether knowing necessarily translates into doing. Whether such access to information can be directly linked to changes in international policy-making processes remains undecided. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that changes in the technical capacity to gather evidence has had negligible effect on the willingness of states to intervene in mass atrocity events. It is no longer feasible for leaders to claim ignorance of atrocities. The chapter concludes, however, that the basic calculus of when to intervene to prevent atrocities has not changed.

David Smith, who has spent decades promoting the medium of radio as a post-conflict tool for reconciliation, makes the case for radio as a tool for countering Boko Haram extremism in the Lake Chad Basin. Smith argues that media only works as a tool in countering violent extremism if it disseminates inclusive civic and moral values. The chapter is about the need for media to be an agent of positive change in perceptions, governance, religious tolerance and education dedicated to the prevention of all forms of violent extremism. Smith puts forward the example of the work of Radio Ndarason Internationale, broadcasting to four countries surrounding Lake Chad: Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, in partnership with a regional organization, the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Smith contends that ignorance of the political, social and economic benefits of an inclusive, progressive society fuels much of the violence that racks the Lake Chad area. Any long-term solution to a crisis involving extreme violence must involve using media to address the issue of good governance. Good governance is the elephant in the room, Smith argues, and is often ignored for the simple reason that those expected to provide solutions to conflicts are often part of the problem.

Bert Ingelaere, a professor at the Institute of Development Policy at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, looks at the radio listening habits of

combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The chapter is based on Ingelaere's discussions with 101 former rebels from the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda — a military movement that emerged from the remnants of the Rwandan army and militia responsible for the 1994 genocide. Ingelaere's interviews were with former combatants who had returned to Rwanda, but the focus was on their use of radio while still in the DRC. The former rebels made clear that, apart from interactions with visitors and telephone calls, radio was their primary source of information in the Congo. Ingelaere pays particular attention to a soap opera broadcast by Radio Rwanda, one of the most popular stations among rebels, and how the soap opera shaped their view of post-genocide Rwanda and affected the decision to return to Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond questions what the lessons of Rwanda mean now, in an age of communications so dramatically influenced by social media and the relative decline of traditional news media. And in the end, there are still far more questions than answers.

The collection you are about to read begins with the case of Rwanda, then traverses other scenes of mass atrocity that in many ways echo Rwanda and also implicate the media.

The most powerful journalism is about people. As journalists, we sometimes feel we have succeeded if our work brings those people to life. For those who report on conflict and mass atrocities, perhaps we have achieved something if we can convince people to identify with those who have perished, to feel some connection and responsibility, and, most importantly, to learn.

I return here to a point made some years back in my preface to the earlier collection, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, an effort to drive home the significance of looking for lessons in events such as the genocide in Rwanda.

More than 500,000 people perished in Rwanda in 1994. The volume you are about to read, a collection of some 250,000 words, could be dedicated to those who were lost in Rwanda. To underline the point, I paraphrase a comparison first made by American journalist Scott Peterson.

To understand the number of dead, imagine that every word in this book is the name of a victim. As you read this collection, look at every word. Then think of someone you know.



**THE
RWANDA
CASE**



1

THE MEDIA AND THE RWANDA GENOCIDE

ROMÉO DALLAIRE

The media can be an exceptionally effective weapon if you wish to use it. It can be used to great effect by either side in a conflict. Those who are not supposed to be taking sides at all, but have an interest in conflict prevention, will also find that they can and should use the media.

The news media — both domestic and international — played a crucial role in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. From my vantage point as commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), I was able to watch this strange dichotomy of local media on the one side fuelling the killing while international media, on the other side, often ignored or misunderstood what was happening.

But a fuller analysis of the role of the media and, more broadly, of communications during an event such as the Rwanda genocide must go beyond examining this important duality of media use by journalists and by proponents of genocide. We must also look at the use of media — or lack thereof — by the international actors who were supposed to be trying

to suppress or even halt the violence. For my part, I wish to document how the United Nations mission in Rwanda essentially failed to use news media tools effectively and was also deficient in the non-media flow of communications and information.

In the final analysis, I would argue that when examining the role and impact of media in atrocity events such as Rwanda — and those horrific echoes of Rwanda that have continued to resonate to this day in other settings — we need to absorb and at times reassess the lessons of the past. But we also need to be agile and creative in our thinking and find ways to apply those lessons at the dawn of the social media era, in the midst of one of the most dramatic transformations of the media and communications landscape since Gutenberg invented the printing press.

Looking back to Rwanda, it is crystal clear to me that for the most part, the local media in the country, in particular the extremist radio station Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTL), were literally part of the genocide. The génocidaires used the media like a weapon. The haunting image of killers with a machete in one hand and a radio in the other never leaves you. I am aware that there is an ongoing debate among academic experts about the precise impact of that media messaging and the degree of its cause-effect relationship to the killing. But to my mind, it is indisputable that the use of hate media by proponents of the genocide had an impact on events. I don't need to wait for the final analysis of that impact to conclude that it was real and warrants our attention.

For its part, the international media initially influenced events by its absence. There was a tree falling in the woods with no one there to hear it. Only those of us in Rwanda, it seemed, could hear the sound, because the international media were not there in numbers at the outset. And by the time international media did turn its attention to Rwanda, it was essentially too late for their reporting to have an influence on events or to generate the kind of groundswell of public opinion that would have been necessary to bring about a major international intervention effort. Looking back, I think it is critical to realize that one of the greatest information and communication gaps occurred before the genocide began, when the international community was not getting any kind of in-depth analysis of

the true nature of the burgeoning conflict and the frictions that were there, or the complexity of what was happening. Because of that gap, there was virtually no attempt at conflict prevention. Instead, we were left to react to what ultimately happened when things went catastrophic.

And my mission, especially in those early days, was ill-equipped to properly monitor what was being broadcast in the local media, or to counteract it with strong messages of our own about the United Nations and its role in Rwanda. On top of everything else, the inability to properly use media tools was a profound failure of the mission.

To step back for a moment, it is important to set the scene in Rwanda in 1993-1994, and then to examine a number of ways in which the media were involved, both locally and internationally. This was a time when Rwanda had, in theory, finished a civil war. Enemies had signed a peace agreement, some of them under duress. In the course of a year, the country moved from a peace agreement to political stagnation to assassinations to massacres to civil war, and, along the way, to genocide. In the end, the Tutsi minority actually won the war and gained control of the whole country.

That period in the early 1990s was, in my view, an era in the New World Disorder, not the New World Order that George Bush Sr. pronounced. There was no new military thinking, no new diplomatic thinking coming to the fore. When I arrived in Rwanda as UN commander, I had commanded in Canada a brigade group of 5,200 troops, but with a military mindset that was still erroneously focused on Central Europe. Stumbling into this new era, we weren't too sure what training we should be pursuing. Because of this, we were still concentrating on mechanized warfare against a possible mechanized force as a way of building capacity of our military in the early 1990s. So I came from that background, with only a couple of days' warning, to Africa and to a whole new realm of conflict — not war, but conflict. This was a realm of imploding nations, failing states and mass atrocities, which fit absolutely none of our doctrinal frameworks or our formal training. Too often, because the prevention of conflict was not even on our radar, we failed in our missions. We moved into Yugoslavia and Rwanda and other places with 40 years of peacekeeping in

Cyprus as our background, even though the green line in Cyprus had nothing to do with what we found in places like Rwanda.

In Rwanda, we entered an era of conflict during which many of the diplomats, politicians, soldiers and humanitarian relief workers stumbled. They did a lot of on-the-job training and a lot of crisis management. In some cases, they applied too many resources, at a terrible cost of life. And in Rwanda, in the end, they didn't want to get involved at all, creating an orphan nation, where the people simply didn't count.

The American experience in Mogadishu in October 1993 significantly changed the will of the Western world to actually commit itself to the betterment of the developing world. Eighteen American soldiers were killed. They were professional soldiers who knew they risked being killed every day when they woke up. It was part of their way of life, their professional commitment. But in Somalia, after 18 military deaths, the imperial power turned tail and ran.

The Americans had entered Somalia, along with Canadians and soldiers from many other countries, because hundreds of thousands of Somalis were dying of thirst, lack of food and medical supplies. And when the Americans eventually pulled out — and pulled the heart out of the mission, leaving it in the hands of Pakistanis, Italians, Canadians and the United Nations — there were still hundreds of thousands of Somalis dying. But for the United States, the price had become too high. The price of 18 soldiers was too much for the American government to continue with its stated aim of helping Somalia.

There is an important media component to the story of American withdrawal from Somalia, a withdrawal that had an enormous impact on the US government's unwillingness to engage with Rwanda a year later. In essence, the public's negative reaction to the prominent publication in the news media of photographs of American war dead — specifically the photos captured by Canadian reporter Paul Watson of Somali civilians desecrating the nearly naked corpse of Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland — forced the hand of the Clinton administration. The Americans withdrew hastily from Somalia and put in place a new doctrine of “never again” for the US military. Never again would they be drawn

into a complex and catastrophic African conflict that could take American lives while offering no strategic or economic reward for the United States.

The irony is this: in the case of Somalia, the existence of photographs — in this case, of American war dead — prompted a dramatic foreign policy directive by the United States to withdraw from Somalia. A year later, the absence of such prominent media imagery probably facilitated the American desire to stay out of the Rwanda conflict and to deflect any international pressure to lead or support an intervention effort.

I think one horrific, overarching media reality that influenced the situation in Rwanda was the fact that we were falling on the heels of Mogadishu. There was, at the time, a fear of casualties — to some degree media-driven — and that became a nemesis to political structures. I sometimes wondered if more consideration was being given to the impact of casualties than to the actual conflicts themselves and to what we should have been doing to grapple with them.

And in an echo of Somalia, during the first 24 hours of the genocide in Rwanda, the gruesome deaths of 10 Belgian soldiers was too much for Belgium, the ex-colonial power, to sustain. Over time, we have come to realize that in the first of many clever manipulations of the media, the planners of the genocide took their cue from the Somalia affair. They instigated the killing of Belgian troops during the first day of hostilities, clearly aware that media coverage of those deaths could well force the Belgian government to withdraw its troops, some of the best-equipped members of the UN force. It was a massive shock, I agree. Then the Belgians pulled out, and tried to convince everybody else that we should leave. They said we would all be massacred. And nobody wanted to risk returning to another African debacle in the making, where the risk of soldiers' lives was too high. I would argue that the mediated dimension of this early development in the Rwanda tragedy has been somewhat overlooked. And it continued to have repercussions in the weeks and months ahead.

Coverage of the deaths of the Belgian soldiers set the tone for everything else. It put the fear of death, literally, into all possible troop-contributing nations. And political decision makers were wary of even considering the

options, be they intervention, reinforcement or continuing the process of trying to prevent the mass atrocities that were not ebbing, as many had hoped, but in fact were continuing.

A representative of one major power came to me within the first weeks of the genocide and said quite clearly that after they did their assessment they had decided they were not going to come to stop the carnage. There were bodies all over. We were already burning bodies with diesel fuel, because of the fear of disease, the smell and the wild dogs. This representative said, “You know, this country is of no strategic value. Geographically, it provides us nothing. It’s not even worth putting a radar station here. Economically it’s nothing, because there are no strategic resources, only tea and coffee, and the bottom is falling out of those markets.” This person further explained: “In fact, what there’s too much of here is people. And, well, we’re not going to come because of people.” And indeed, in quantifying that, he went on to say that his government could only reconsider its decision not to intervene if for every one of its soldiers either killed or injured, there would be an equivalent of 85,000 dead Rwandans.

Are all humans human or are some more human than others? Do some count more than others? Billions of dollars were pouring into Yugoslavia in 1994 along with tens of thousands of troops. Everybody was looking at Yugoslavia. Nobody came to Rwanda. They pulled out and abandoned us in the field. There were more people killed, injured, internally displaced and turned into refugees in 100 days in Rwanda than during the six years of the Yugoslav campaign. And yet the powers that be ripped the heart out of the possibility of stopping, or at least curtailing the killing, or even saving a number of black Africans. It was as if those people didn’t count.

In Yugoslavia, the problems were portrayed as long-standing divisions that educated people could debate. It was religious and ethnic — something studied and analyzed. We brought in new terms such as “ethnic cleansing” to describe Yugoslavia. In Rwanda, it was just a bunch of tribes going at each other, the way they always do. Rwanda was black. Yugoslavia was white European. That, in my view, was the stark difference.

And where were the media? Where were the media in that debate? How many were taken in, or set up? In terms of humanity, the real crisis at that time was in a small country in black Africa that nobody was interested in. The media for the most part travelled down the middle-of-the-road thinking of the world powers, convinced that it was Yugoslavia that mattered, not Rwanda.

While the killing raged in Rwanda, the O.J. Simpson case dominated the airwaves in North America. Tonya Harding's kneecapping of her figure-skating rival was there as well (a story that resurfaced for another generation when retold from Harding's perspective in the 2017 Hollywood film *I, Tonya*). You had Nelson Mandela's election in South Africa. You had Yugoslavia. And oh yes, somewhere in there, a bunch of black tribesmen in Africa are killing each other. During the 100 days of the Rwandan genocide, ABC, CBS and NBC offered more coverage of Tonya Harding than of the Rwandan genocide. Was that because of a love of pathos? Was it because of the excitement? Was it because the Harding story was on CNN's radar screen? Or was it the hand of someone above, guiding the media, and getting across the subtle message: "Listen, we have absolutely no interest in going into another hellhole in Africa. We do not want to get involved in Rwanda. So don't get us involved."

The media, like so many others in Rwanda, failed. The world powers failed. Individually we failed. Major news agencies devote fewer resources to Africa to begin with and virtually ignore small countries like Rwanda, which are deemed to be of little strategic value. There is no context and no general understanding of situations like the one that evolved in Rwanda. As I say in my first book, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, when I was asked to go and serve as commander of the mission in Rwanda, I had to ask, "Rwanda, that's in Africa, isn't it?"

Before the genocide started, the foreign press was absent in Rwanda. The media scene in Rwanda was essentially internal, with some local stringers who responded more often than not to international journalists based in Nairobi. Up to the start of the war, international media involvement amounted to "Is there an event? Do we go, or do we just get the stringer?" After the fact, we realized that before the war started the BBC had a

Rwandan stringer on the ground who was feeding erroneous information to the BBC as part of the extremist government's media structure.

Months before the genocide, when we opened our mission headquarters in the presence of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana, a number of journalists from international agencies attended. When the president was sworn in as part of the new government, there was international media coverage. When there was a massacre in the northwest of the country, there was international coverage. In essence, however, the international press were neophytes when it came to Rwanda.

In the news media's defence, that reality also reflected exactly what the United Nations thought of Rwanda. For the United Nations, Rwanda was a sideshow; it was going to be a cakewalk and had nothing near the significance of what was going on in Yugoslavia, nor Cambodia. It certainly didn't carry much importance as they were moving toward the elections in South Africa.

Many journalists did eventually appear at the doorstep, after flying into Rwanda on the Hercules or sneaking in by other means. But many came lacking background information on what had happened before their arrival. I was not surprised that a number of media simply saw these events as a sort of flare-up of tribalism. Much more background and context were needed to understand the depth of what was going on and the extent of what was happening.

In my view, most of the journalists who came into Rwanda after the war started knew little or nothing of Rwanda. And those who did know a lot were not necessarily heeded. Many of the stories were simply gruesome accounts of killings. There was little analysis of why we let a potential peace process fall into disarray.

The war really started with the killings that began the day after the April 6, 1994, shooting down of the plane carrying Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira. All of a sudden, after years of ignoring the place, every journalist wanted to jump on an aircraft or truck to get to Kigali. To put it bluntly, we weren't on anybody's radar until the shit hit the fan. When it did, the response was overwhelming. The media didn't

know exactly what they were looking for, but there was excitement, and it had reached the CNN radar screen. And so in the first days, a number of journalists did appear.

They came to report that people were being slaughtered by the tens of thousands. Platoons of journalists would come in for three or four days, and then they'd leave so I could bring more in. We guaranteed their safety, and provided them with transport, food and lodging. To me it was absolutely essential that they get their story every day. And I put the lives of my troops on the line to guarantee that people got their daily story — not only in the places where the catastrophe was evolving, but also in getting their stories out to the rest of the world. I had officers and soldiers run the gauntlet to get television tapes to my headquarters in Uganda, and from there to Kampala and then to Nairobi, where the technology existed to upload video to Europe and North America.

It took some time before the big media outfits came in and set up their international capabilities. But the volume of material going out didn't necessarily capture the extent of what was going on. Instead, they seemed more to be providing reporting on Africans attacking Africans, as if there was nothing out of the ordinary. So the reporting did not move the international community to action as I had hoped.

Within the third week of the genocide in Rwanda, when the United Nations had buckled under pressure and decided not only that it was not going to reinforce, but that it was going to abandon Rwanda, the only voice — the only weapon — that I had was the media. If I could shame the international community into acting through the media, then I would have achieved my aim. But despite the courageous work done by reporters in the field, the stories often didn't get past the editor's desk. I often wondered how it was possible that O.J. Simpson and Tonya Harding got more time on ABC, CBS and NBC — and even CNN — than the genocide did. It was not because the material was not being made available. We were getting it out and helping the media to get it out. Yet it seemed to me that much of this material was finding itself on the cutting floor in newsrooms in Atlanta, New York and Toronto.

Although there was more attention paid in Europe, interest in Rwanda was still nowhere near as great as I thought the story demanded. There just wasn't enough reporting being done on Rwanda. And the story never really got told.

Sadly, the lack of depth and analysis helped to set the scene for the extremists to conduct the horrendous scale of extensive destruction that they inflicted. Looking back, it seems that the dearth of in-depth media reporting of a conflict before it actually went catastrophic was an absence that permitted and even encouraged those who were going to pursue a more extreme position to actually do so — and enabled them to believe that they might even escape the condemnation of the international community.

Within the country, Rwandan media played an exceptionally important role in the genocide. Rwanda is known as a radio country. In some villages, the radio was like the voice of God. At the height of the killing, you could still find people with portable radios in the camps for the displaced and refugees. I found myself asking, where did they get the batteries? We couldn't even get batteries for our flashlights.

Of the local media on the ground, RTL M was created specifically as a tool of the génocidaires. Its objectives were to demonize the Tutsi, lay the groundwork for genocide and then literally to continue to drive the killing once the genocide started. The local media also became an instrument of propaganda and information against the international community, the United Nations in particular.

The media can be a two-way street. I tried to give journalists what they required, and some of them were instrumental in providing me with intelligence information. Many of the journalists were courageous enough to go between the lines. I opened my headquarters to them. The only time I didn't want them there was when we were planning operations. At other times, I would see journalists standing at the big map boards with my operations duty officers. They would be making marks on the map and saying, "Yes, I've been through there, and yeah, there is a massacre site there, and yes, there are about 50,000 people on the side of that hill over there." The exchange was transparent.

But after the initial flurry of attention in the first few days of April, most international media representatives were evacuated with the other expatriates. Then it seemed as if there was nobody there and no one cared.

It is important that news reaches the general population and shapes public opinion. When there is a lack of statesmanship, public opinion can force a government to make decisions. Getting information out to the general population and holding decision makers accountable — by continuously berating them about what is going on and what they are doing or not doing — requires more than a few talk shows and a couple of newscasts. In the case of Rwanda, that was where the media connection broke down. The events in Rwanda simply did not break through enough to create momentum.

Only a handful of international reporters were on the ground from mid-April into the start of May to witness the genocide. I went to great lengths during that period to attract international media attention. I wanted journalists to get their stories and, as mentioned, used UNAMIR resources to get tapes up to the border with Uganda so they could eventually be fed to Europe. The BBC's Mark Doyle used my satellite phone from time to time.

At times it felt to me as if one good journalist on the ground was worth a battalion of troops. I realized a good journalist could bring pressure to bear. I had a policy of taking all media calls in the evening and gave instructions to my staff to facilitate those interviews. I had frequent conversations with Michael Enright on the CBC Radio program *As It Happens*.

But the media coverage wasn't enough in April, May and June to create an outcry in the international community. The ambivalence toward Rwanda was too embedded in the great powers, which, because of Somalia fatigue, had a reason to lack interest and to turn away.

Ironically, the news media finally descended in hordes once the genocide was over and the "refugee crisis" took root in Goma. The picture of the suffering in Goma was a clouded one, where the génocidaires were among

those who fled and were now getting 10 times the media attention given to the genocide itself.

I have been asked why I didn't leak the famous January 11, 1994, cable,¹ with its warnings of Interahamwe militias training to kill thousands, making lists and hiding weapons. There has been much debate about my message informing New York that an informant provided intelligence about arms caches and the preparation of lists of people to be exterminated. I told New York of my intention to raid some of the arms caches, but was given orders not to intervene. Once it was clear the UN system was not going to act on those warnings, should I have leaked that information to *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*?

If the media had come and asked me what was going on, if they had come and queried me about the stagnation and the political and security process and asked me what we were doing, they would have got the answer. And they could have reported what was happening. But I was not going to leak that document. You cannot be ethical and fiddle with the media.

Besides, I am not convinced that the leak of the January 11 cable would necessarily have had a profound influence on events. For a host of reasons — lack of interest, lack of understanding, lack of resources, the difficulty of the terrain and the fraught logistics of reporting from Rwanda — most media organizations had turned away, even in the face of massive atrocities and violations of human rights. In that context, even looking back with the clarity of hindsight, I am not sure that sharing the information contained in the January 11 cable would automatically have changed the course of events.

A great handicap for UNAMIR — acting, in effect, as the representative on the ground of the world community — was our initial ignorance of what was really happening and of the mixed media messages. We had very little capacity to monitor broadcasts, in particular those in the local language, Kinyarwanda.

From a mission point of view, we essentially had no media resources whatsoever. We had one spokesperson, and nobody had thought to make

any provision in our budget for the mission to have a dedicated radio station, as we had in Cambodia. So we couldn't get our story out in any way, shape or form.

It was only during the genocide that I was able to monitor the RTLM, thanks to the interpreters being protected and fed at my headquarters who translated the material being sent out. During the whole of the pre-war, we had no interpreter capability, and certainly no interpreters perceived to be objective enough to give us the information we needed. So the mission was actually blind and deaf to what was going on except for what we could glean and whatever people from each side were feeding us. We could listen in French and we could listen in English, but we couldn't listen in Kinyarwanda — and the true stories were coming out in Kinyarwanda.

I feel that we were also far from being able to sufficiently mobilize the international community, enough so that they could have intervened before the conflict and during the conflict, because we didn't ever really get the story out appropriately.

I hold myself and the organization I was representing there very much responsible for not realizing that, in the era of these imploding nations, failing states and complex and ambiguous mandates and missions, we were nearly lame ducks. Without a very savvy and engaged capability to communicate and interface with media, and without that communication going both ways, we had limited ability to gain the initiative and ultimately influence the course of events.

We didn't realize for a long time the difference in tone between RTLM broadcasts in French and those in Kinyarwanda. We missed this vital early warning sign of what was to come because, in effect, we weren't listening properly to local media and what it was telling people in Kinyarwanda in January, February and March.

I still believe it would have made a significant difference if we had had the capacity to comprehensively monitor local media from the outset. This was one of the lessons learned from Rwanda: that part of our role as an international force was to get the whole picture and to realize the importance of media messaging.

In the first few days after April 6, it was actually Rwanda's prime minister designate, Faustin Twagiramungu, hiding in my headquarters, who acted as my media monitor, listening to RTL and translating from Kinyarwanda. Later we hired a young man who could speak English and French, and trained him to perform the same task.

Such missions need their own media and linguistic skills. You ignore the local media at your peril. And there was another lesson in this volatile situation. UNAMIR desperately needed its own media outlet, in this case, its own radio station. In the media war that was going on, we were unarmed. We had virtually no capacity to explain ourselves to the local community, which was being bombarded by the hate mongering of RTL.

From a media point of view, the UN mission came into Rwanda completely unprepared. We had no radio station, even though the media in Rwanda were so important and people were clearly turning to the extremist RTL, the state-run Radio Rwanda and the rebel-controlled Radio Muhaburu. As a mission, we looked at the example of the United Nations' use of radio in Cambodia and how essential it had been. But in our case, no such radio equipment was available in the UN inventory, and so it was dropped from the budget for our mission. When it became very apparent in January and February that we needed a media outlet to explain ourselves, we begged the United Nations for that facility. We knew that the radio gear from the UN station in Cambodia was actually in storage in Italy. We pleaded for it, but didn't receive the gear until well after the genocide.

Thus, we did not have a radio station to take part in the debate or to sell our "product." It became clear to me that none of the radio stations in Rwanda actually told people why we were there. There was no information being passed on. All people saw was a white vehicle with a blue flag going by at 70 km per hour. Many Rwandans didn't have a clue why we were there. And those who knew we were there were led to believe that we were able to do much more than our mandate actually permitted.

In fairness, before April 6, at the behest of Jean-Marie Higirot, then the director of Radio Rwanda, we were afforded 30 minutes a week on the air. But what we discovered was that nobody in our small mission had the

skills to do 30 minutes of programming. In fact, there were some weeks when we didn't even go on. I found out that our spokesman didn't even use the 30 minutes, and so between not having interpreters and media analysts for a long time, we didn't have the skill sets to present a lucid program.

After the killing started, when I was meeting displaced people, there was always this look of astonishment from Rwandans in regard to the Blue Berets. They believed that the UNAMIR mandate was to protect and defend the Rwandans, whereas, in fact, the Security Council ultimately limited our role to assisting in establishing an atmosphere of security. The limitations of our mandate were never really explained to anyone in Rwanda, and that was one of the great tragedies of the mission.

Another tragedy was our failure to intervene early to shut down RTLM, which had become the voice of the devil in Rwanda. Through January, February and March of 1994, before the genocide began, the radio station stepped up its campaign, delivering the message that there were people who should not live in Rwanda. It even described ways to eliminate them.

Failing all else, if unable to counteract RTLM, we should have shut it down. I repeatedly asked for the capability to jam RTLM and the request was denied. The legal argument from the State Department was that this would amount to a violation of state sovereignty, and that there was also a very high cost attached to maintaining jamming equipment.

Looking back, there was also a shocking failure to share intelligence information that would have been useful to me as force commander. Most of the major players had eyes and ears on the ground and were gathering useful intelligence. But for the most part, it wasn't shared with me. I received nothing. My own country refused to give me information. The commander of the force at the time in Cambodia had more support from Australia in that mission than I even could have imagined.

There was some aerial imagery obtained from satellites. The Russians were willing to give me some satellite imagery when the genocide was taking place because I needed to know where the people were being moved and I needed those satellite shots. But they wanted to sell the information to me. First of all, I didn't have the budget, and second, the United Nations

didn't want to engage in that. So I had nothing from nobody. Whatever I scrounged I bought with my own money. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the United Nations absolutely refused to give me any assets so I could gather intelligence on my own. This was despite the fact that establishing an intelligence capacity was fundamental to being able to prevent this conflict from going catastrophic. We knew that after January 11, when my Senegalese officers had acquired some information — but what we got was infantile compared to what we should have had.

My view then, as now, was that we needed to question the absolute of state sovereignty and to ask whether sovereignty was becoming an impediment to humanity. When RTLM started to attack not only the mission, but also myself, when RTLM was launching its description of how to kill, it was obvious to everyone that RTLM was operating without any rules. It was beyond rules. It was beyond limits, and was an overt instrument of genocide.

I went to the United Nations and the big powers, and I said, “I need two things. One is a radio station. And second, I need somebody to find that RTLM emitter, and close her down, either by jamming it or ultimately destroying it.” But the response at the height of the genocide was that Rwanda was a sovereign state, the airwaves belong to that sovereign state, and we could not intervene. Rwanda's sovereignty became an excuse for us to not do anything.

In fact, in a convocation speech on May 25, 1994, at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, President Bill Clinton said that his country could not be the policeman of the world and would only participate in and fully support UN peacekeeping operations that were deemed to be in the vital interest of the United States. “We cannot solve every such outburst of civil strife or militant nationalism simply by sending in our forces,” Clinton said. “We cannot turn away from them. But our interests are not sufficiently at stake in so many of them to justify a commitment of our folks.”² This doctrine was spelled out in Presidential Decision Directive 25,³ unveiled that same month, even as the killing went on unabated across Rwanda. That directive codified and complicated US participation in peacekeeping operations. Indeed, it is my

understanding that weeks earlier, on April 7, in the working room of the Security Council, Madeleine Albright and her colleagues said bluntly about Rwanda: “The Americans are not going to intervene, and they’re not going to help anybody who wants to.”

The world failed utterly to deal with one of the century’s most clear-cut examples of abuse of media. Sadly, we dealt with it only in hindsight through the important prosecution of the media trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

As for the international media, I think we need to ask ourselves, did the lack of attention and understanding by the international media actually contribute to the genocide? Did the decision to ignore Rwanda border on complicity, by letting this atrocity go largely underreported?

The media can be both a weapon and a conscience for humanity. Journalists can be powerful individually and collectively. But they can also be manipulated easily, especially if there is no depth of understanding of the subjects. For future journalists, my advice would be to get yourself a lot more cultured: learn some geography, some anthropology, some sociology and maybe even some philosophy. Bring more depth to your questions and to your analysis. And stay dynamic in the search for the truth, for you are an instrument of the absolute called “justice.” If you abdicate or are perfunctory in your responsibility, we will all be weakened.

And for soldiers, and for military institutions, there is still a failing when it comes to our understanding of the role of the media. Commanders still need more education on the complexities of conflict. We need a whole new conceptual framework for conflict prevention. Generals who know only how to fight are useless in this era. The warrior ethic and being able to use force and the threat of the use of force are critical, but there is so much else we could be engaged in that would lead to prevention and engagement. But that is not happening. And in Rwanda, that was not on our radar at all.

1 The text of the cable has since been published in many places. One source is a document cloud maintained by the National Security Archive:

www.documentcloud.org/documents/816325-19940111a2-unam-rwdp.html#document/p1/a138279.

- 2 A full text of the speech can be found at www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=50236.
- 3 The text of Presidential Decision Directive 25 can be found at <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-25.pdf>.



2

REPORTING THE GENOCIDE

MARK DOYLE

Journalists covering the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 did not fail because of some conspiracy of silence, as suggested by some commentators. We failed in the first few days because it was an extremely dangerous situation with hot lead flying about everywhere. The analysts and academics who — in comfortable retrospect, with the benefit of hindsight — say we failed are not reporters who were there. They have no idea of the logistical difficulties we faced — the blood, death and roadblocks. And, more to the point, after a few weeks we were indeed telling the truth because we had synthesized what we had honestly learned and we of course wanted to tell the truth.

That truth was that the mass killings were overwhelmingly in one direction. If any government — the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Nigeria, France (or anyone else with listening posts) — tries to claim they did not know what was going on by late April to early May of 1994, I would just call them liars. It is absolutely inconceivable that their intelligence services were not at least listening to the BBC. And, of course,

they had their own secret channels. Blaming the media is pathetic and just wrong.

What stopped a real international response to the genocide? “It was racism, stupid!”

As the East Africa correspondent for the BBC, I was one of just a handful of reporters — others were from Reuters News Agency, Agence France-Press and a few others — who stayed in Rwanda for most of the 100 days of the genocide (with trips home to Nairobi for short rests). I recall vividly a moment in late April 1994. I was in Kigali, doing a question-and-answer session with a BBC presenter in London and the presenter asked me to clarify what all this shooting and killing was about. I found myself saying, “Look, you have to understand that there are two wars going on here. There’s a shooting war and a genocide war. The two are connected, but also distinct. In the shooting war, there are two conventional armies at each other, and in the genocide war, one of those armies — the government side with help from civilians — is involved in mass killings.” That may seem simplistic, but I think it is a useful way of understanding what happened.

This chapter recounts my own experiences reporting the war and the genocide for the BBC, filing both radio and television reports. Normally based in Nairobi, Kenya, I spent much of the 100 days after April 6, 1994, reporting from Rwanda, at times as one of the only Western reporters still in the capital. I won’t draw comparisons with other media reporting, because, quite frankly, I was so busy during those 100 days that I didn’t catch much of it. But I think it is important to go into some detail about what I did before I started reporting on the genocide *as genocide*.

I have to admit that during the first few days, I, like others, got the story terribly wrong. Down on the ground, up close, if you could get close enough, safely enough, it did look at first like chaos. I said so. I used the word “chaos.” What I could see clearly in the first few days was the shooting war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the government, and the dead bodies. It was not clear who had killed whom, not at first, and the shooting war appeared chaotic, with shifting front lines, a lot of noise and a lot of red-hot lead flying around.

In a way, the shooting war was easy to describe. The genocide war took a little longer to confirm. But I got there in the end. In fact, looking back now at the scripts of my reports broadcast on the BBC,¹ within little more than a week of the beginning of the killing on April 6–7, there were clear references to government-backed massacres of ethnic Tutsis and Hutu opponents of the regime. In other words, within the first few weeks of the killing, there was reportage from the field sketching out the true nature of the massacres.

My focus here is on what I know best: the reporting I did on the ground.

My first two trips to Rwanda were in late 1993 and early 1994, before the genocide. The installation of the Broad Based Transitional Government kept on being postponed. I didn't really understand why this was happening until I visited an African embassy in Kigali and asked the ambassador if he would give me an off-the-record briefing on the political situation. I can't identify which ambassador it was, of course, because he spoke off the record.

This ambassador astonished me by not only explaining in some detail and very frankly how the various extremist Hutu parties were blocking the installation of the power-sharing government, but he also astonished me by keeping me there, in his private office, for more than four hours. I was a bit embarrassed at first. I didn't even have an appointment. But every time I looked at my watch or made to start leaving, the ambassador said, "No no, sit down. I want to make sure the BBC understands this — do you understand it? Do you realize now what is going on and how dangerous it is?" Thanks to the ambassador, I was just beginning to realize.

The ambassador kept me in his office for four hours because he was frustrated that the world didn't seem to be paying attention to Rwanda, and didn't seem to realize the dangers. When I left his office he said something like: "Don't forget Rwanda, Mark, something big could happen here."

There are some events that make us all remember exactly what we were doing at the time. For my parents' generation it was what they were doing

the day John F. Kennedy was shot. For me, it was what I was doing the day the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi was brought down, late on the evening of April 6, 1994.

I was working late in the BBC office in Nairobi, at about 11:00 in the evening. The phone rang. It was one of the editors in London — I remember it very clearly. At the other end of the phone was a man by the name of David Eades, who went on to be a BBC-TV presenter. David said they were getting news agency reports that a plane carrying the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda had crashed. I remember with crystal clarity what I said. “Oh my God,” I said, remembering clearly the ambassador’s warning. “Oh my God, this is going to be a huge story!” David was taken aback by my response.

I told David I had to go to Rwanda immediately, because this event was going to have major ramifications. That night, I filed a report based on information that I could gather by phone from Nairobi, citing information from UN and diplomatic sources and residents on the ground in Rwanda. My first report focused, not surprisingly, on the reports of the plane crash and “urgent discussions,” between UN commander Roméo Dallaire and members of the Rwandan government.

The next day, the machinery got in motion. Colleagues from Reuters News Agency chartered a plane from Nairobi to Mbarara in southern Uganda, and I bought my seat. Kigali airport was shut, of course, so that destination was out of the question. Heading for northern Rwanda, to the zone held by the RPF rebels, seemed the best way of getting some sort of angle on the story immediately. It took us most of the day and night to get to Mbarara, southern Uganda, then most of the next day to get to Kabale on the Uganda-Rwanda border. And then, after many hours waiting at the border, we negotiated entry into the RPF-held zone and Paul Kagame’s headquarters in the manager’s offices of an old tea estate in Mulindi, in northern Rwanda.

My memory of arriving there has a digital clarity. I remember looking down from the hill where Kagame had his headquarters, down to the old, long-abandoned tea plantations. The field of bright green tea bushes was in

such stark contrast to the dark green trees around the edges of the valley that the expanse of tea looked like a placid lake of green water.

I stayed for a couple of days near Mulindi and saw the start of the shooting war, between the RPF lines just north of the town of Byumba and the government lines on the outskirts of the town. Remember, I say the start of the “shooting war” because I think it is helpful, in order to understand what was going on in Rwanda, to say there were two wars taking place at the same time. The shooting war and the genocide war. There was some overlap, but they were largely distinct operations.

From Mulindi, on April 8, I reported on an interview with the then-RPF Secretary-General, Theogene Rudasingwa, who said the RPF intended to take military and political action to restore order in Kigali and throughout Rwanda. My report on April 9, from Byumba, focused on the RPF attack against government troops and the RPF plan to send a detachment into Kigali to shore up the rebel garrison there. I signed off this way: “The strategic outcome of the current hostilities is impossible to predict, but it’s a certainty that the ordinary Rwandan people who have suffered years of ethnic and political violence, will be adversely affected in the short term.”

When it became clear from what I saw around Byumba that the shooting war had started again in earnest, I decided I had to try to get to Kigali. There was no way I could get through those front lines and travel south toward the capital by land, so I took a risk and went back north into Uganda, driving through the night to Entebbe airport.

By an extraordinary fluke and some negotiations, a few other journalists and I met an aid worker at the airport who had a plane that he was going to fly from Entebbe to Kigali. It was half empty, except for some food supplies, and he agreed to give us a lift. Again, I don’t think I’ll tell you the aid worker’s name, because he got into a furious argument with General Dallaire when he turned up in Kigali, unannounced, with a plane full of journalists.

I don’t think General Dallaire was in a particularly good mood at the time. After months of asking for more and better troops for his UN mission, and being told none were available, he suddenly saw hundreds of them arrive,

but not to help in his mission of pacifying Rwanda, but to take part in an entirely different mission, which was saving expatriates.

The scene at Kigali airport was extraordinary. The shooting war was clearly in full flow. We could hear constant small arms and mortar fire from inside the town. At night we could see tracers and explosions. On the apron of the airfield, there were numerous French, Italian and Belgian military planes disgorging European paratroopers who had come to save European lives.

I spent a few nights sleeping on the airport floor and eating French military rations — which are, by the way, infinitely superior to most other military rations. By day, I went on short trips with the French military as they drove into town to rescue French and other European citizens. I went on these trips not because I thought rescuing Europeans was the main story, but because it was the only story I could cover safely, or at least relatively safely. It was the only way I could get into town to see what was going on. No one in their right mind would have voluntarily gone into the city of Kigali in those early days without a serious armed escort.

On April 11, I filed this report from Kigali:

The capital of Rwanda is in chaos. Three main military groups are contesting positions in the centre of the city: the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front and two components of the government forces, regular army troops and elements of the Presidential Guard, loyal to the late head of state. Reinforcements for the rebels are moving towards Kigali from their stronghold in the north. In addition to those military forces, various militias are settling ethnic and political scores which broadly reflect animosity between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. But this is not just a tribal war. The Hutu are split politically and former neighbours are now at each other's throats. I have definite evidence that at least a dozen people were killed this morning. The total for those few hours alone is certainly many more. An experienced aid worker said tens of thousands of people had

died in the last five days. Foreign residents are being evacuated from Rwanda in an air bridge to Nairobi and other regional capitals. The United Nations forces, which came here to monitor a ceasefire between government and rebels, have found themselves in the middle of a vicious war. Loud explosions, believed to be mortar fire, could be heard sporadically throughout the day near the airport compound, which is controlled by UN forces and French troops brought here to evacuate their nationals. It is not thought that the airport is being targeted, but it is close to positions held by the three main military groups. Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

It was on one of those evacuation trips with the French military that I realized something other than just the shooting war was going on. Standing on the back of a military truck I looked down to see a Rwandan man attacking another Rwandan, in the head, with a screwdriver, clearly intent on killing him. I saw several dead bodies of people who had been killed with machetes. Colleagues at the other end of the convoy of trucks saw someone being attacked with machetes. The French soldiers controlling the convoy just drove past all these incidents, heading for the house of a European who was to be rescued.

In a contribution to another news package broadcast April 11, I filed this report: "As the convoy left the airport to collect its mainly Belgian passengers, snaking its way through outlying suburbs and farms, I counted three recently killed people, probably Rwandans, lying in a pool of blood. Large groups of men armed with clubs and machetes stood around. An hour later as the convoy returned, there were at least eight bodies. Reporters at the front of the convoy saw at least two people being hacked to death. The killing is continuing."

It wasn't until about a fortnight after the plane went down that we started piecing together a clear picture of what happened starting on the night of April 6. We all know now, of course, thanks to the various inquiries, that the Interahamwe and the army set up roadblocks within hours or even

minutes of the signal, if it was a signal, of the plane going down. And we all know now the purpose of those roadblocks.

In a live interview on April 12, I relayed news that the interim government of Rwanda had reportedly fled to Gitarama and that thousands of refugees were apparently leaving Kigali by road, heading south in the direction of Burundi. Another report that day quoted Dallaire as confirming that the RPF force sent down from the north had now linked up with the RPF battalion based in Kigali.

My report from April 13 focused on the fight for Kigali:

The battle for Kigali continues. Small arms, automatic weapons and grenades are being used as rebel and government forces struggle for advantage. On Tuesday (April 12), the UN commander in Rwanda said the rebel forces were not encountering strong resistance. However, there was heavy fighting at dawn on Wednesday. The conflict began when the president's plane was shot down seven days ago. The president's supporters blamed rival tribal and ethnic groups and the massacres of civilians began. Tens of thousands of people were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced by the unrest. Now the fighting has a more military aspect with two highly trained armies attacking each other. The rebels say they are fighting to restore order in Kigali and then in the longer term to introduce democracy to Rwanda. The government army may be fighting for its own survival. The government it was supposed to be protecting fled on Tuesday for a regional town. Different groups are in charge of various parts of Kigali while much of the population has fled. Whichever group comes out on top will have to manage a huge humanitarian crisis. Over a million people were critically short of food before the Rwandan civil war resumed because of drought and earlier conflict. Hundreds of thousands of others will now be dependent on food aid.
Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

Later the same day, in a report about ceasefire negotiations, I referred to the RPF contention that it had no interest in a ceasefire “while innocent people were being killed in Kigali.” I also reported:

...rebel allegations that thousands of political opponents of the late president, who died when his plane was shot down last week, have been systematically murdered by the government army and militias loyal to the former head of state. These allegations are supported by numerous eyewitnesses. However, the RPF advance has also undoubtedly led to many deaths. The main army base in western Kigali and the area that surrounds it is still firmly in government hands. The streets around the base are patrolled by government soldiers in armoured cars and tanks. Several evacuated foreign embassies in the zone are untouched by looters. In other parts of the west of the city however, thugs mounting road blocks are continuing to kill people they consider to be their ethnic or political opponents. Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

Many reports, including my own, made reference to the “tribal” nature of the conflict and militias settling scores. But the outlines of genocide began to appear in news reports, even before we first used the word to describe the killing. Here is a report from April 14, which began with the sound of gunfire:

One of the many front lines in Kigali. The city is now divided into rebel and government-held zones. Where there aren't soldiers from one side or the other, militias with machetes and clubs rule the streets. Neighbourhood boundaries are defined by roadblocks, often with piles of bodies next to them. Militias loyal to the government have killed many ethnic Tutsis. Militias loyal to the rebels have killed Hutus. Before the rebels came to Kigali a few days ago, what appears to have been a deliberate plan by Hutu militias to massacre Tutsis or rebel supporters was instigated — thousands were executed by bullet or by knife.

There have been some reports that rebel soldiers are taking revenge. This afternoon, a reliable eyewitness saw an RPF soldier force five people into a house and shoot them dead. The rebels hold positions near the United Nations headquarters and several other areas. The government holds the western zone, where empty foreign embassies stand, positions around the airport and other areas. The deafening sound of gunfire and mortar echo around the misty valleys of this once beautiful city. The sickening stench of bodies on the streets is common, despite the mass graves — some containing thousands of bodies — which have been filling up. The United Nations operation in Rwanda was helpless as the carnage gathered pace. Now its commander, Gen. Dallaire, is shuttling between the two sides trying to arrange a meeting which might lead to a ceasefire. The rebels have vowed to capture the whole city, but they have failed to take several key points because of government resistance. The battle for the Rwandan capital continues.
Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

On April 15, I reported on the decision by the International Committee of the Red Cross to suspend its operations in Rwanda following an attack on a Red Cross ambulance, during which six wounded being carried in the ambulance were killed at a roadblock. The report also noted the continued intensity of the military battle: “The fighting is fierce. Mortar and heavy calibre automatic weapons were heard at various times throughout the night. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the last week in clashes which have involved tribal militias at least as much as regular government and rebel troops. The capital of Rwanda is anarchic. UN peacekeepers have failed to stop the fighting but are trying at least to organize a meeting between the two sides.”

Another report on April 15 painted a more detailed picture of the suffering on the ground:

The displaced people I have been able to see in the capital are undoubtedly but a drop in the ocean of human suffering

caused by the political and military unrest. Five thousand Rwandans have taken refuge in a football stadium in which Bangladeshi UN soldiers are billeted and a similar number fled to a UN hospital. Thousands more are in churches or in other places of refuge. The 5,000 displaced in the main Kigali football stadium are being protected by the Bangladeshis but have very little food, no running water and no medical supplies. Many of them were wounded in the fighting or are suffering from malaria and other easily preventable diseases. There are several Rwandan doctors in the football stadium but they have no drugs or bandages. The Bangladeshis have shared some of their combat rations with the refugees. At a makeshift clinic under one of the main spectator stands, a Rwandan volunteer was handing out small sachets of apricot jam to sick people. 'It's all we've got,' he said. 'I know it's not medicine but I've got to give them something.' With almost all United Nations civilians and other aid personnel evacuated from Rwanda, there are virtually no foreign aid organizations here to address the catastrophe caused by the war. The main exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross, but even this organization has had considerable difficulties operating. Several aid groups are said to be standing by in Nairobi to bring in much-needed food and medical supplies, but until the fighting dies down and airport security is guaranteed by the UN, aid flights can't come in. The UN force commander said improving airport security was one of his top priorities. Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

My reports over the next few days focused on the withdrawal of Belgian troops, the appointment of Augustin Bizimungu as the new Rwandan army chief of staff, the government's claim that two million people had been displaced by the fighting and the intense battle for strategic hilltops south of Kigali.

But a dispatch on April 16, about attempts at ceasefire talks, cited senior UN officers who said the killing of the president's political opponents

began soon after the April 6 plane crash:

The immediate aim of the talks is clearly a ceasefire so a semblance of order can be restored to the capital. Currently, apart from the two warring military sides, there are militias, bandits and looters on the streets. Near-anarchy prevails and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by the war. There is no effective government and the RPF rebels don't recognize the interim administration, which has now fled the capital and is based in the town of Butare in the south. Meanwhile, for the first time since the president's plane was brought down over a week ago, a clearer picture is emerging of what United Nations peacekeepers think happened after the crash. Senior UN officers say massacres of the President's political opponents from both Tutsi and Hutu tribes began just a few minutes after the plane was brought down. UN officers said they appealed to the presidential guard to stop the killing, but failed. According to the UN officers, it was this mass killing which prompted the rebels to break out of their United Nations designated cantonment to mount what the rebels described as a rescue mission. The city is now divided into government and rebel-held zones which ethnic and political militias are protecting as a first line of defence. UN military officers said the rebels were also fighting for the Northern towns of Ruhengeri and Byumba, which are held by government soldiers but which have come under rebel shelling. The UN asked for a pause in the shelling, so it could pull back some of its units to the capital. Mark Doyle, BBC, Kigali

A report the next day, April 17, repeated the summary by stating: "It's estimated that tens of thousands of people have been killed in Kigali since the president's plane was brought down by still unknown gunmen. First the president's supporters massacred his political opponents, then the rebels marched on the city and military clashes began..."

An April 18 report gave some credence to the Rwandan army claim that the RPF had rounded up 250 civilians and killed them. But it also stated: “Most independent eyewitness accounts of killings in the Rwandan capital in the last few weeks have accused government soldiers and militias loyal to the government of killing political opponents in very large numbers. The presidential guard in particular is accused of massacring ethnic Tutsis and Hutu members of political parties opposed to the late president who died when his plane was shot down almost two weeks ago by unknown gunmen.” And another file that day contained this reference: “Camps full of ethnic Tutsis, fleeing violence from government sponsored ethnic Hutu militias, are said by Rwandan army officers to have been created in several parts of the country.”

In an April 19 report about the withdrawal of UN military observers, I stated: “On the streets leading to the main government army base, militias armed with machetes are directed by soldiers and form a first line of defence against rebels and rebel sympathizers, who are often taken by the militia to include any ethnic Tutsis.” Monitoring events from Nairobi on April 20, I reported that “thousands of people have been killed with machetes and clubs by the government militia, who have targetted opposition sympathizers and members of the minority Tutsi tribe who dominate the rebels’ forces.”

And again on April 22, I made a reference to “militias loyal to the memory of the Rwandan president who was killed in a plane crash two weeks ago. The militias are killing political and ethnic opponents of the late president in large numbers.” The same tone permeates my April 23 report, once again from Kigali, which is bolstered by information from the Red Cross: “Massacres of ethnic or political opponents of the late president, who died in a plane crash which rekindled the war, are continuing. Most of the massacres are committed by militias loyal to the late president’s memory — sometimes with government army soldiers present. The Red Cross estimates that up to one hundred thousand people have been killed in the past two weeks.”

My report from Kigali on April 24 painted a clear picture of what was happening on the ground:

It's difficult to imagine the scale of the human disaster in Rwanda unless you've seen some of the many piles of bodies heaped on the streets of Kigali and on roadsides in the rural area. There is little dignity for the main victims of this war which General Dallaire reluctantly believes still has some time to run. The Canadian commander is keeping lines of communication open, is protecting those civilians that he can and is working hard for a ceasefire. But he said it was not clear to him that the tactical aims of the two armies had yet been achieved. Most of the killing is being done not by soldiers or rebels, but by machete-wielding militias who seek out ethnic and political opponents. The worst killing so far has been in the capital and the worst culprits have been militias opposed to the ethnic group from which the rebels are drawn, the Tutsi. Other political opponents from the Hutu tribe have also been killed. While this slaughter continues, there is a more conventional war between the government and rebel armies taking place...

Short of using the word "genocide," my report from Kigali on April 26, echoing charges levelled by Amnesty International, challenged the notion that the killing was a simple tribal conflict.

Amnesty's main charge is that the killings have been part of a deliberate political plan, rather than pure tribal violence. The main culprits, according to the human rights organisation, have been supporters of the late president who have systematically executed known or suspected opponents of his former rule. This thesis fits broadly with the facts. It was only a matter of minutes after the late night plane crash three weeks ago before elements of the former leader's presidential guard began killing opponents of their late head of state. By morning the next day, militias loyal to President Habyarimana's party were on the streets seeking out opposition sympathizers. They included members of the Tutsi tribe, from which the rebels draw most of their support and ethnic Hutus from opposition parties.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, up to 100,000 people have been killed. Despite the undoubted political motivation behind many of the killings, it is nevertheless probable that the majority of those to have died are Tutsi. Politics and ethnicity are inextricably linked in Rwanda. While many Rwandan intellectuals, particularly opponents of the former president's military rule oppose tribal politics, it is still a factor in most political calculations and is likely to be for some time to come.

Looking back through my reports, it appears I didn't use the word "genocide" until April 29, in a report filed from Nairobi that noted the British aid agency Oxfam had described the killing in Rwanda as "genocide." But my reports had for some time been replete with references to the massacres of Tutsi civilians and moderate Hutus by government-backed militias.

After that, and as it became clear to me what was happening, I used the word "genocide" more often. But one of the problems we faced in reporting the genocide *as genocide* — apart from, of course, confirming the facts on the ground — was that it took the rest of the world, including some of my editors in London, some time to take it in. I'm not saying I was censored, or anything like that. Far from it. I think every word I sent to London was rebroadcast. But the BBC often uses sources of information and interviewees other than its own correspondents on the ground. That's quite right and healthy, of course, but it sometimes meant parts of the BBC were at odds with what I was saying.

The first problem was a general one. There is a general tendency to portray Africa as chaotic, the "Dark Continent" and so on. Sometimes, indeed, it is very dark. It was in Rwanda in 1994. But Rwanda was not, after a while, chaotic or impenetrable. It was, as we now know, a very well-planned political and ethnic genocide. That didn't really fit the media image of chaotic Africa and various things flowed from that.

For example, I used to take regular calls from BBC editors in London asking me to make sure I "put the other side." The implication, of course,

was that the RPF must be killing as many as the Interahamwe and the government army, and that I should be reporting this. During calls like this, I had to control my inner fury at the implication that I was somehow biased. But, from a London perspective, I could see why they were asking the question. I told them what I knew, that this was not a balanced picture in terms of killings, and that was that — whether it fitted what we might have expected or not. My editors trusted me and used my material, but I still had a feeling they were a bit uneasy.

Sometimes, if I took my eye off the ball and didn't carefully monitor the output from London, I found that BBC newsrooms in London would revert to using phrases like "chaos" and "indiscriminate mass killings." It wasn't chaotic, on the whole, and it wasn't, on the whole, indiscriminate. I sometimes found myself sending my editors what for me were highly unusual memos, not for broadcast, asking them please to stick to my words. In response they usually did.

I sent one such memo on June 20, headed "Rwanda/Guidance." It read as follows:

It is a very serious misrepresentation of the situation in Rwanda to describe the killings simply as "the slaughter of civilians" or "the mass killings," without explaining who is killing whom. The vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of killings in Rwanda have been committed by the government militia and government army who have been implementing a well-organized plan of genocide of Tutsis, the tribe from which the rebels draw most support and ethnic Hutu government opponents. These killings preceded, or coincided with, the military offensive by the mainly Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front rebels. The BBC should not fall into the trap of bland and misleading descriptions of Africans massacring Africans without explaining why, as the news agencies are doing most of the time. The killings in Rwanda are political as well as ethnic. A BBC correspondent who has spent much of the last three months in Rwanda says the government militia and the

government armed forces are responsible for most of the bodies being found in mass graves in Rwanda and floating in rivers leading from Rwanda to Lake Victoria in Uganda.

Nevertheless, the spin doctors sometimes won bizarre victories. In July 1994, a few dozen British and American soldiers arrived at Kigali airport to help distribute some aid. The US and British army spin doctors promptly announced to the world, in keeping with the usual image of Western troops arriving in Africa, that they had “taken control” of the airport. This was, of course, ridiculous. The RPF was by this time in control of almost the whole country and had been in complete control of the airport for many weeks. A few lines of this “taken control of the airport” rubbish crept into BBC News bulletins written in London. The phrase gave the desired impression, of course, that the United States and the United Kingdom had finally arrived to sort out the squabbling natives, when this was complete nonsense.

There were more serious attempts to “balance” what was essentially an unbalanced story. A few weeks into the genocide, some RPF soldiers killed five churchmen. I’m not sure of the exact circumstances, but it was public knowledge soon afterwards because the RPF leadership publicly denounced it. Newsrooms around the Western world seized on the killings with undisguised glee — it was as if here, at last, was proof that the “other side” was just as evil. The problem was, this was *not* the proof of moral equivalence that could make the world feel okay about dismissing the whole Rwanda business as African chaos. This was *not* the balancing item that would make it okay to forget about the genocide and say, with the warring parties at each others’ throats, nothing could be done. Five murders, condemnable and awful though they may be, cannot, in my book, equate with 5,000 or 50,000 or however many had been committed by the other side by that time. I believe that highlighting this case, giving it the prominence it got, was misleading.

On another occasion a senior spokeswoman for a UN agency told a press conference in Geneva that the Hutus in southwest Rwanda, who were mainly fleeing the shooting war, had good reason to fear being massacred by the advancing RPF. At this point, there was, to my knowledge, no

evidence of mass killings by the RPF, and this UN spokeswoman was simply wrong. Perhaps she, too, was seeking a moral equivalence. But she had clearly not understood the difference between the shooting war and the genocide war, and who was doing what to whom. And yet, as a senior UN official, she surely should have done. Her remarks were given wide credence, but again, they were misleading.

I filed this copy on May 1:

The statement by the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] spokeswoman, Sylvana Foa, to the effect that the mainly Hutu people in southeastern Rwanda are in danger of being massacred appears to be based on misinformation. Ms. Foa said that the Hutus are desperately afraid of the RPF and that tens of thousands of them are in danger of being massacred. The clear implication was that the rebels would do the massacring. A BBC correspondent who has spent much of the last three weeks in Rwanda, said there had been no convincing evidence of the RPF massacring civilians. The RPF have openly admitted to killing government militias whom they consider armed combatants. Our correspondent says it is likely that the Hutus in southeastern Rwanda are scared of the RPF military advance, because they don't want to be caught in the crossfire with government troops, but that the allegation that they fear being massacred by rebels does not appear to have any evidence to back it up. The vast majority of the killing in Rwanda has been done by government militias, murdering ethnic Tutsis and Hutu members of the opposition parties.

In addition to filing the news copy, I added this guidance to the desk: "I suggest that we do not broadcast Sylvana Foa's statement about the alleged fear of massacres by the RPF until some convincing evidence emerges to back it up."

After the front lines began to stabilize a bit in Kigali, I ventured out of the airport and away from the protection of the French military who were rescuing their fellow nationals. I went into town on my own. My first stop was the Mille Collines hotel.

I managed to get a share of a room in the hotel and decided — rather foolishly, in retrospect — to go to the Red Cross hospital. It was a rather dangerous thing to do. But I suppose I'm pleased I ventured out because I learned a lot that day, about two weeks after the plane went down, about the genocide war.

There were about six roadblocks between the Mille Collines and the Red Cross, with militiamen and soldiers on them. As we made our way toward the hospital there were a comparatively small number of bodies next to each roadblock. (This is, of course, an extraordinary way to describe dead fellow humans. But Rwanda seemed to change the way we all saw things, including scale. Never before then would I have used a phrase like “a comparatively small number of bodies.”)

With some bluffing, we managed to get past the militiamen at the roadblocks and reached the hospital. I was with fellow journalist Catherine Bond. We did the necessary interviews with Red Cross officials and patients, and, after about two hours, started to make our way back to the hotel. The piles of bodies at the roadblocks had grown. For the first time, I had personal eyewitness evidence that pro-government militias were killing people. There was no doubt about it. I remember Catherine turning to me in the car and saying we should describe that road between the Mille Collines and Red Cross as “Machete Avenue.”

“If they can have ‘Sniper Ally’ in Sarajevo,” she said, “we can have Machete Avenue in Kigali.”

I think I stayed at the Mille Collines for a few more days, then I became too scared by the militias at the doors, and I sought a kind of refuge at the Red Cross offices. The incredibly brave Red Cross representative, Philippe Gaillard, who used to cross the front lines every day doing his humanitarian work, tolerated me on his floor for a few days. But Philippe made it clear that I would be kicked out if any of my reports ever

compromised his neutrality. I didn't like putting him in this position, so I moved out when I realized that the Meridien hotel, on the other side of town, had some UN officials staying in it and consequently had a few Tunisian UN soldiers on guard.

Staying at the Meridien was surreal. The hotel was actually on the front line when I moved in, and again, in retrospect, it was absurdly dangerous being there. The RPF had dug trenches in the road just outside the entrance lobby and we used to actually watch them exchanging fire with the government forces. It was also surreal staying there because although two of the floors were full of refugees, one of the managers of the hotel had stayed on and still had the keys to the kitchens and the wine cellar. Every night she served us a meal, which we paid for in dollars and ate while the shooting war raged, literally, outside our front windows.

A colleague from Reuters News Agency had a bullet come through his window and into his bathroom. The most sought-after rooms were at the back.

Gradually, the RPF won the initiative in the shooting war in the capital and took the area comprising the UN headquarters at the Amahoro stadium, the Meridien hotel and the airport. This meant that there was some freedom of movement in this area, and fairly quickly the UN headquarters at the Amahoro became a focus of my activity. It was a focus for me because it was a relatively safe place to be, and because the UN was a good source of information. Not all of the UN officials were happy for me to be there, but most came around after a bit of persuasion. Some of them let me go on trips with them and briefed me about their version of events. Ceasefire meetings were held at the Amahoro and that meant I had regular access to both RPF and Rwandan government officials. This would have been impossible without the UN's support.

General Dallaire himself was quite canny with the press. He would talk to us when he could and was quite friendly. I remember once going to his room to interview him. I hadn't shaved for several days, and the first thing he did was to open his personal suitcase and give me a disposable razor. But I realized that at the same time as being quite friendly, Dallaire was *using* the press. If he turned up at a meeting with, say, Kagame or

Théoneste Bagasora, with a posse of journalists in tow, it allowed him to get the belligerents to say, on camera — when they wanted to, of course — that they agreed with this or that ceasefire proposal.

I was quite happy to be used in this way if it meant I got better access to the key actors in the two wars. But on one occasion I deeply regretted travelling with General Dallaire to a ceasefire negotiation. He went across Kigali, across the front line, to meet with the government side in the Mille Collines hotel. The top government army and gendarmerie brass was there. After the talks, the press were invited in to record some prepared statements. At this ceremony, a senior gendarmerie officer suddenly started publicly berating the press, especially the BBC, for spending too much time with the RPF and not telling the government side of the story. Now, let's be clear. There were very good reasons why we didn't spend much time on the government side. It was hostile and extremely dangerous there. For one thing, the RPF were winning the shooting war and the government positions kept on being overrun. For another, the genocide war was taking place on the government side and it was a distinctly unhealthy place to be, of course for Rwandans, but also for foreign journalists. I'd been there many times and it was, quite frankly, terrifying.

Nevertheless, some misplaced pride in my objectivity persuaded me to answer the gendarmerie officer's complaints by saying, in public, that I would welcome the opportunity to accompany him on a visit to the government front lines. I regretted it almost as soon as I had opened my mouth, but I realized that once I had said it, in public, I had to go through with it. And so, I set off, very reluctantly, again with my colleague Catherine Bond, on a tour of government positions near the centre of Kigali and in the district of Nyamirambo. I deeply regretted our itinerary, in a government military vehicle, because I knew, from independent sources, that the RPF had firing positions in the hills above Nyamirambo.

At one point a mortar round landed quite near to us, quite possibly targeting the military officers I was travelling with. But on the other hand, I did learn some important things that day. One — the killing was continuing. I saw a deep well full of bodies. And two — the government military were working in direct collaboration with the civilian militia. I

knew this because I saw it for myself. I saw the barriers with bodies next to them, and I drove in a car with army officers who ordered the civilian militiamen to let them through. I also saw a senior civilian militiaman give orders to men in uniform. It was direct collaboration.

Once the RPF had more or less firm control of most of Kigali, more and more journalists started arriving in the capital by road from the north, and the RPF began showing us things for themselves, especially genocide sites. I went with them a few times including, once, to the church at Nyamata where several hundred people had been killed. But on the whole, I preferred to stay near the UN forces because that way I could get parts of both sides of the story, hitching rides with UN officers as they shuttled between the two sides. I travelled, for example, to Gitarama to interview Theodore Sindikubwabo, the man who was briefly appointed interim president after the remnants of the government had fled the capital. I got there thanks to some friendly Ghanaian military observers. I also made many trips outside the capital independently.

My last trip before leaving Rwanda in late July 1994 was an independent journey to the town of Gisenyi on the border with what was then known, and I still think of, as Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). The RPF had claimed to have taken Gisenyi, and since it would be the last major town to fall to them, meaning they would have won the shooting war, I decided to go to check.

Again, there is a crystal-clear digital picture in my mind. Gisenyi was littered with red beer crates that had been looted from the brewery, and the hills around the town were dotted every few metres with the little piles of stones Rwandans use to balance their cooking pots. Hundreds of thousands of Hutus had camped there, in the open, before flooding into Zaire, as the génocidaires made what I am convinced they thought of, at the time, as a tactical retreat.

There was a petrol tanker on fire at a crossroads in Gisenyi where I met a tall RPF officer called Bruce Munyango. Someone had told him I was coming and he greeted me. As I shook his hand I noted that he had one finger missing on his right hand. "I'm going to take you right up to the border," he said, "to show you we're in full control." He did just that. The

RPF had won one of the wars, the shooting war. But it didn't feel like a triumph, because the other side had almost won the genocide war.

¹ This chapter relies very heavily on the verbatim transcripts of my reporting from Rwanda, accessed from within the BBC archive before I left the organization in 2015.



3

LISTENING CAREFULLY, LOOKING HARDER: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN MEDIA COVERAGE DURING THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE, 1994

CATHERINE BOND

That the outside world did nothing in April of 1994 to stop the genocide in Rwanda, where just a little more military intervention could have saved so many lives, is well established.¹ Less well-known perhaps is that many journalists from the international and national media reported on the unfolding of the genocide right from the very start, often in minute detail. How well it was covered — the words we as reporters used, and the weight they were given by our editors in Brussels, London, Nairobi, New York or Paris, and how much we understood of what was going on all around us — is another matter, but we did report, edit and broadcast for anyone who cared to notice. Were there no mighty, military interventions, no major reinforcements for the small UN force already there because we failed to convey the enormity of what was happening? Or did what we report — the

fragments of genocide as they passed before our eyes — go largely unnoticed or, worse, ignored by those with the will to listen and the power to act or the empathy to care?

This chapter seeks to explore some of the international and national media coverage of the genocide from April to July 1994, when the 507,000 Tutsi estimated killed during the genocide died. Although more conservative than the figures of 800,000 or one million often cited, this figure of about half a million Tutsi is the one Alison Des Forges settles on in her definitive study of the genocide, *Leave None to Tell the Story* (Des Forges 1999). In it, she points out that half a million persons represented a very high proportion — about 77 percent — of the Tutsi population of 657,000 calculated to have been living *inside* Rwanda at the time.

This does not include the thousands of politically moderate Hutus, many of them prominent in civil society and politics, who were killed by Hutu extremists, nor the 25,000 to 45,000 Hutu estimated killed by Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels inside Rwanda during the genocide as well. Added to them are the 15,000 combatants — Hutu soldiers and Tutsi rebels — thought to have died in combat (neither side in the war published their troop losses) (*ibid.*, 15-16). This would bring the number of deaths directly linked to the 1994 genocide and the war going on alongside it to between 547,000 and 567,000 in 1994. A UN expert evaluating Rwanda's population loss during the period of the genocide (April–July 1994) calculated it at 800,000, a figure that also included deaths from causes other than the genocide.

In April 1994, when the genocide began, news of what was happening — starting with the deaths of two African presidents in an extraordinary air crash at 8:25 p.m. local time on Wednesday, April 6, as they flew into Kigali, the Rwandan capital, not long after dark — was carried by all the major French, British and American news agencies (known as “the wires”) and broadcast in many different languages by radio stations with hundreds of millions of listeners around the world. Rwanda was then largely francophone, the result of four decades of Belgian colonial rule, and the francophone press — Belgian, French, Swiss and Rwandan — was almost always ahead in its reporting, illustrating that at this, as at every other

level of the genocide, language played a defining role, from the words that were used to describe it to the language in which they were spoken.

In exploring early media coverage of the 1994 genocide, this chapter hopes to challenge the careless, almost casual, way the Rwandan genocide is still described in the world's media — as a “spree of madness” (Gettleman 2013) — a description that, although true to the atmosphere during it, fails to convey the relentlessly methodical and largely unpitiful manner in which individual killings were carried out. That, almost 25 years later, the Rwandan genocide can be portrayed as irrational frenzy, despite being one of the best-known, best-documented mass atrocities of the twentieth century, speaks to the gap in knowledge that exists between witnesses and victims, historians and other academics, and the everyday perceptions of even the relatively well-informed.

Initial reporting by the French press, for example, was accurate and swift: early on April 7, the French news agency, Agence France-Presse (AFP), relayed news of the deaths of all 12 passengers on the plane; official confirmation of the plane crash had been first broadcast on Rwanda's and Burundi's state-run radio stations. “The cause of the crash was not known,” reported AFP at 06:37 GMT, April 7, 1994, from Kigali/Paris, “but at the United Nations in New York, Rwandan Ambassador Jean Damascene Bizimana charged that the aircraft had been hit by rocket fire as it prepared to land at Kigali airport” (AFP 1994a). From the start, he suggested the crash was an assassination, not an accident.

Despite the relative obscurity of Rwanda and Burundi in world politics then, the sudden and apparently deliberate deaths of Presidents Juvénal Habyarimana, age 57, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, 39, meant that by April 8 news of their deaths had appeared in national newspapers in Belgium, Britain, France, Kenya, the United States, Uganda and elsewhere. Unusually, there was none of the delay normally associated with the slow investigation of plane crashes. On April 7, the day after the crash, a spokesman for Rwanda's Ministry of Defence said the executive jet (lent by France) had been brought down by “unidentified armed elements” — a statement that would hold true for the next 20 or more years (AFP 1994b).

In time, questions about how the plane crashed and who fired the missiles that brought it down would divert attention to the question of its putative cause, and away from focusing on the path of the genocide and its heartbreaking consequences. In 1998, a French parliamentary commission would examine arguments concerning the crash during hearings into France's role in Africa in the early 1990s. In its findings, however, the cause of the crash remained unanswered (Assemblée Nationale 1998). The motive remains important because RPF rebels used the plane crash to justify ending a ceasefire that had been in place for months, and Hutu extremists in the government used it to trigger the killing of high-ranking political moderates in the city of Kigali, and members of Rwanda's ethnic Tutsi minority all over the country.

At the time of the crash, the Rwandan government and its military was composed mostly of ethnic Hutu, and the political and military leadership of the rebels who had been fighting against them, mostly of ethnic Tutsi from the diaspora. Colonial language played its part: men and women in the RPF rebel leadership were brought up in anglophone Uganda as children. They went to school and university there before working in Uganda, Kenya or farther afield. Those who were older than 40 in 1994 spoke some French, but many younger people did not. In early 1994, Paul Kagame, the leader of the rebels' military wing — the RPA or Rwandan Patriotic Army — was 36. Most civilian politicians in the RPF leadership were a decade older, but the real power lay with the military and not the political wing — with soldier politicians, some of whom had graduated first in law or medicine in Uganda. Their inability to speak French limited their rapport with francophone Rwandans from the Hutu political elite during peace negotiations in 1992 and 1993 in the Tanzanian town of Arusha. It also affected their standing in the eyes of French government officials during the civil war (1990–1994) the negotiations were designed to end.² At the same time, the RPF's recruitment of refugee and ethnic Tutsi from francophone Burundi and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) had little impact on the linguistic divide at the top, with most newcomers placed in the RPA's middle and lower ranks.

For the generation of Tutsi brought up in Uganda, growing up in the tense and turbulent 1960s, 1970s and 1980s had not been easy. Stigmatized as

outsiders, and portrayed as ambivalent in their allegiances, many Tutsi men were recruited (as army officers) and women (as spies) by former President Idi Amin (1971–1979). When Amin fell, they were subjected to collective punishment by his main successor, President Milton Obote (1980–1985). In response, young men of Rwandan descent joined a rebel army raised by Yoweri Museveni, a militant politician who fought his way to power in a civil war (1981–1986) and has remained Uganda’s president ever since. Rwandan refugees who joined his army served in military intelligence (like Kagame) and other units, and were often deployed in combat areas of eastern and northern Uganda. Away from prying eyes at army headquarters, they stockpiled arms and ammunition, tested expensive artillery, and rallied troops of Rwandan heritage, using the Ugandan army as a springboard from which to launch a rebellion of their own. These Rwandan Ugandans were seeking a place to call home — and a home to rule, a lasting escape from the humiliation of being a refugee, and a sanctuary from the horrors they had witnessed and perpetrated as young men serving in Museveni’s army.

If differences between English and French speakers exacerbated the level of tension between hardline members of the Tutsi and Hutu political elites, the language they shared did little to heal them. Kinyarwanda spoken inside Rwanda was sophisticated and ironic — the popularity of state-run Radio Rwanda having only made it more so. Tutsi raised as refugees had grown up speaking other languages as well, among them Kinyankole and Luganda in Uganda, and Swahili in the army; Swahili in Kenya and Tanzania; Lingala in Zaire; and Kirundi in Burundi. As adults, many spoke faltering Kinyarwanda or Kinyarwanda with a strong accent. Crossing from Uganda on foot in October 1990 as part of the RPF invasion was the first time many of the original RPF force of about 3,000 RPF/A officers and men (and a few women) had been in Rwanda since they fled it as toddlers with their parents in 1959 or 1962; those born later had never been there at all.³ It did not meet their expectations: where their parents had praised Rwanda’s beauty, they saw hills less spectacular than those in Uganda. Knowing little of the lie of the land when later they seized control of the Mulindi tea plantations, they opened fire at night on flares of methane gas rising from peat swamp under the tea fields, mistaking the

flaring gas for their enemy, the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR), shooting at them from its positions.

After hearing news of the plane crash on shortwave radio, such as the BBC World Service, Voice of America or Radio France Internationale, a number of British journalists based in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi — myself included — chartered a light aircraft to the Ugandan town of Mbarara. From there, we drove to the RPF's headquarters in Rwanda, which lay behind the front lines, with no real fighting in the immediate area. Senior RPF officers emerged scratching, as if from lice, from their billets in tiny lean-tos thatched with banana fronds. They seemed distracted; it looked to us as if news of the plane crash had caught them off guard. Having arrived in the hope of getting to Kigali, but finding ourselves unable to, we grew restless and plaintive. Thus, some of the first photos of the “fighting” in April 1994 came from a brief display the RPF put on to quiet the press, lobbing mortars from a rocket launcher across a valley in the direction of the hilltop town of Byumba, then held by government troops of the FAR.⁴

We began to add more detail to our reporting, looking at who was killing who in Kigali, and sketching a framework from which a pattern to the killings would quickly begin to emerge. In the British daily *The Guardian*, Mark Huband wrote “troops of the Rwandan presidential guard have sought out and slaughtered opposition politicians, church people and aid workers from both the Hutu and the Tutsi tribes” (Huband 1994a). To understand why people in these professions were being singled out, it helped to know — as a regionally based journalist such as Huband did — that quotas set by Rwanda's Hutu-led governments set limits on the proportion of government jobs given to Tutsi. The effect of these limits was to force Tutsi to seek employment elsewhere, in the private sector, UN agencies and other exempted fields, such as religious and aid groups.

Over the next week, think pieces by academics, and letters from readers, began to be published in the United States and France about the situation in Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire, some highlighting France's role (Smyth 1994). They added the context reporting from the ground might lack, for lack of time or perspective, or omit for brevity's sake, when your story

was competing with the conflict in Bosnia for space in the newspaper the following day, or air time on radio or satellite television.

In a piece published on April 14 in *The New York Times*, titled “French Guns, Rwandan Blood” (ibid.), contributor Frank Smyth wrote, “The horrendous violence that has seized the tiny African republic of Rwanda is not as random as it looks.” In places, Smyth undermines his own logic, describing the presidential guard as going on a “rampage,” and stating that “Militiamen and soldiers under irregular command randomly attacked Tutsi or anyone suspected of being one” (ibid.). To use the term “irregular command” was misleading — actually, incorrect — since the militias had been trained by the Rwandan army and were being supplied by them. So was the term “randomly,” as Smyth himself points out. But at a time when France took its influence in post-colonial Africa very seriously, Smyth’s explanation that it had assumed Belgium’s former role as the Rwandan government’s key francophone ally was crucial to understanding the geopolitics behind the tragedy unfolding on the ground: “French is an official language [in Rwanda] — even though [only] one in six adults are fluent in it — and that counts for a great deal.” The context was important because France felt its sphere of influence threatened by Museveni’s militarism; in the RPF’s invasion from Ugandan soil, France glimpsed the dawn of an anglophone empire in Africa’s Great Lakes region, and the erosion of its own. Rwanda was, for it, a buffer zone against anglophone encroachment. Smyth ended: “in propping up the Rwandan regime for so long, it [France] bears part of the blame for the current bloodbath.”

In the scores of newspaper articles and radio transcripts I read in the process of researching this chapter, some of the details we reported in 1994 pointed in the “right” direction — clues, like the crumbs that led to the witch’s cottage in the forest — and others were misleading. Most of the articles we wrote were partly “right” in that our choice of words conveyed the systematic nature of the killing, and not wholly “wrong” in that being caught up in it was, for a while anyway, chaotic for everyone — victims, militiamen, soldiers, rebels, witnesses, UN military personnel, journalists, expatriate evacuees and the foreign troops rescuing them. Some of our language hinted that subconsciously we sensed a wider scheme of things — a greater plan — and some of it conveyed the

temporary sense of chaos that, for the first weeks of the genocide, existed alongside it. Some of our language was sober, conveying a sinister sense of the order that existed behind the appearance of mayhem. Some was not.

Contradiction can be true, and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were both full of such contradictory language, not least from their correspondents on the ground. The words “anarchy” and “methodical” would appear cheek by jowl. On April 25, *The New York Times* ran a story from its new East Africa correspondent, Donatella Lorch, in Kayanza in northern Burundi, where she interviewed the few Tutsi managing to escape Rwanda. (She herself had just spent five or six days in Kigali.) She wrote: “Rwanda fell into anarchy after its President, Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was killed in a suspicious plane crash....The crash reignited the centuries-old hatred between the majority Hutu ethnic group...and the minority Tutsis.” And then, “What began as political violence aimed at Tutsi and moderate Hutu officials in a Rwandan interim Government has widened into what appears to be a methodical killing of Tutsis across the countryside” (Lorch 1994).

In hindsight, words such as “anarchy” and “centuries-old” were unhelpful, throwing foreign policy makers who were pondering what to do about Rwanda off the scent. But on the same day, *The New York Times* ran an editorial stating, “What looks very much like genocide has been taking place in Rwanda” (*The New York Times* 1994). Policy makers could make up their own minds.

The New York Times published at least 41 articles on Rwanda between the day the genocide began, April 7, and the end of April — the period when the vast majority of Tutsi were killed. Lorch’s story details the machete wounds Tutsi survivors bore on their necks and hands. Beyond the semantics and the implications some academics have drawn from it (the less histrionic the vocabulary, the more likely an intervention), what strikes me most is the torrent of detail, the heartbreaking quotes from victims and witnesses. The hundreds of pages, the tens of thousands of words in English and French (alone) that — taken together — lead one to question the argument that the genocide went underreported.

Right from the very start after reaching Kigali in April 1994, many of us sensed — without knowing enough to explain exactly why — that something very different, something much bigger was taking place than all the terrible civil wars, famines and atrocities we had been reporting on from the Horn of Africa and East Africa, almost every year in the mid- to late 1980s.

Early on in the genocide, my reports, too, contained information that was wrong and information that was right. Thus, in a piece for *The Times* (of London) published on April 13, I led with “Rebel troops were on the verge of taking Kigali, the Rwandan capital, last night” (Bond 1994), which was inaccurate. The rebels sent reinforcements to their battalion in the city, but were a long way off capturing it. (They didn’t take control of Kigali until early July.)

When we reached Kigali from Uganda’s Entebbe airport on a UN aid flight on April 10, we were initially confined (by fighting in Kigali) to the airport terminal. We slept on the floor and ate the rations that French, Belgian and other troops evacuating their nationals from Rwanda gave us. Finding space on a convoy they led to collect evacuees on April 11, we witnessed an episode that has haunted us since:

Returning to the airport in a convoy of Belgian evacuees, we witnessed a scene of a type that has become horrifyingly normal. French paratroopers halted the convoy to wait for gangs carrying kitchen knives, machetes, hammers and clubs to finish killing a number of adults on the road ahead. We waited for perhaps 10 minutes.

On our departure from the airport an hour earlier, we had seen the bleeding corpses of two people — a man and a woman, the woman with her legs cut off, a mutilation witnessed in massacres 30 years ago and sometimes described as a Hutu form of contempt for the taller Tutsi tribe....On our return, four more women had been butchered just ahead of our convoy in the same place outside a mud

hut. Four men had also been killed with machetes and their bodies were lying in grassy ditches by the road.

The scene produced in me a mixture of nausea and tears. Seemingly unmoved, however, the French paratroopers I was travelling with turned up the volume of the disco music on their car cassette. The attackers lined the road, cheering the French troops and heckling the Belgians. (ibid.)

I also quoted a British cameraman, Nick Hughes, who captured for television a scene unfolding some way across the valley from the Belgian school — a place where expatriates gathered to wait to be evacuated. “They brought women, old or middle-aged women, out of the houses and onto the street and made them sit in a pile of bodies, [of] wounded and dying people,” he said. “For about 20 minutes the women pleaded for their lives with a group of men who walked up and down the street chatting. They clubbed one woman to death, then the other.”

I went on to report: “Soldiers of the Rwandan army passed the school in lorries looking as if they were heading to prepare a mass grave with the help of a road digger.” And later in the same article, “most of the killing is probably not random but carried out along ethnic and political lines. The victims are likely to be Tutsi as well as Hutu who made the now-fatal mistake of supporting opposition parties” (ibid.).

Nowadays, we would search for data to substantiate our claims; it was no different then. The numbers of people killed made their way into our reporting from very early on. “The Red Cross estimates that over 15,000 people have been slaughtered since last week. Eight thousand have been buried in a mass grave outside the city, where the Red Cross provided fuel for earth movers to dig a hole big enough for all the bodies,” reported Huband in *The Guardian* on April 12 (Huband 1994b).

Statistics aside, you would have to have had a heart of stone to read anything on Rwanda then without pausing. Correspondents recognized the irony of focusing on foreigners fleeing the country: “*Au regard de ces exactions, la peur des Europeens...semble un peu derisoire,*” reported

Jean-Philippe Ceppi in *Le Monde* on 11 April. “*Mais les scenes d’adieu sont déchirantes, particulièrement chez les Belges. Avec des amis de longue date, tutsi pour la plupart, qu’il est impossible d’emmener avec soi.*” (“In the face of the killings, the fear of Europeans... seems a little trivial. But the farewell scenes are heartrending, particularly in the Belgian homes. With their old friends, most of them Tutsi, who it’s impossible to take with them.”) (*Le Monde* 1994b).

Criticism of the media’s initial focus on the evacuation of foreign nationals overlooks the almost prophetic and lasting value of the eyewitness testimony they gave, such as this, from William Schmidt, another correspondent for *The New York Times*, published on April 12:

The worst part, says Phil Van Lanen, was not the constant crackle of gunfire around the house, or the trucks piled with corpses, or even the gangs of wild-eyed young men who were always outside, somewhere, waving clubs and machetes and looking for someone to kill.

The worst part, said Mr. Van Lanen, a relief worker with the Seventh-day Adventist Church mission in Rwanda, was fleeing Kigali, and leaving behind African friends and co-workers.

“Now that we are out,” Mr. Van Lanen said today, “I fear, in a way, that we have betrayed the people we came to help.” Fighting both guilt and tears as he spoke, the 37-year-old dental technician at the church’s clinic in Kigali added, “I think we have left a scar on our soul that will take a long time to heal.”

Anguish Over What to Do

“Has my faith been tested by what happened in Kigali?” said Ron Clark, another church worker. He paused. “Yes. Yes. I suppose it has. I keep asking myself, how could I have left?”

For four days, the Van Lanens and the Clarks and other church workers prayed and anguished over what to do. ...

...Mr. Van Lanen begins to weep when he talks of the eight Tutsi girls who used to work in his dental clinic; they lived in a shantytown suburb of Kigali called Nyamirambo, or the place of skulls, where Hutu mobs last week left bodies of Tutsi victims stacked against walls.

Mr. Clark's voice catches, and he gulps for air, when he recalls the telephone call from a Tutsi worker, her voice quivering with fear as she said that Hutu gunmen were going from house to house on her street, breaking down doors and shooting.

"She said she was hiding in the kitchen, that they were just next door, that they were coming to get her," Mr. Clark said. "And then the line went dead." (Schmidt 1994)

The Washington Post published about 36 stories on Rwanda in the same period (April 7 to April 30); reading them reminded me of the professional frustration we experienced covering the genocide. As the *Post's* regional correspondent, Keith Richburg found his access compromised by the fact he is African-American and was therefore at risk of being attacked by the militias in Rwanda. He therefore reported mostly from Nairobi, a location that gave him the advantage of catching Hutu extremist politicians for comment when they were en route to peace negotiations abroad. Their political perspective was not otherwise readily available to us. All of us had covered the US intervention in Somalia in 1993, and Richburg more than most; thus, misleadingly, one of his first pieces on Rwanda refers to "Somalia-style anarchy" (Richburg 1994). It was a hasty comparison I too made on my first day in Kigali. Assuming one conflict has the attributes of another is lazy: Rwanda's was as distinct from Somalia's as it was from other conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s — Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Sudan.

Were we suffering compassion fatigue as a result of covering Somalia, its fighting and its famines, and did that affect our ability to cover Rwanda properly and well? Plain old fatigue was more like it, with the workload especially heavy for reporters for the wires (Reuters, the Associated Press and AFP) and BBC World Service, and the repeated absences from our homes in Nairobi taking a toll on us and our partners, families and friends. Jennifer Parmelee, a stringer for the *Post* based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, went into Kigali in Richburg's place. She wrote this vignette from the Mille Collines hotel (later portrayed in the Hollywood movie *Hotel Rwanda*), where we had moved from the airport. It was published on April 15 as part of a larger piece:

Christophe Runyange's grandfather was killed in 1963 during the first major explosion of ethnic violence after Rwandan independence. His father died just last week, the victim of a similar cataclysm. Now Runyange believes his own number is up.

"If the pattern held, I should live another 30 good years," he said today, jotting down the years the men of his family lost their lives. He adds another 30, to make it 2024. "But I think for me too, 1994 will be the last year."

Runyange, an articulate young businessman and human rights activist, is a Tutsi, a member of the minority tribe that has been the primary target of the mass slaughters that have ravaged this small Central African state over the past week.

"It is a miracle that brought us here," Runyange said of the gauntlet of fear and death he and his pregnant wife ran to reach the comparative safety of Kigali's Mille Collines Hotel. "Now we need another miracle to get out. We don't know what will happen to us."

Like most of the other Rwandans taking refuge here, Runyange, in his mid-thirties, regarded the hotel as a safe

haven because foreigners have been staying here. Soon, however, the army, drawn predominantly from the majority Hutu tribe and waging intense battles against a Tutsi-dominated rebel group, began to use the hotel as an informal base. Then the foreigners began to leave the hotel — and Rwanda.

“Now you foreigners are all going away, and we are left with those who have been hunting us down,” said one 18-year-old in a hushed voice, as he eyed the soldiers strolling the hotel’s halls. When the last foreigners left today, most of the Rwandan civilians gathered dejectedly in the hotel lobby, many begging tearfully to go with them....

...As he [Runyange] sat talking, a friend came up and announced in a daze, “It’s finished.” He had just learned that his brother, his brother’s Belgian wife and children had all been slaughtered. A Catholic priest in white robes then walked up to Runyange, and the two men embraced with silent emotion.

“We went to secondary school with each other,” Runyange said of the priest. “He’s Hutu, and I’m Tutsi, but we are friends. That’s the way it should be.” (Parmelee 1994)

Our own national identities and linguistic skills played a role in how much mobility we, as foreigners, had on the ground in Rwanda. The militiamen manning Kigali’s roadblocks were less hostile to French journalists than to the rest of us because they viewed France as their ally. They viewed Belgium as their enemy, believing it sided with the RPF. On the lookout for Belgian journalists, they poked their heads into our borrowed cars and scrutinized our passports. Usually, they carried machetes (container-loads had been imported before the genocide). Radio Milles Collines encouraged them to make it look *to us* as if their weapons were for municipal maintenance. As if to prove this, they pruned ornamental yucca plants when we drove by. Although no less bizarre, the experiences of Rwandan journalists were far more harrowing — not only witnesses to the atrocities

but constrained on pain of death in what they said, and forced to flee into hiding or to man militia roadblocks.

The extremists who held sway during the genocide had founded the FM station Radio Milles Collines to broadcast their supremacist ideology during the pre-genocide era, when there was intense rivalry between political parties vying for seats in the new transitional government promised by the series of peace accords the RPF and Rwandan government had signed in August 1993. Broadcasting in Kinyarwanda and French in early April 1994, they told militiamen where they might find Tutsi hiding, and urged them to be vigilant — an admonition in one broadcast warned against being diverted into settling scores by women jealous of other women's looks.

I never doubted they would kill us, Belgian or non-Belgian, if an argument got out of hand. Transcripts from Radio Milles Collines in early April 1994 point to this: “The journalists are, not primarily, among the people we must turn aggression on,” presenter Georges Ruggiu (a Belgian national) is quoted as saying on air. “If it is good to control them, it is not good to be aggressive towards them. However, we must be careful with these journalists. We've gotten to know that a journalist in search of information will always be kind and friendly towards persons to whom he asks questions and who help him to collect information, but that afterwards he can be less kind when he will have these pieces of information and that he can maybe use them against you. Pay thus attention if journalists take photos or video films.” This was why it was difficult — almost impossible — for us to get television footage or photographs of what they were doing. Not all militiamen were armed with farming tools, although we knew these to be deadly; some had assault rifles and fought the RPF ferociously, often from 2:00 p.m. at the main roundabout below the Milles Collines hotel and just above the Sainte Famille church, where thousands of Tutsi were taking refuge.

In the first days of the genocide, French journalists could drive around Kigali with more ease than the rest of us; they made good use of that by being more tenacious in their pursuit of the story. Although they were battling for space in their papers too, their editors seemed to take more

interest in the fate of a nation they already knew more about than their anglophone counterparts. “*On craint ici que les derniers Tutsis de la capitale soient massacrés avant que les troupes du FPR ne l’aient atteinte,*” wrote Jean Hélène, *Le Monde*’s correspondent, in a report in which he described the aftermath of a massacre that had taken place on Saturday, April 9, in a church in Gikondo, a working-class suburb of Kigali. “We here believe that the last Tutsis in the capital will be massacred before the troops of the RPF reach it” (Hélène 1994). Jean-Phillipe Ceppi, a French-speaking Swiss journalist for *Libération*, detailed the same massacre; those of us behind rebel lines had reported the RPF was leaving its positions to march on Kigali (this turned out to be wrong): “*Mais avant qu’ils ne s’emparent de la ville, pour autant qu’ils le puissent, le génocide des Tutsi de Kigali aura probablement eu lieu.*” “But before they take the city, however hard they try, the genocide of the Tutsi of Kigali will probably have taken place” (Ceppi 1994). (In their paper criticizing international media coverage of the genocide, Linda Melvern and Paul Williams (2004) take the liberty of broadening Ceppi’s statement to include all Tutsi in the country.)

Despite France’s political bias toward supporting the rump government, now openly led by Hutu extremists (who suppressed the moderates within their ranks), *Le Monde* carried a complex opinion piece from Bernard Taillefer on April 15, predicting that France’s failure to intervene meaningfully at this stage would allow for “a real genocide” of Rwandans by extremists from both sides, meaning a genocide of Hutu extremists killing Tutsi and Tutsi extremists killing Hutu: “Stopping the activities [at evacuating French nationals] would be tantamount to allowing a full-blown genocide at this stage to be carried out on all those who wanted to contribute to peace by refusing extremism or, [even] more intolerable, of all those who did not have the good luck to be born in the right ethnicity, which isn’t the same [ethnicity] for all extremists” (Taillefer 1994).

If the lack of meaningful intervention was all about journalists failing to “call” the genocide (and it wasn’t, as the RPF didn’t want more military intervention, fearing it would scupper their chances of seizing power), Jean Hélène (a pen name) and Ceppi were not the only people to describe the killings of Tutsi as genocide early on. On April 17, a rebel spokesman,

Gerald Gahima, used the word in a broadcast on the RPF's Radio Muhabura: "The world cannot, and should not forget the genocide," he said, "which is being perpetrated in Rwanda today by the surviving associates and allies of the late President Habyarimana." His broadcast ended with an appeal to "the community of nations to come to the assistance of the surviving victims of the genocide." In time, the RPF would show itself equally capable of murderous campaigns, most dramatically in its deadly pursuit of the tens of thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees across Zaire (the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1996 and 1997. But in 1994, it was the killing of Tutsi by Hutu extremists that was the genocide, making claims (such as that hinted at by Bernard Taillefer, the author of an opinion piece in *Le Monde*) of "double genocide" misleading. The RPF killed many Hutus in 1994, too, but it did not set out to exterminate them as a group.

Outside Rwanda, it was frustrating to us that our news organizations treated claims made by either side with equal weight at a time when they lacked equal credibility. And then, conversely, as if to make up for it, treated the RPF like the saviours they were not — sweeping in to end the genocide, an image the RPF were only too willing to embrace. (It's been said they were accidental saviours at best.)

The reporting from the international media at the start of the genocide was, if anything, far closer to the truth than a few weeks in, when hundreds of thousands of terrified Hutus fled the RPF's advance in eastern Rwanda in late April, across a bridge into Tanzania. Most of the genocide's victims in the east of Rwanda were by then dead. It took on even greater dimensions when more than a million Hutu fled into Zaire in July, evoking an outpouring of international sympathy and a flurry of aid. The exodus spawned the enduring misconception, perpetuated through a lack of explanation by news outlets to this day, of the Rwandan refugees as victims — rather than the perpetrators they were, fleeing retribution, as well as those members of the regular Rwandan army whom Radio Mille Collines chided for not showing enough enthusiasm for the genocide, and their families.

Another charge made by people who have reviewed media coverage of the genocide is that colonial constructs did not help, leading to distortion. But then, as now, Rwanda was an opaque place, given to guarding its secrets, and in the case of La Une radio, based in Belgium, insight born of post-colonial ties proved more of an asset to understanding than an impediment.⁵ La Une's analysis was always spot on, judging correctly at the start of the killings that it was pro-democracy Rwandans who were being taken out.

“The situation is very serious in the Rwanda capital, Kigali,” La Une radio reported from Brussels on April 7, 1994, in French. “It now seems quite clear that hardline factions, including President Habyarimana's Presidential Guard, are hunting down the moderates, be they Hutu or Tutsi.”

“There are reports of sporadic gunfire in several quarters of Kigali, where there are reports of clashes between youths and soldiers. We have not yet received any toll for these clashes. What seems clear is that there is growing tension between the Presidential Guard and the United Nations. The spokesman for the UN peacekeeping forces said they were prevented by the Presidential Guard from going to the scene of the crash of the presidential plane.”

However difficult the militia roadblocks made it for us to get around Kigali, nothing deterred us from reporting the genocide more than the war. Far too quickly, the daily slugging of shells across the city became the focus of our stories, with news of massacres and mass burial sites sliding farther down our copy and the news agenda. The war also meant obstacles to travel — there were front lines to be crossed. Our access outside the city, to the countryside, slowly opened up after we flew out of Kigali on about April 21, to make our way back to Rwanda behind rebel lines in early May. In eastern Rwanda, we found churches full of corpses and hospitals full of wounded people.

By April 25, it had become clear that massacres were spreading to areas of Rwanda previously untouched by them — parts of southern Rwanda, where the *prefet* (governor) of the town of Butare and the army had

refused to allow the mass killing of Tutsi. As a result, the rump government replaced him with an extremist and the killings commenced. It was evident that the rebels, too, were committing massacres, something that made its way into news stories quoting aid workers in the refugee camps in Tanzania filling up with Hutu. But just as we couldn't easily report on the Rwandan army and militiamen massacring Tutsi civilians in government-controlled areas, it wasn't at all easy for us to find out about the RPF massacring Hutu civilians in RPF-controlled areas.

In those areas, our movements were tightly controlled by the RPF. This affected the impact of our reporting; whereas we thought we were rushing to catch up to report the massacre of Tutsi and wanted to interview survivors and witnesses while their memories were fresh and their stories untold, the RPF's priority was military gain — it was set on securing the areas around massacre sites in churches first, to mop up Hutu militiamen and others who lingered. Every massacre we reported was late, over, a *fait accompli* — it was difficult to get across the immediacy or scale of the killing of Tutsi civilians, let alone convey that this was still happening in other areas of Rwanda now and that something could, and should, be done to stop it. After covering Somalia, where we had gone more or less where we wanted, whenever and how we wanted, having our movements curtailed by the RPF was difficult; although I had reported from inside Rwanda on the RPF's rebellion since 1990, and had known many of their senior officers since the late 1980s in Uganda, it got me into arguments with them.

On this side of the war, the language divide was a factor again. We in the anglophone press had better access than our colleagues from the francophone press: the RPF did not trust French photographers who wanted to travel with us; they felt they had reason to believe French nationals were acting as French spies. But I argued the case that our French colleagues should come because their photographs would lead to more international exposure of what was taking place. My attempts at solidarity slowed us down.

There was an emotional dimension, too. The sight of the bodies of hundreds — if not thousands — of men, women and children rotting inside

and outside churches was profoundly upsetting to us, as were interviews with the survivors in hospitals on what they had seen happen. We knew what we were doing was vital to witness, but we often felt as if we were howling in the wilderness — unsupported by our news outlets and alone. It affected us in ways that made objectivity and detachment impossible. After filming in a church at Rukara, Simon Cox, the cameraman I was working with, could hardly bear the thought of filming in another church (at a place called Sake) that I was pressing to get to, and which the RPF eventually gave us the go-ahead to visit about a week after I made my request. During research for this chapter, I found an article from April 16 in *El País*, a Spanish newspaper, based on interviews with the Spanish missionaries based at Rukara. They described the massacre at the church: ““The massacre took place the night of Tuesday, April 12. We were praying the rosary in the church. There were some 1,000 people inside the temple and another 2,000 in the surrounding rooms, in the movie theatre, in the room for the catechuminate. It was 6:30 in the evening.’...The massacre lasted until 6:00 in the morning. Twelve hours of cruelty” (Armada 1994).

Published in Spanish, this piece wasn’t widely read in English, making a case for the translation of reporting in undercovered crises. Similarly, the BBC Monitoring Service singularly failed to use the Nairobi branch of its listening service to transcribe — and translate — the Hutu extremist radio broadcasts used to pass orders to militiamen nationwide. (After the genocide, the BBC introduced a Kinyarwanda language service.)

In May 1994, reporting on the aftermath of the massacre in the church at Rukara, we absorbed the depth of the trauma that survivors’ stories expressed; I felt paralyzed and unable to find the words to capture it. My (then) poor French didn’t help, and I didn’t understand — or write — anything like as much as I wish I had. An overpowering stench of death enveloped us. So I would push to get to more churches sooner than we could — to get more footage and more stories to convey the scale of the killing — but, for reasons of military imperative, the relatively junior RPF officers assigned to escort us would be under orders to hold us back. And then, when I had exhausted myself from arguing, we would be given the go-ahead to go somewhere to film, and I imagined the images of the

church massacres would be older, the testimonies staler. Even the piles of belongings Hutu villagers dropped as they fled the RPF's advance along the main tarmac road south to Tanzania were gone before we could take more footage of them, because — in another act of clearing, this one designed to destroy evidence of the refugees' terror in flight — the RPF had cleared up all their belongings.

What mistakes, then, did we make? In retrospect, there were many. Rushed along by events, caught up in the logistics of getting from A to B — of finding food, even — none of us took the time then to sit down and profile the two opposing leaders whose strongly held beliefs determined the nature of the crisis: the RPF's Paul Kagame and the Rwandan government's Théoneste Bagosora, the man who more than any other was instrumental in the degree of planning and persistence the execution of a genocide required. Bagosora believed in the invincibility of the Hutu ethnic majority and wanted to rid Rwanda, once and for all, of Tutsi, whom he saw as a recurring threat to Hutu power. On the other side, Kagame's controlling personality led him to focus on subjugating, sometimes eliminating, individuals or groups (Tutsi or Hutu) who had the temerity or disposition, the intellect or wherewithal, to challenge him. Where Kagame was ruthless, Bagosora was merciless. We failed to explore their motives, their personalities and *modus operandi*. Look at leaders, the hold they have and the influence they wield — these were lessons from the genocide we could learn, too.

News outlets often put together fact boxes when they report on countries alien to their readers. AFP's fact box appeared in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on April 8 (*Le Monde* 1994a). Of a population of about 7.1 million, it gave an approximation of Rwanda's ethnic composition: Hutu 80 percent, Tutsi nine percent, and one percent Twa pygmies. It noted Rwanda had been a one-party state for 17 years before opening up to multi-partyism in 1991, after which nine political parties were recognized. No mention was made of the extremist ideologies that had led parties to split, however, into moderate and extremist factions in 1993, while a description of Rwanda as "always torn apart by tribal wars" conjured up visions of a cyclical state of affairs, rather than the unique scale of the killings for Rwanda in 1994.

In April 1994, the rebel spokesman's (Gahima's) message about genocide couldn't have been clearer. Although partisan — in fact, it was propaganda — his allegation stood the test of time. Is it worth studying propaganda anew? Listening carefully to partisan broadcasts for ideology and intent, and for what they inadvertently revealed, proved important. The government's state-run Radio Rwanda, and the privately owned Hutu extremist Radio Milles Collines, were not so much untruthful as they were one-sided. "The Inkotanyi [a Kinyarwanda word used to mean the warriors of the RPF] we captured this morning told us that they hunt moles, partridges and cicadas," broadcast Radio Milles Collines during the genocide, portraying warriors weakened by hunger.

Radio Milles Collines broadcast against its real and perceived enemies ("those sons of bitches Belgians") and rallied local militiamen, or Interahamwe, against them: it described the RPF's alleged use of street children as spies, and its bivouacs below Kigali's lush diplomatic quarter. "You people who live down there near Rugunga, even though it is raining, go out," the station broadcast in mid-May 1994. "You will see Inkotanyis' straw huts in the marsh where horses are kept. It is clear then that this place shelters Inkotanyi. I think that those who have guns should immediately go to these Inkotanyi before they listen to RTLM [the official acronym of Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines] and flee. Stand near this place and encircle them and kill them because they are there."

One broadcast contained a lengthy interview with a child soldier, allegedly press-ganged by the RPF into fighting. The broadcaster's words carried the power to determine his life or death. "Interahamwe who have him should keep him. He must retire from Inkotanyi to be Interahamwe and he will continue telling us a lot of things..." Radio Milles Collines and Radio Rwanda could be truthful or they could be dissembling, but reading transcripts of their broadcasts adds to an understanding of the genocide that other media coverage cannot provide — their extremist rationale, and the everyday mechanics of how it took place. Broadcasters on Radio Milles Collines were accomplished storytellers: RPF rebels, high and low, listened to Radio Milles Collines all the time. In northern Rwanda, their camps bristled with homemade antennae to pick up its signal. They found it as entertaining as it was informative. Its presenters would name (on air)

who among the Hutu extremist party faithful was helping kill Tutsi, and who stood in their way. Their tone was always intimate, personal, the lead presenter lamenting (for example) how the war had put an end to the dancing and drinking he enjoyed after work. He described knocking off work to go to a hillside in Kigali, armed with an AK-47 to take part in fighting.

There was killing, but there was also survival: Radio Rwanda had been a popular government service. The theme tune for the news was said to be long enough for a farmer working outside to get back to his house to listen. Its broadcasts contained everyday salutations from soldiers to their families and families to their soldiers — ordinary messages among loved ones. Radio Rwanda was at times lighter and less fiery than Radio Mille Collines. Once it carried a reporter's humorous account of a panic caused by Rwandan government soldiers looting a broken-down beer truck, the noise of which had attracted Hutu vigilantes who — armed with machetes and other agricultural tools — flocked to it thinking that rebels had broken through the front line, prepared to attack them. At close quarters, machetes are close-proximity weapons, offering victims less chance of escape than a gun and, in Rwanda's largely agricultural society, the Kinyarwanda term most often used for the mass killing that was going on, was agricultural too, *tshemba-tshemba*, meaning “to clear.”⁶

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- 1 See Linda Melvern and Paul Williams (2004) on the need for 5,500 more trained troops to halt the genocide.
 - 2 In an interview with the author, senior RPF military officer Frank Mugambage said French government officials used his lack of French to diminish his authority during a visit to meet them in 1992.
 - 3 Author's notes from conversations with RPF officers near Mulindi, July 1993.
 - 4 An Associated Press photograph of RPF troops firing a rocket launcher appeared in *Le Monde* on Monday, April 11. It is unethical for journalists to film or report military assaults that have been staged for their benefit, although most journalists witnessing this particular display were, at the time, unaware that this was what the RPF was doing.
 - 5 Brussels, La Une radio network, in French, 14:00 GMT, April 7, 1994.
 - 6 Eric Kibera, in conversation with the author in Rwanda, 2000.



THE GENOCIDE VIDEO

ALLAN THOMPSON

The man in the middle of the dirt road is praying, a woman cowering beside him.

Kneeling amid a pile of twisted bodies in the red clay of the Gikondo district of Kigali, the man repeats the same motion over and over, first clasping his hands in front of him, then spreading his arms wide, palms turned upward. A throng of men mills about nearby, holding machetes, crowbars and sticks with nails protruding from them. Except for the crude weapons, they look like members of a construction crew on a break.

It is just after 10:00 on a cloudy Monday morning — April 11, 1994, five days after the assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana plunged tiny Rwanda into the abyss. The road in Gikondo is already lined with corpses.

Across the valley, from the top floor of a building known as the French school, British journalist Nick Hughes is watching the praying man

through his camera lens and recording these final moments. One of only a handful of Western journalists in Rwanda, Hughes, a freelance cameraman, heard earlier in the day about killings taking place in Gikondo, a stronghold of Hutu extremists.

Hughes is one of those legendary characters among the coterie of Western journalists, adventurers really, who make their careers chronicling African tragedies. Last year it was Somalia, and next year it will be Zaire. Today's hellhole is Rwanda, and Hughes has come to the French school looking for a secure vantage point from which to shoot. Because Belgian troops are stationed there, the school is a gathering point for expatriates seeking evacuation. And evacuation of foreigners is the outside world's utmost priority at the moment, even though thousands of Rwandans have already been butchered.

Earlier, on his way up the steps, Hughes met Reuters cameraman Mohammed Shaffi, who told him that from above, you could see killers slaughtering people across the valley. On a top floor, Hughes encountered a Belgian paratrooper. The distraught soldier was looking through the scope of a rocket launcher and pointed to the dirt road across the valley. Hamstrung by a UN mandate forbidding outright intervention, the paratrooper had been watching death squads drag people out of their homes to be tortured and killed in broad daylight, their bodies left in a heap in the clay.

Hughes sets up his camera. First, he focuses on some of the bodies strewn along the road, then he pans across the valley, through the trees. When he pans back, he spots the praying man and the cowering woman, who have apparently been hauled up from the side of the road and are now among the pile of bodies. Hughes watches for about 20 minutes, periodically turning off his camera because he knows that he is almost out of tape and fears his batteries are running low. He also knows what is coming, and the journalist in him wants to capture the moment.

The man continues to pray. It is as if, resigned to his fate, he has already turned heavenward. The crew congregated in front of the low tin roof of a house up the street seems to be oblivious to the pair. A young boy dressed in a T-shirt strolls past, giving the man and woman only a backward

glance. Then some armed men move forward and begin to pound the bodies that are strewn around the two figures, striking the corpses again and again. One man gives the bodies a final crack, as if driving a stake into the ground, then slings his stick over his shoulder and ambles off. All the while, the praying man continues to wave his arms.

A white pickup truck approaches and drives through the scene. The windshield wipers are flopping back and forth. One of the men huddled in the back of the vehicle gives a wave and seems to be saying something as the pickup bumps past.

Finally, two other men approach the scene on the street. One, dressed in dark trousers and a white shirt, winds up to strike the praying man. The attacker has the posture of someone who is about to whip an animal. The victim recoils before he is struck on the head with a stick. The praying man crumples to the ground, then suffers more blows from his murderer. Moments later, the woman is struck down by another assailant, who swings with such force that her head is very nearly lopped off by the initial blow. Finally, the two killers walk away casually, leaving the bodies to squirm.

In the distance, there is the sound of birdsong.¹



This is the story of a journey to afford the dignity of identity to people whose deaths were captured on camera.

It is the story of a man who prayed to God to forgive his killers while his daughter cowered beside him.

And the story of how we watched genocide on television, then turned away and did nothing.

Remarkably, during a genocide that would eventually claim hundreds of thousands of lives, this is one of the only times a killing was caught on

video by the media. The grainy footage was shipped out to Nairobi within hours. Hughes took it to the airport and gave it to a stranger who was boarding the aircraft. Then he hollered through his satellite phone at a producer in Nairobi who didn't seem to understand the urgency of getting to the airport to receive the package.

The tape was uploaded to London and distributed by the British agency WTN, for whom Hughes was freelancing. A producer at WTN in London would recount later being stunned by the Hughes footage and the brutal killings it documented.² That night and the next morning, the footage flashed across television screens around the world — CNN, Australian Broadcasting and German giant ZDF — but somehow, it didn't make any difference. Rwanda never became a *cause célèbre*. And the killing in Gikondo rolled out across the country for another three months.

The images captured by Hughes have since become the virtual stock footage of the genocide, a sort of Zapruder film of the Rwanda tragedy. The pictures of those men wielding clubs and hacking their victims are used over and over in nearly every documentary account. The footage was even fictionalized by producers of the film *Hotel Rwanda*, in the scene during which the cameraman played by Joaquin Phoenix bursts in to show his producer the video of a killing he has just captured in the streets of Kigali. In the Hollywood version, no one really cares. “How can they not intervene, when they witness such atrocities?” asks the heroic Rwandan hotel manager played by Don Cheadle. “If people see this footage, they'll say, ‘Oh, my God, that's horrible’ and then go on eating their dinners,” the cameraman played by Phoenix replies. And that's exactly what happened.

Hughes captured what should have been one of the iconic media images of our time. The footage is akin to the 1972 photo of the little girl, naked, in pain and terrified, her arms outstretched, running from a napalm strike during the Vietnam War, or the image of the solitary figure in front of an advancing tank in Tiananmen Square in 1989, or the pictures of the falling man plummeting to his death after leaping from the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 — singular human figures who transcend historical events. The little Vietnamese girl, Kim Phuc, was identified years after the famous photo and now lives in Ajax, Ontario, and heads a foundation

committed to the plight of war-affected children. So far, no one has definitively put a name to the solitary figure defying the tanks in Tiananmen Square, or to the falling man of September 11.

But the images of the praying man and the woman who perished beside him on a dirt road in Rwanda are somehow different, more urgent, more haunting for what might have been.

The news footage of their deaths was captured in the first moments of a 100-day rampage, at the front end of the arc of a genocide that would overtake Rwanda in the months to come. If only we had understood what we were seeing — or cared enough to understand — Rwanda might have been different.

As their deaths were broadcast around the world, their unidentified bodies were hurled into the back of a yellow truck and dumped into a mass grave, forgotten by the world that also forgot their country.



Rwanda, a tiny central African country, a mere dot on the world map, garnered virtually no international media attention before the apocalypse that followed the death of President Habyarimana. A fledgling peace accord signed in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1993 after years of civil war had set out the details for a power-sharing arrangement between the majority Hutu population and the minority Tutsi. But an international peacekeeping force, commanded by Canadian General Roméo Dallaire, was left virtually powerless when the country plunged into mass killing, in a campaign carried out by Hutu extremists. The massacres began almost immediately in Kigali through the night of April 6-7. Hutu moderates, who were willing to share power, were among the first targeted, along with Tutsis marked for extermination in a campaign that eventually fanned out across the country.

Gikondo was one of the places where it all began, a stronghold of the Hutu extremist movement. The first large-scale massacre to be discovered by

UN troops took place there on April 9. Brent Beardsley, the Canadian who was the staff officer for UN commander Dallaire, headed for Gikondo that day with two Polish military observers, Stefan Stec and Maric Pazik. Inside the walls of a Catholic mission the soldiers found bodies hacked apart. Stec used his camcorder to take pictures of the bodies, believing he had evidence of genocide. But he was later forbidden by the United Nations from using the word.

Two days later, the French newspaper *Libération* ran a report by correspondent Jean-Philippe Ceppi, who visited Gikondo with the chief delegate of the International Committee for the Red Cross, Philippe Gaillard, and saw mutilated bodies of men, women and children. Ceppi used the word “genocide,” but then the term dropped from the headlines for weeks.

Even though a handful of journalists risked their lives to tell the Rwanda story, most international news organizations initially misunderstood the nature of the killing in Rwanda, portraying it as the result of tribal warfare, not genocide.

The grainy video captured on April 11 by Nick Hughes is truly the exception that proves the rule. Eventually, when journalists returned in greater numbers, the international media reports on Rwanda were replete with images of bloated corpses, strewn at the roadside or choking Rwanda’s rivers. But there were so few foreign journalists on the ground at the height of the killing — because media gatekeepers didn’t seem to care and because the domestic media in Rwanda had either been cowed or co-opted into the massacres — that there are virtually no other known images of the crime itself, the crime of genocide.



For my part, I came late to the Rwanda genocide. Like many journalists, I seemed to be busy with other things in the spring of 1994. As a political reporter with the *Toronto Star*, I was based in Ottawa. Foreign affairs was one of my beats, and given that the *Star*’s Africa correspondent was locked

down in South Africa covering the end of apartheid, it would have been natural for me to volunteer to go to Rwanda. But I didn't. Indeed, I don't recall the thought even crossing my mind. My only vivid memory of the Rwanda genocide is of a conversation on the front steps of the Presbyterian church my parents attended in the southern Ontario hamlet of Glammis. A church elder, Jim Gilchrist, was marvelling at the news footage from the country. "They're just killing each other like animals over there," he said. That was Mother's Day. Even now, I can't explain how I remained oblivious to Rwanda during April, May and June of 1994, but it is something of which I am deeply ashamed.

It wasn't until 1996 that I found myself in Rwanda, dispatched by the *Star* to cover the situation in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), where another peacekeeping force led by Canada was about to deploy to ease the plight of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees who had been living in squalid camps since fleeing Rwanda at the end of the 1994 genocide. Among their number were many of the killers.

In one of the camps abandoned by civilians who had gone back to Rwanda, we came across a massacre site, nearly 20 bodies hacked apart and dumped in a heap. Some had their heads cracked open and brain matter exposed, others their entrails spilling out of body cavities. These were the first human remains I had seen outside of a funeral home, and they will always be with me. The most difficult to look at were the children, one a baby in a green woollen jumper, lying on its back, arms splayed. As if by reflex, my response was to take out my camera and step gingerly through the bodies, regarding them through my camera lens.

Those moments in the Mugunga camp, when I was confronted by some of the lost souls of Rwanda, were something of an epiphany for me. Two years after the Rwanda genocide, I found myself asking: "How did I miss the Rwanda story? Why wasn't I here in 1994? How could I have been so oblivious?"

I've been back to Rwanda nearly 20 times since, both as a reporter for the *Star* and, more recently, to establish a partnership between Carleton University's journalism school — where I now work — and its counterpart at the National University of Rwanda. Later, I edited a collection of essays

on the topic of the media and the Rwanda genocide — *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, published by Pluto Press in 2007 — and one of the pieces was by Nick Hughes, about his remarkable footage.

To be honest, I don't remember the first time I saw the Hughes footage, but I probably became aware of it years after the genocide, when it appeared in documentaries. I began to realize its significance when I came across the transcript of Hughes' testimony at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in Arusha, where the video was entered as evidence of genocide.

In early 2007, I set out on a book tour to promote my collection of essays on the media and the genocide. The Hughes footage was a central part of the presentation I made at every stop, one of which was in Nairobi, Kenya. After dinner with a media colleague, I was talking about trying to identify the victims in the Hughes footage. The friend pointed out that Nick was actually living in town. I asked my friend to call him up right away and we arranged to meet for lunch the next day at the posh Norfolk Hotel in downtown Nairobi.

Nick was wearing a collarless shirt with a red handkerchief tied around his neck — the stereotype of the war correspondent. He told me he had made an attempt to identify the victims in his footage in 2002, when he and Rwandan filmmaker Eric Kabera managed to find at least one woman who had witnessed the events. But after that the trail went cold.

The next time I travelled to Rwanda was in the last two weeks of June 2007, to work on the Carleton project. On the way to one appointment, I caught out of the corner of my eye a street scene that looked familiar and realized it was the spot in Gikondo where the killings had taken place. The road has since been built up and paved and now leads to a tourist market, Koplaki, where vendors sell wooden carvings and handicrafts. I left my colleagues at the craft market and headed up the road hurriedly on foot, glancing back over my shoulder and across the valley to the French school, trying to envision the sightline through which Nick shot his footage. I came to a spot in the road that looked right, judging by the streetscape and the adjacent buildings, and at that moment decided that I had to call Eric

Kabera and finally make a concerted effort to identify the victims in the genocide video.

Eric agreed to help me, and on our first visit to the street, after several hours of knocking on doors and interviewing local residents, we managed to find two women who said they'd witnessed a series of killings in front of their homes in early April. The scene they described matched the footage of people praying. Eric wanted to film our interview, so we returned the next morning. One of the witnesses was Godance Mukanyirigira, a tall woman with a regal bearing. The second was Rosine Kankundiye, quieter and slightly stooped. Eric and his crew set up their cameras on the front porch of Godance's home, inside a rusty tin fence that separated the property from the street. Both women were Tutsi survivors. Godance started by telling us that she had lost 27 people from her extended family, including her husband. "But I am okay, I am still here," she said.³ Rosine said she had lost 38 family members, including her husband and virtually all of her in-laws.

Godance and Rosine sat stiffly in front of the cameras and began to recount the killings that had occurred on the road in front of their homes. The interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda, so I relied on Eric for interpretation at the time and then reviewed the tapes later with a translator. "I witnessed this, from where we are sitting now," Godance said, describing how in 1994 her property was bounded by a thick hedge that she'd peered through when she heard the noise. She said it was about 10 a.m., and victims were dragged from down in the valley and forced to crouch in the street at a roadblock in front of her home, where there were already dead bodies.

"We saw them kill an old man who was with his son," Godance recounted. "They beat him on the head and the brain matter landed on a tree on the other side of the street. But no one spoke. We were like stones, we couldn't even scream or say anything."

They watched the killing of a person named Tatiana, a tall woman from across the road who had long hair and a limp, from a bout with polio. She

also had a baby strapped to her back. Rosine said in passing that she heard later that two of Tatiana's older children had survived.

“And there was another man, oh, what was his name — I'm going to remember after,” Godance recalled. “This man was the father of a young woman, Justine. Yes, he was Justine's father and his name was Kagaba.”

She said they were the ones who were praying.

I realized that for the first time, someone had put names to the people who died in the genocide video.

Rosine admitted she was simply too afraid to leave her home — until she heard a baby crying, the baby that had been strapped to Tatiana's back and remained alive after its mother's slaying. She slipped out of her house, but then saw a man coming back up the street, carrying a crowbar. “I personally witnessed that, I saw him hitting the baby with the bar,” she said.

The bodies remained there for the rest of the day, until the yellow trucks came at around 4 p.m. to collect them. “We don't know where they went to throw them, and we haven't found them yet to be able to bury them,” Godance said at the time.

The next day the death squads came back. “They took me,” Godance said. “But God hadn't decided yet that I was going to die.” Instead, she crawled out of a mass grave and survived. But Godance didn't want to talk about herself and returned to describing the scene in front of her house that day, particularly the deaths of Justine and her father, the praying man. Both born-again Christians, they were praying loudly, she recounted. When Godance began to mimic the victims praying, spreading her arms in the air, I knew that this was the same killing, the deaths captured in the Hughes footage.

Through Eric, I asked if Godance and Rosine would be willing to look at the footage of the killings, and they agreed. I opened my laptop on a table inside the house, in a sitting room painted a muted aqua. The women sat transfixed, leaning forward to watch the footage for the first time. I

thought they might become emotional or, worse, traumatized, but instead they watched intently, retelling the events of the day, talking to each other about the details.

“Yes, Justine and her father were praying, clapping their hands, saying, ‘Thank you, God, thank you, God’,” Godance said. “Justine was right beside her father. And I remember that she was the last to die because she was the last one that they hit.”

Godance winced at the point when the video showed the killers coming forward to pound the bodies strewn around Justine and her father. Then she commented on the pickup truck that drove through the scene. “I remember that this vehicle passed by and they asked why that cockroach was still making noise and asked, ‘Why don’t you kill it?’ That’s when the baby was still alive.”

Godance and Rosine asked to watch the video again and again, each time picking up a new detail and commenting on the identities of some of the killers whom they recognized and remembered, including a brutal man nicknamed Gasongo, who came from Butare, in southern Rwanda. He was the one who had returned to kill the baby.

At one point I thought I heard Godance mention the Kinyarwanda word for mother. I pressed Eric to ask whom she was talking about, and Godance confirmed that Justine’s mother still lived nearby.

My heart began to pound. I asked if we could go to see her. Godance sent a child to go and knock on the door, but the boy came back and said no one was at home. So, we arranged to return the next day at 4 p.m. Eric said he was too busy to return, but offered to send one of his producers, Thierry, to act as my translator.

The following day, I slipped away from a meeting in the late afternoon and took a motorcycle taxi down past the Mille Collines hotel, along Rue Akagera, past the French school from where Nick shot the footage, and finally, across the valley to Gikondo. I met up with Thierry and Godance, who greeted me this time with a broad smile and a handshake. Then she

led us down the road to her neighbour's house, about 100 metres from where the killings had taken place.

From the main road we followed a dirt path — the same path the death squads followed in 1994 — and in a minute or so, we came to a ramshackle tin gate that led into a small yard.

Godance knocked on the door, and a pretty young woman answered. She was Violette, Justine's younger sister. She invited us inside, into a small, dark living room lined with couches and well-worn chairs. The walls were painted a chalky yellow. Above the couch there was a small plaque with the words of Psalm 24, verse 21, from the Old Testament, written in Kinyarwanda: "Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who hate the righteous will be condemned."

Violette called for her mother, Rosalie Uzamukunda (in Rwanda, family members often do not share the same last name), who emerged from a curtained-off back room. Her hair was wrapped in a red kerchief and she was wearing a yellow cotton outfit. Her face was stern and wary. She was polite, but distant, avoiding eye contact. When we shook hands, I used my left arm to prop up my right, a Rwandan sign of respect. A little boy perched on a chair in the corner. He was Justine's brother, Isaac. His mother had been seven months' pregnant with him at the time of the killings.

Through Thierry, I explained who I was and what I was doing there. I told Rosalie that as a journalist, I wanted to learn all I could about her family members, the people who were killed on the road that day and whose deaths were among the only ones recorded by the news media.

At the mention of the video footage, Rosalie became agitated. Thierry told me that she had no idea that the death of her husband and daughter had been captured on video. In an instant, I realized that Rosalie would almost certainly insist on seeing it, and I got a knot in my stomach. I told Thierry that I had no intention of showing her the footage. That's not why I had come here. I needed to show it to the other women, I explained, to make sure they were recounting the same event, but I didn't want to show it to a family member.

He repeated this to Rosalie, but she persisted and said that if there were pictures of her family, she wanted to see them. “Tell her the battery in my laptop has run out of power,” I said. She replied by pointing to an electrical outlet on the wall. Again, I cautioned that she had to understand what these pictures showed, and I insisted that I didn’t want to show them to her. But she was adamant. So reluctantly, I knelt down beside her on the floor and opened my laptop on the coffee table.

One last time, I told Thierry to please tell her that I was very reluctant for her to see these images. She said to go ahead.

So, I clicked on the icon for the Hughes footage. The first person to speak was the little boy, Isaac, who asked who those people were, the ones praying. The witness, Godance, explained that they were his father and sister.

Within moments, Rosalie was sobbing uncontrollably, crying and panting while being embraced by her daughter Violette and wiping away tears. “I remember that shirt,” she said, pointing at the screen. Then she asked me to stop the footage and left the room. “They didn’t know how they were killed,” Godance explained. “All they knew was what we told them.”

A bit ashamed, I packed up the laptop and returned to my seat across the room. I told Violette I was sorry to cause such grief, but that I simply wanted the world to know about her sister and father, and that I still wanted to know more about them.

“We have photos,” Violette offered, just as her mother returned to the room. Thierry wondered aloud if we should stop and return another day. “It’s okay now, it’s fine,” Violette said. “We don’t want to hurt her more; we can stop and come back another time,” Thierry said.

“No, it is okay,” Rosalie replied. “But I had never seen that film. Other people told me how they were killed, but now I see it for the first time.” Then she said to Violette: “Go and bring the pictures.”

Violette returned from the other room carrying two dog-eared photographs and handed them to me.

It is hard to explain what happened next. I don't think I was prepared for my emotional reaction to seeing the photos, especially the one of Justine Mukangango. It was as if she became a real person in front of my eyes, in a moment that remains one of the most poignant for me in two decades as a journalist. I had watched her death dozens of times, but in the photo she was alive and vibrant, sitting cross-legged on a chair in a bedroom, a crooked smile beaming at the camera. She wore a crisp white blouse and blue skirt. One hand was placed carefully in her lap.

On the end table at the foot of the bed there was a radio, a thermos for tea and a glass jar containing some flowers. Someone had drawn a cross on the photo in blue ink, a tradition after a person passes away. It was as if I had known her for years but met her for the first time when she looked out at me from that photograph. And now her face won't leave my mind.

“So, this is her,” I heard myself saying out loud. By then I couldn't hold back the tears any longer and sat there and wept, staring at the photo for a long time. When I turned it over I noticed that on the back someone had written in a careful hand “Le 11 – 4 – 1994,” the date of her death.

Justine's mother was crying again, wiping her eyes with a tissue. “Please talk to me about her,” I said. And she told me about her Justine, who was born on July 20, 1974. “She was a good believer, a Christian, and went to the Pentecostal church near the market, in Gikondo,” her mother said. Justine loved to pray and sang in the church choir. She also enjoyed playing the piano.

In April 1994 she was taking general courses in school, but dreamed of becoming a doctor so she could get her parents a new home. “She used to say that she would build a house for me, and that when she begins to work and earn money she would buy her father a car.” Her father was an auto mechanic but never owned a vehicle himself.

And then I looked again at the photo of Justine's father, Rosalie's devoted husband of two decades, Gabriel Kagaba. In the old, black-and-white photo he was stern and handsome.

Godance spoke again about what she had witnessed. “The father was asking forgiveness for those who were about to kill them.”

Violette, who was eight at the time of the killings, recounted that the death squad had come in the morning, at around nine. In fact, they had come the day before to take away her father, but he had managed to slip away, and a neighbour talked the intruders into leaving. But on the morning of the eleventh they came back, banged on the tin gate, then stormed into the house and demanded Gabriel — who was accused of being an accomplice of the Tutsi rebels — also grabbing Justine. They said they would return for the rest of the family later and left. A Congolese neighbour helped Rosalie and the rest of her children to hide in a latrine. When they returned hours later to the house, neighbours told them Justine and her father had been taken to the street and beaten to death with sticks.

Justine “used to help me in small tasks at home,” Rosalie said. “Whenever she came home from school or the choir she would take care of the little ones, her brothers and sisters, or clean the house and cook. She was a special child.

“All we can say is that they are not alive anymore; they were a very important part of the family and now life has changed. We don’t have a good life anymore.”

By then we were all drained, and I felt it was time for me to leave. But Rosalie began to speak, and Thierry motioned for me to remain seated. “She wants to pray,” he said softly, just as everyone began to hold hands. Thierry gripped my right hand and I reached over to Violette, who was sitting on my left. Then Rosalie bowed her head and began to speak in a low voice. I couldn’t understand the words, but the sound of Thierry the translator sobbing was more than I could bear and, once again, I broke down.

When I finally rose to leave, I shook hands with everyone in the room, and then embraced Rosalie in a long hug and said the only thing I could think of in Kinyarwanda. “*Thangane* — I’m sorry, be brave.” And then I climbed back up to the main road.

Before we parted, Thierry told me what Rosalie had said when we bowed our heads: “Dear Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for bringing these people to our home. I thank you for all the things we have been talking about....Guide them as they go away, and we will be grateful to you if we can meet again. Amen.”

It took a long time to tell this story. After identifying Justine and her father, I wanted to do them justice. But I hesitated. It felt a bit mercenary, as if by rights it should be Nick Hughes recounting the tale of his historic footage. I felt awkward about telling him I had gone ahead and investigated on my own.

As it turned out, Nick went to work almost immediately on a documentary, returning to Rwanda with a crew to retrace his steps and recount the events of 1994. They found new witnesses to the killings. And, in a remarkable turn of events, Nick and his crew followed up on the story of Tatiana, the woman with the baby on her back who perished just before Justine and her father.

They picked up on the comment from the neighbour, who said she'd heard that two of Tatiana's older children had survived. Tatiana brought the little boy and girl to the home of a Hutu neighbour, who hid them under a bed. The woman then spirited them out of Kigali at nightfall, and they remained with an aunt in a remote village in western Rwanda.

Nick and his crew found the children. And then Nick did something that the textbooks say journalists aren't supposed to do: he took the children to Nairobi, where they lived with him while he put them through school. Nick is very protective of the siblings, now adults, and doesn't talk much about the fact they joined his family in Nairobi.

The director of Nick's documentary returned to Rwanda again in November 2007 to chase down leads from eyewitnesses who were adamant that they recognized at least one of the killers in the footage. Some claimed they recognized Alexandre Usabyeyezu, who lived at the top of the road. By a remarkable coincidence, Usabyeyezu had been detained only days before, accused of looting and other crimes during the genocide. At the filmmaker's request, the coordinator of the Gaccaca communal

justice program arranged a special public meeting during which Usabyeyezu and two other men accused of involvement in the killings were brought to a community centre, to watch the video in the presence of some of the survivors.

The documentary, *Iseta: Behind the Roadblock*, was released in 2008. It includes a stunning scene during which Usabyeyezu, in the pink uniform worn by prisoners in Rwanda, was filmed as he sat and watched the video in the presence of witnesses, who prodded him to confess.

In 2008, I managed to interview Usabyeyezu, who was then spending his days behind the imposing walls of Kigali's central prison, dubbed "1930" because of the date inscribed above the gate of the castle-like structure. After two failed attempts to gain permission to visit Usabyeyezu, I was finally allowed an interview in the office of the prison warden.

Usabyeyezu is serving a life sentence for murder, having been convicted partly because of evidence contained in Nick Hughes's footage of the killing of Gabriel Kagaba and his daughter Justine Mukangango. A Rwandan friend named Jean-Pierre came along to translate, and the warden supervised the meeting in her stark office outside the prison walls. But first, she asked to know more about the purpose of my interview. While I was explaining my intentions, it became clear that she knew about the video footage that had led to Usabyeyezu's life sentence. "He still insists that it's not him in the video, but other prisoners tell him he should confess to the crime and try to reconcile."

Finally, Usabyeyezu was ushered into the room. More than six feet tall, he was dressed in the incongruous pink uniform worn by prisoners in Rwanda. He wore brown leather sandals and had a small wooden cross hanging from a string around his neck. In his left hand he clutched some folded papers.

Before sitting in a chair across from me he reached over to shake hands. The warden explained that I was here to talk to him about the Gikondo killing, the one captured on video. In the small of his neck beneath the Adam's apple I could see the skin vibrating in time with his heartbeat.

“I know there are people who say it was me, but they are wrong,” he insisted. “I wasn’t so heavy back then in 1994. I weighed only 50 kilos and was not so big as the man in the pictures.” After the genocide he stayed in Gikondo, where he worked as a welder and carpenter, living with his wife and six children, until his arrest.

When asked who was responsible for the slayings, Usabyeyezu spoke of a ringleader, Claver, and of Prosper, a man of his size who he said is the one in the video. He insisted the video was never shown at his trial, but only at the public meeting held for the filmmakers. And he said it was witnesses who had seen the video who testified at his trial. Usabyeyezu said that he confessed to involvement in other killings that took place at the time, although his version is that his role extended to reading out the ethnicity on the identity cards of people pulled aside at roadblocks. He said he was complicit in the killings of four people because he identified them as Tutsi and did nothing to prevent their deaths. He said the killing in his area was coordinated by someone named Birushya. I asked him if he knew who had been killed that day. He said he knew the woman Justine — who he guessed was about 22 at the time — because he had once rented a room from her grandmother. And he said he knew her mechanic father. “The film is the reason I am here,” he said, referring to the life sentence that he is attempting to appeal. “All I want is justice.”

When I met with Kagaba’s widow, Rosalie, the next time, she knew I had been to see Usabyeyezu. She said she was glad to hear that he had confessed to killing her family, that it provided her some comfort. I didn’t contradict her version of the story.

Like Nick Hughes, I have also become involved in a story, a journalistic transgression that I am willing to live with. My academic work at the time took me to Rwanda at least twice a year and, whenever possible, I made a visit to Rosalie and her family.

The first time we met I pledged to Rosalie that I would write about her family’s tragedy, but would not profit from their story. Anything I earn from it would be delivered to the family.

At the end of one visit to Kigali I had a few hours left before my flight and decided to go to the street in Gikondo. I gave directions to a motorcycle taxi driver. It was a warm Sunday morning. At the side of the gravel track from the main road the bougainvillea bushes were in bloom.

At the house, Violette's older sister Yvette answered the door. I explained in French that I was the Canadian journalist, the one who had visited before. She said her mother had just left for church, but that she could probably catch her on her mobile phone. Then she invited me to come in and sit down. I had brought along a young Rwandan journalism student named Gilbert, who agreed to translate.

Before long the gate creaked open and Rosalie arrived. I remembered how wary she had been the first time we met, but now she greeted me with a broad smile and a hug. Choral music was playing on the radio in the background and grandchildren scurried about.

Rosalie said she had been wondering when I would come back to see her again and wanted to know about my article. I told her that I hoped to publish something soon.

Like the vast majority in Rwanda, Rosalie and her family struggle to get by, even though the country has made vast strides since the devastation of the genocide, rebuilding and trying to move forward.

We chatted about how things were going with her family. Her eldest son, Charles, is married and lives away. Yvette and Violette had finished their studies but didn't yet have work. (Both have since married.) Isaac was going to school in Ruehengeri, in the northwest of Rwanda. And every day, Rosalie said, she misses her eldest daughter and husband.

“She was a real Christian and I have been told that when they were killing her she still took her time and prayed, and the same for my husband. Those people who were around said this lady was going directly to heaven.”

On the twentieth anniversary of the genocide, in the first week of April 2014, I was in Rwanda again, to take part in commemoration events and at their invitation, to spend the day, April 11, with the Kagaba family. Every

year on that day, they gather to mark the date that is for them, the anniversary of the genocide, the day their family was torn asunder.

Since I documented her family's story for the *Toronto Star* in 2009, Rosalie and I had kept in touch. I'm Facebook friends with her youngest son, Isaac (who was born two months after the death of his father and eldest sister), as well as sisters Violette and Yvette. There are also two older sisters, Josephine and Debra, and a brother, Charles.

To mark the twentieth anniversary, they wanted to visit the Nyanza memorial site on the outskirts of Kigali, where the remains of Gabriel and Justine were later interred. I helped find some cars to bring family members to the memorial site. We picked them up mid-morning, Rosalie dressed in the flowing grey robes that genocide widows wear for memorial ceremonies. On the way, we stopped in the market in central Kigali to pick up flowers, beautiful arrangements of red roses and long, white lilies. I also picked up a small bouquet of my own.

I hadn't realized before that the bodies of Gabriel and Justine had been found. It was only in the car, on the way to the memorial site, that I learned the harrowing tale of how the family found some closure.

The death squads had come to the house that morning 20 years ago, dragging away the father and eldest daughter, threatening to come back for the others. Rosalie, then seven months pregnant, fled with her other children and was hidden by neighbours for the day. But by the evening, when they came out of hiding, they were told of the deaths and that the bodies had been hauled away.

Some 16 years later, in the spring of 2010, a woman who lived in the area in 1994 but had fled after the war, came forward to describe a mass grave. She said she'd watched hundreds of bodies being dumped into a deep ditch that day, then covered over. In 2010, the grave had not yet been found. When excavators opened the ditch, they found several hundred mangled bodies. They also found large rocks, car batteries — even a refrigerator — that had been hurled into the tomb, presumably to strike down some who were not yet dead.

Rosalie's family was contacted after an identity card was found in the pocket of one decomposed body, that of Gabriel.

As we were waiting for other family members to arrive at the Nyanza memorial, Violette described for me how she and her little brother Isaac went to claim the body and to prepare it for burial in the traditional way. Their mother simply couldn't bring herself to take part.

Violette and Isaac carefully removed their father's tattered clothes, then lovingly washed his bones, removing the caked-on soil and debris.

"You have to be strong," Violette told me, just as the family assembled and headed in a procession to the memorial tomb, one of several mass graves at Nyanza containing thousands of bodies laid to rest beneath marble markers.

The family spent a few moments in silent prayer before Rosalie placed their memorial wreath. A few moments later, I joined them and added my small bouquet, carefully removing one red rose.

For the most part, family members remained sombre and composed, with only the older sisters Debra and Josephine wiping away tears and sobbing. "You know, I want to cry, but it is as if I don't know how anymore," Violette said as we walked slowly away from the tomb.

Together we went to a restaurant in Gikondo, where we drank Orange Fanta and Coke, then ate goat brochettes and French fries.

After the meal, Isaac, the youngest brother, rose hesitantly to speak. "It is almost 20 years since I was born, 20 years since the genocide," said Isaac, who thanked family members for attending, and also thanked me for "standing with us as well on this day."

Then I stood to speak.

"I just wanted to thank you for allowing me to be with you today.

“As someone from outside, also someone who works as a journalist, I have to tell your family that I am very sorry that I couldn’t do anything to help you in 1994. But I thank you for letting me tell the world about your family, so those outside Rwanda could know about what happened.

“I always wanted to tell Rosalie, your mother, that I am sorry that I am the one who showed her pictures of what happened to Gabriel and Justine. But I think it is important that people outside Rwanda know what happened.

“So, thank you for letting me be with you today.”

Finally, Josephine, the oldest sister, rose to speak.

“It’s been 20 years since the genocide ended in Rwanda. Genocide touched us. We lost our parent, our sibling. When we have a Fanta on such days, we remember our father, but even the brothers of our father were killed in the same genocide, so we take time to remember them. We remember more than 50 people who died during the genocide time.

“We were young at the time they were killed. We were with Mom alone. So, we thank Mom for managing to take care of us and we thank God for that.

“And we thank our brother Thompson who came into the family and become one of us.

“And we thank God that all of us are alive.”

“We were young during that time, but now we have our kids. So we thank God that we are all alive and healthy. We are remembering and rebuilding ourselves. This is not a time to be covered by sorrow, but a time to move forward, to look forward.”

After lunch we drove back to the family home in Gikondo, the same home the family occupied in 1994, little more than a hundred yards from the place where Gabriel and Justine were slain.

I had brought some gifts for the family — a smartphone for Isaac, fancy leather purses and scarves that my wife, Roula, sent for the daughters, and earrings and a necklace for Rosalie. In turn, the family presented me with a woven Rwandan basket, containing a traditional bolt of African fabric for my wife to wear.

We spent a few more hours together, looking at family photos on my laptop, laughing, joking and posing for photographs.

By late afternoon, as other friends and relatives began to drop in, I said my goodbyes, promising to return again on my next visit to Rwanda.

I walked alone up the dirt path from their modest house, following the same route to the main road that Gabriel and Justine's killers probably used to drag them to their fate, 20 years ago on this day.

I made my way to the place in the road where Gabriel and Justine had been slain, in front of the house of one of the eyewitnesses to the killing.

The sun had already begun to set, bathing the street in a soft, warm light. Motorcycles rushed past. At the side of the road, a woman washed clothes in a plastic tub and little children stared curiously at the stranger on the road.

Before turning to leave, I knelt down briefly to remember Gabriel and Justine, and gently set down a single red rose.

But perhaps my most poignant encounter with Rosalie came during yet another visit, when I passed by with a young Rwandan journalist named Gilbert, who agreed to come along and translate.

I told Gilbert to try to explain to Rosalie that, as a journalist, I feel some remorse for the fact that we didn't do a better job of telling the world what was happening in Rwanda, that we didn't make people understand what the deaths of her daughter and husband really meant.

And I also asked him to tell her that I sometimes regret showing her the genocide video.

“Tell her that I hope at least some good has come from that. I remember how emotional it was for her to see those pictures, so I’m sorry for the grief I caused.”

Before Gilbert could finish translating, Rosalie was shaking her head.

“No, no, no,” she said. “Thank you, thank you very much for showing me that video.

“Of all the million people who were killed in the genocide, it was the members of my family, my daughter and my husband, whose deaths were captured by that camera. Because of that I am one of the only ones who can show what happened. Because of that we know, and the world knows.

“To have that chance to know, it was a miracle.”

And then, as before, she stopped me just as I was preparing to leave and took my hand. Like her husband and her daughter, lost in the cataclysm of the Rwanda genocide, she wanted to pray.

AUTHOR’S NOTE

This chapter is largely based upon a piece of journalism I first produced in 2009 and published under the headline “The father and daughter we let down,” by the *Toronto Star* newspaper, on April 11, 2009. That story has been revised and updated here to reflect more recent events.

1 An extract from the Nick Hughes video can be viewed online at <https://vimeo.com/126760724>.

2 Interview with the author.

3 I made an audio recording of the interviews, which were conducted in Kinyarwanda with very little direct translation at the time. Later, I worked with a native Kinyarwanda speaker on the production of a verbatim transcript of the interviews, from which these quotations are drawn.



5

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HATE RADIO AND VIOLENCE? RETHINKING RWANDA'S "RADIO MACHETE"

SCOTT STRAUS

INTRODUCTION

In 1994, government and military officials in Rwanda orchestrated one of the twentieth century's most extreme human rights crimes. During a three-month period, in the midst of a civil war that they were losing, Rwandan officials led an extermination campaign against the country's minority Tutsi population that left at least 500,000 civilians dead (Des Forges 1999). At the time it occurred, despite the magnitude and character of the violence, the genocide in Rwanda received relatively little attention in the English-speaking developed world. Rwanda was a small, land-locked, coffee-and-tea-exporting, francophone and strategically insignificant country. However, in the decade that followed, interest in Rwanda surged, as evidenced by a raft of major motion pictures, documentaries and books (both scholarly and popular) about the country. Through these various

media, Rwanda has emerged as one of the most recognizable contemporary cases of mass violence and as a textbook example of the international community's inaction in the face of genocide.

A prominent theme running through the corpus of work on Rwanda is the pervasive and pernicious role that modern media, in particular “hate radio,” played in stoking the genocide (Chrétien et al. 1995; Kellow and Steeves 1998; Melvern 2004; Moghalu 2005; Schabas 2000; Thompson 2007). In popular settings, films on the Rwandan genocide invariably feature radio.¹ In policy circles, debates on how to contain the genocide often focus on jamming the radio (Metzl 1997; United States Department of Defense n.d.). For skeptics of rapid democratization, Rwandan private radio is a showcase example of the dangers of media liberalization (Snyder and Ballentine 1996; Snyder 2000; Kirschke 2000). In addition, students of genocide (Chalk 1999), journalism (Article 19 1996; Gatwa 1995; Temple-Raston 2002; Temple-Raston 2005) and international law (Metzl 1997; Schabas 2000) all highlight Rwandan radio. And in a major decision in 2003, the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found two radio journalists and a print journalist guilty of inciting genocide (ICTR 2003a), the first international court to do so since the Nuremberg conviction of Julius Streicher. In short, radio has become a symbol of the genocide in Rwanda, and Rwanda has become a paradigmatic case of hate radio sparking genocide (Levene 2005; Metzl 1997; Thompson 2007).

However, despite the central role regularly attributed to radio, there has been little sustained social scientific analysis of radio media effects in the Rwandan genocide. Many of the standard methods and concepts of political communications empirical research — such as exposure, timing, frequency, reception, audience selectivity and survey research — have found little to no application in the literature on Rwanda. This is the case despite the presence of often quite strong claims about media effects, found especially in film and popular writings. Such claims often assert or imply undifferentiated, direct and massive media effects — effects that, if true, would be at odds with decades of political communications empirical research. Scholarship on Rwanda shows greater differentiation, but many

observers suggest large-scale media effects or employ somewhat vague terms, such as radio “fomenting” genocide (ibid., 6).

Given the importance of the Rwandan case and given the centrality of hate radio to the commentary on Rwanda, a better assessment of radio media effects in the genocide is needed. At stake is not only getting the Rwandan story right, which has implications for a series of related issue areas, including genocide studies, ethnic conflict, humanitarian intervention and democratization. The issue also matters for the political communications field, for which the bulk of research focuses on voting behaviour and electoral outcomes in Western countries. But perhaps most significantly, the Rwandan radio case raises the question of how outside observers conceptualize extreme behaviour in poor, non-Western settings. The conventional wisdom on hate radio and massive media effects in Rwanda is undoubtedly an improvement on ahistorical and empirically untenable claims that “ancient tribal hatred” drove the violence — a view common to press commentary on Rwanda and ethnic conflict in general. Nonetheless, much of the conventional wisdom on hate radio reproduces simplistic models of political behaviour that attribute little or no agency to Rwandans and that minimize the context in which extreme violence took place. Re-examining radio effects in Rwanda thus allows for a reintroduction of causal complexity to help explain what was a very complex and multidimensional outcome.

To gain analytical leverage on the issues at hand, this chapter focuses on two researchable questions: first, do radio broadcasts account for the onset of genocidal violence in Rwanda; and second, is radio responsible for prompting ordinary citizens to become genocide perpetrators? I examine the questions using a series of methodologies and triangulating available data and original field research, including a survey of convicted perpetrators. On the whole, I conclude that radio alone cannot account for either the onset of most genocidal violence or the participation of most perpetrators. That said, I find some evidence of conditional media effects. Radio catalyzed a small number of individuals and incidents of violence, framed public choice and reinforced messages that many individuals received during face-to-face mobilization. Situated in context — that is, seen alongside the primary dynamics of violence that drove the genocide

— I hypothesize that the effects had a marginal impact on the outcome. To be clear, the overall point is not to exonerate, legally or morally, journalists found guilty of incitement; radio broadcasts were at times racist and openly inflammatory, and those responsible deserve punishment. Rather, the point is to evaluate systematically and empirically, using the tools of social science, the conventional wisdom about media effects for what has become a world-historical event.

The chapter is laid out in four sections. In the first, I discuss the media environment in Rwanda as well as the main claims about radio media effects in the Rwandan genocide, isolating causal mechanisms in the literature. In the second, I underline a series of theoretical and empirical problems with the conventional wisdom. In the third, I test the hypotheses that radio drove the genocide and participation in violence against available evidence. In particular, drawing on methods and concepts from the political communications field, I examine broadcast exposure, timing, content and reception. I also discuss the results of a survey of perpetrators conducted in Rwanda. In the final section, I conclude by proposing an alternative model of conditional media effects, which take on significance only when embedded in an analysis of the principal dynamics of the genocide.

MEDIA AND MEDIA EFFECTS IN THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

Most discussions of media effects in the Rwandan genocide focus on radio, in particular a notorious semi-private FM station called Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), which began broadcasting in July 1993 (ICTR 2003a). The focus on radio is appropriate, given that radio in Rwanda and throughout Sub-Saharan Africa is the most important medium of public communication (Mytton 2000). Radio transistors and batteries are comparatively plentiful and cheap in Rwanda, as throughout Africa. By contrast, print media have limited circulation outside the capital and are accessible primarily to urban and educated elites. Television media have similar demographics.

RTLM was not the only radio station accessible in Rwanda on the eve of and during the 1994 genocide. Rwandans could listen to the more staid, state-owned station, Radio Rwanda. In addition, the Tutsi-led rebels, who were fighting the government in a war that began in 1990, operated a station called Radio Muhabura. Several foreign stations were also accessible.² But for discussions of the relationship between media and genocide, RTLM garners the most attention. The station was owned and controlled by Hutu hard-liners within the ruling regime who ultimately organized the genocidal violence (Article 19 1996; Chrétien et al. 1995; ICTR 2003a; Kirschke 2000). Before the genocide, RTLM broadcast a steady digest of belligerent, nationalist, anti-rebel and often openly inflammatory statements. During the genocide, RTLM announcers encouraged listeners to fight, and in some cases, the announcers broadcast names of individuals and places, which were subsequently attacked by citizen bands. For these reasons, RTLM is the subject of most commentary on genocidal media effects: “If ever there was a textbook case of broadcasting genocide, RTLM’s emissions after 6 April 1994, fit the bill — chapter and verse,” claims an ICTR prosecutor in a typical statement (Monasebian 2007, 308). RTLM is thus the focus of this chapter.

Within the literature on Rwanda, a number of claims about RTLM’s effects are evident. The strongest and most common assertion — the conventional wisdom — is that RTLM broadcasts had large-scale and direct effects on behaviour. For example, Roméo Dallaire (2003, 272), the celebrated former United Nations force commander in Rwanda, claims, “In Rwanda the radio was akin to the voice of God, and if the radio called for violence, many Rwandans would respond, believing they were being sanctioned to commit these actions.” Another well-known author on Rwanda, Linda Melvern (2000, 71), writes that RTLM radio was “a propaganda weapon unlike any other.” She claims, “The influence of hate radio...must never be underestimated” (ibid., 25). Similarly, Pulitzer Prize winner Samantha Power (2001, 89) claims, “Killers in Rwanda often carried a machete in one hand and a radio transistor in the other.” (The implication being radio delivered instructions, and then men attacked with machetes.) Such conceptualizations suggest a strong causal link between radio broadcasts and genocidal violence. So do expressions about RTLM such as “broadcasting genocide,” “radio genocide” (Mitchell 2004, 42), “death by

radio” (Misser and Jaumain 1994), the “radio dispatcher of murder” (*The New York Times* 2003), “radio murder” (Melvern 2005, 25), the “voice of genocide” (Melvern 2004, 205), “a tool for mass murder” (Kimani 2007) and “call to genocide” (Des Forges 2007). The most common sobriquet — Radio Machete³ — directly equates RTLM with a violent weapon.

Some observers — a minority in the literature — hold more moderate views. For example, Rwandan analysts Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy (2007) and Charles Mironko (2007) argue that media had some effect, but that media alone cannot account for citizen mobilization during the genocide. After interviewing perpetrators in Rwanda, researcher Darryl Li (2004) concludes that RTLM communicated ideology and constituted “performances” that listeners subsequently re-enacted. Radio routinized and legitimized violence, he argues; RTLM “may have been the key thing that helped transform the genocide from a state-led campaign into a nationwide project” (Li 2002). But Li distances himself from claims that radio had direct media effects capable of instantly causing violence. Richard Carver (2000), a rare skeptic, faults most commentary on hate radio in Rwanda for failing to establish a causal relationship between radio propaganda and the violence. Similarly, Alan Kuperman (2001, 91) doubts that radio broadcasts were essential to the genocide outcome because military officials had separate communication networks, and moderate Rwandans were not convinced by such broadcasts. Nonetheless, neither these moderate claims nor the stronger ones have been subjected to systematic empirical research, testing and adjudication.

The combined writings on RTLM indicate two prominent causal mechanisms. The first is that radio broadcasts implanted ideas in listeners that subsequently caused them to hate, dehumanize and fear Tutsis. Radio thereby conditioned, facilitated and legitimized violence and became a tool for the mobilization of genocide. Writing in the preface to a seminal study, for example, a UN investigator claimed Rwandan media were the vector by which “the poison of racist propaganda is spread” (Chrétien et al. 1995, 7).⁴ Similarly, Melvern (2005) claims, “In order to commit genocide, it is necessary to define the victim as being outside human existence — vermin and subhuman. In Rwanda, the propaganda campaign against the minority Tutsis was relentless in its incitement to ethnic hatred

and violence.” In another study, communication scholars Christine Kellow and H. Leslie Steeves (1998, 124) assert that radio indoctrinated the public by “instill[ing] a pronounced fear and hatred that previously had not been part of the everyday culture.” Such views are fairly common in the commentary on radio media in Rwanda (Chrétien 2007; Chalk 2007; Orth 2006).

The second major theme is that radio was a voice of authority and that having issued orders to kill, Rwandans obeyed. In their seminal study, *Les Médias du Génocide*, French historian Jean-Pierre Chrétien (1995, 191) and coauthors claim that the Rwandan genocide had two main tools: “the radio and the machete, the first to give and receive orders, the second to execute them.” Another observer, a journalist, asserts, “When the radio said it was time to kill the people opposed to the government, the masses slid off a dark edge into insanity” (quoted in Kellow and Steeves 1998, 124). The UN investigator quoted above similarly concluded that the “poison” of radio propaganda “is all the more effective because, it is said, the Rwandan peasant has a radio culture of holding a transistor up to his ear in one hand and holding a machete in the other, waiting for orders emitted by RTLM” (Chrétien et al. 1995, 7).

The ICTR decision is a variation on these themes. The judges essentially make two arguments. The first, and the emphasis in the decision, is about indirect incitement. The judges find that media “spread hatred and scorn” and equated the Tutsi ethnic group as a whole with the Tutsi-led rebels, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Thus, the court concludes that “RTLM broadcasts engaged in ethnic stereotyping in a manner that promoted contempt and hatred for the Tutsi population. RTLM broadcasts called on listeners to seek out and take up arms against the enemy. The enemy was identified as the RPF, the *inkotanyi*, the *inyenzi*, and their accomplices, all of whom were effectively equated with the Tutsi ethnic group by the broadcasts. After April 6, 1994, the virulence and the intensity of RTLM broadcasts propagating ethnic hatred and calling for violence increased. These broadcasts called explicitly for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group” (ICTR 2003a, 165). Hate media thus “paved the way for genocide” (ibid., 318).⁵

The second argument that the court makes is about direct incitement. The court recounts instances when people or places were named on the radio; that naming was followed by attacks: “Both before and after April 6, 1994, RTLM broadcast the names of Tutsi individuals and their families, as well as Hutu political opponents. In some cases, these people were subsequently killed, and the Chamber finds that to varying degrees their deaths were causally linked to the broadcast of their names” (ibid., 165).

In short, the court finds that radio played an essential role in the genocide by indirectly and directly inciting listeners to commit genocidal violence.

PROBLEMS WITH THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Nothing a priori discredits a causal relationship between RTLM radio broadcasts and the bulk of genocidal violence in Rwanda. However, to be persuasive, the strong claims found in the literature should be well grounded theoretically and empirically. As I show in this section, neither is the case.

Theoretically, the strong claims that radio indirectly instilled ideas that led to violence and issued orders that directly led to mobilization have three primary weaknesses. First, the claims are at odds with mainstream political communication research. The claims closely resemble a “hypodermic needle” model of media effects, whereby media purportedly inject ideas into the body politic and thereby have a direct impact (Zaller 1992, 311). That view — and similar elementary models of propaganda stimulus and behavioral response — has been largely discredited after more than four decades of empirical research (Perse 2001; Bryant and Thompson 2002). Even if political communication scholars no longer agree, as they did for many years, that mass media have “minimal effects” (Zaller 1996), contemporary scholarship still focuses on effects of much smaller magnitude than what is claimed for Rwanda. The focus of most contemporary political communication scholarship is on voting behaviour and electoral outcomes.⁶ The common causal mechanisms found in the literature include agenda setting, elite persuasion and reinforcing predispositions (Zaller 1992; 1996). To be sure, the field is considerably more complex than this truncated summary indicates, but the point is to

highlight the very large gap between the effects claimed in mainstream political communication research and the effects commonly attributed to the Rwanda case. Candidate preference, voting turnout and agenda setting are quite different media effects than murder and genocide.

Second, the strong claims found in the literature on Rwanda imply a simplistic and improbable model of agency. With the exception of Li and Mironko — both of whom did interviews with listeners and perpetrators — most discussions of Rwandan media effects attribute little or no agency to listeners. The Rwandan public is often characterized as hearing a drumbeat of racist messages and directly internalizing them or as hearing orders to kill and heeding the command. Those views are consistent with stereotypes about Rwandans, namely that they obey orders blindly, that they are poorly educated and thus easily manipulated, and that they are immersed in a culture of prejudice.⁷ But, being based on stereotypes, the assumptions deserve close scrutiny. Third, most discussions of media effects are not situated in a broader discussion of the dynamics of violence or of an assessment of rival explanations.⁸ None of these latter assumptions — minimal agency; an obedient, pliant and hateful public; or uncomplicated dynamics of violence — should be dismissed out of hand. But to have validity, the claims require empirical substantiation.

However, the existing empirical case is as weak as the theoretical one. The most common method of analysis in the literature on Rwanda is nonsystematic content analysis.⁹ One exception is a study by Kenyan journalist Mary Kimani (2007), who conducted a detailed content analysis of RTLM transcripts.

Even so, Kimani and other studies do not systematically address questions of timing (whether content correlates to violence in temporal terms) or audience selectivity (whether and how media effects varied by social category, education level, region, political party affiliation or some other potentially relevant variable). Some studies suggest RTLM appealed to young listeners because of the station's talk show format. If true, the finding runs contrary to expectation because the two existing published studies on the demographic profile of genocide perpetrators indicate that

they were a cross-section of the adult male population (Fujii 2006; Straus 2006). In addition, some commonly cited broadcasts — such as the evocative command “the graves are not yet full”¹⁰ — may never have aired.¹¹

Perhaps the most glaring absences are questions of exposure and reception. As I discuss below, it is not clear that RTLM reached all areas of Rwanda where violence occurred. Moreover, with the exception of Li and Mironko, the existing literature does not assess media effects through interviews or survey research. Li’s study also has empirical limits. Li primarily interviewed detainees and sentenced perpetrators in Kigali’s Central Prison, thus drawing an urban (as well as a nonrandom) sample. Mironko had a larger and more rural sample, but he concludes that media had minimal effects and that most perpetrators he interviewed thought broadcasts were destined for the urban, elite and educated (Mironko 2007). In short, despite very strong causal claims about media effects commonly found in commentary on Rwanda, the supporting evidence is weak.

The ICTR judgment is a case in point. Like other studies, the judgment documents content of fear-mongering and racist stereotypes in RTLM before the genocide as well as incitement to violence during the genocide. However, in most cases, the effects of the broadcasts are not specified. In fact, the Chamber concludes it does not have to prove a causal link because, “With regard to causation, the Chamber recalls that incitement is a crime regardless of whether it has the effect it intends to have. In determining whether communications represent an intent to cause genocide and thereby constitute incitement, the Chamber considers it significant that in fact genocide occurred” (ICTR 2003a, 342). The court’s claim may work for legal arguments, but it is less satisfying from a social science perspective.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Given the attention Rwanda receives and the prominence of hate radio in the commentary on Rwanda, a better appraisal of media effects is critical. While existing data to test hypotheses are not extensive, enough evidence exists to test, in various ways, some of the claims found in the literature.

In this section, I pursue several approaches. Each method is independently inconclusive, but triangulating the approaches yields a cumulative evaluation.

EXPOSURE

A central issue for assessing media effects is exposure: in this case, how many Rwandans had access to RTLM broadcasts? One way to answer the question is by looking at radio ownership rates. UN statistics indicate that less than 10 percent of the Rwandan population in 1994 owned radio transmitters, which is comparatively low for Africa.¹² But the data are weak, and individuals listened collectively.

A better measure is broadcast range: did RTLM reach areas where the genocide took place? The genocide itself was national. The violence occurred in all 11 prefectures and in all but one commune (an administrative unit equivalent to a town) under government control. By contrast, while the data to evaluate RTLM's broadcast range are inconclusive, most indicators suggest the range was not national.¹³ Several studies claim RTLM had little reach in rural areas (Kellow and Steeves 1998, 118; Kirschke 2000, 241), even if Rwanda's population was 90 to 95 percent rural in the early 1990s (République du Rwanda 1994). The ICTR decision does not address the question of broadcast range, but during the trial, the prosecution produced a Rwandan radio technician who testified that RTLM had two transmitters. He claimed RTLM had a 100-watt transmitter that could reach the whole of the capital Kigali and a few areas south and east of Kigali, as well as a less powerful transmitter on Mount Muhe in western Rwanda that could reach some areas in that part of the country. If true, then RTLM would not have reached large segments of the country, including northern, northeastern, southern and southwestern areas, where genocide occurred.

Another way to consider broadcast range is through an analysis of topography and elevation. The assumption would be that hilly and mountainous areas have comparatively limited exposure to radio broadcasts. Here again, the evidence from Rwanda points to non-national range. Rwanda's nickname is the "land of a thousand hills," which reflects

the country's mountainous and hilly terrain, and large numbers of changes in elevation. Rwanda's topography thus makes the country a poor exemplar for mass effects from FM broadcast media. In short, the available evidence suggests a significant exposure gap between broadcast range and where the genocide occurred.

Timing 1: Broadcast Range and Regional Patterns of Violence

Another way to test media effects is through an analysis of timing, here operationalized as whether broadcast range corresponds to regional temporal patterns of violence. Even though the genocide occurred nationally, the violence started at different times in different regions. In some regions, violence started immediately after President Juvénal Habyarimana's assassination on April 6, 1994. In other regions, the violence took two weeks or longer to materialize. Moreover, in one commune (Giti) under government control, genocidal violence did not occur. The temporal variation is small, but nonetheless, it represents different levels of local willingness to commit genocide and of resistance to it.

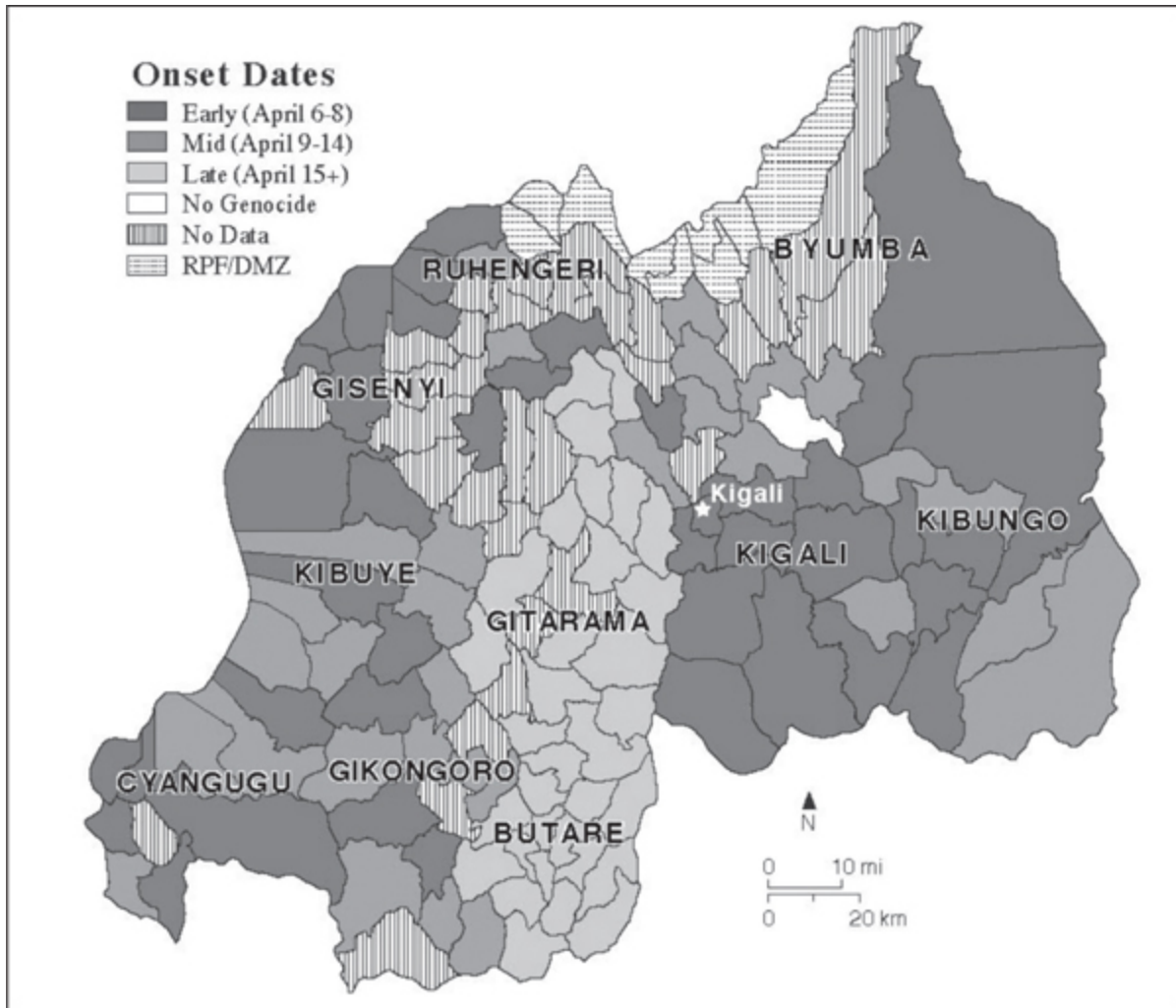
Since RTLTM's exact range is unknown, I compare four hypothetical broadcast models against a data set of onset variation. The data set includes onset estimates for about two-thirds of Rwanda's 145 communes that existed in 1994.¹⁴ The four hypothetical models of RTLTM's broadcast range are as follows: (1) national coverage; (2) urban coverage (including the capital of Kigali and environs); (3) coverage as stipulated in the ICTR testimony (Kigali and environs and Mount Muhe and environs); and (4) coverage in Kigali plus flatter and lower-elevation regions.

All told, no hypothetical model clearly supports the conventional wisdom, and some models flatly contradict it.

Under model 1 (national coverage, as represented in [Figure 1](#)), the prediction would be that violence happened simultaneously countrywide. But [Figure 1](#) shows that simultaneous onset was not the case; as noted above, there were pockets of early and late onset in the country. Under model 2, as represented in [Figure 2](#), the prediction would be that Kigali as well as proximate areas in Kigali rural, Byumba and Gitarama Prefectures

would be early-onset areas. However, [Figure 2](#), which depicts the hypothetical scenario that RTLM had a 40-kilometre radius around the capital of Kigali, demonstrates that coverage areas exhibit the onset spectrum. The hypothetical broadcast range includes areas of early onset (around Kigali and southeast of Kigali), mid-onset (parts of Byumba Prefecture) and late onset (parts of Gitarama Prefecture). Under model 3, as represented in [Figure 3](#), the prediction would be that areas around Kigali and Gisenyi would be early onset. [Figure 3](#), which depicts the hypothetical scenario of a 40-kilometre broadcast range around Kigali and a 20-kilometre range around Mount Muhe (under the assumption that the Muhe transmitter was less powerful), does show a hypothetical broadcast range that includes primarily areas where genocide started earliest. However, the map also shows many uncovered areas where violence started earliest.

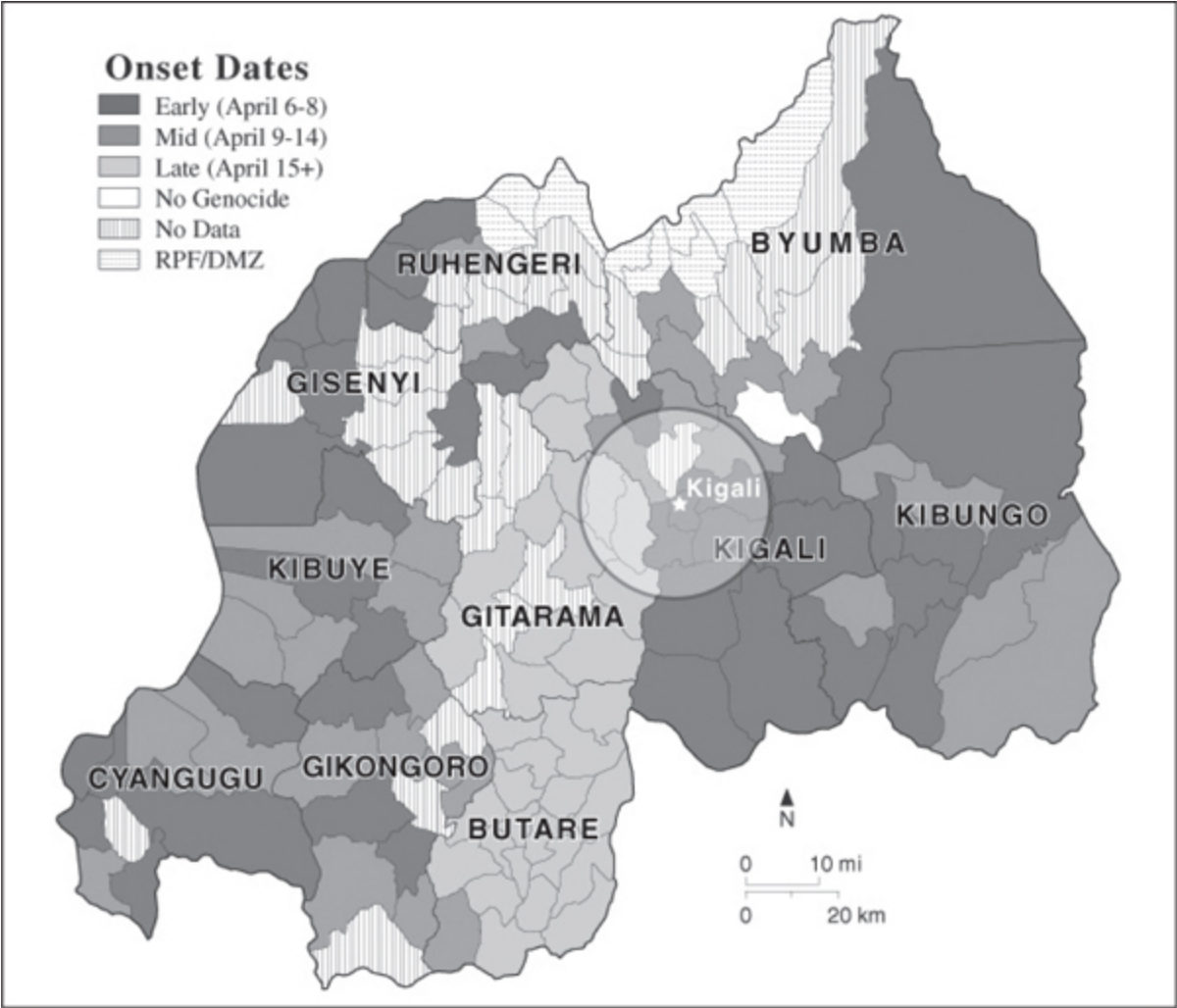
Figure 1: Genocide Onset Dates with Hypothetical National RTLM Broadcast Range



Source: Reprinted from Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. Copyright © 2006 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

Finally, under model 4, the prediction would be that flatter and lower elevation regions would be early-onset areas. However, [Figure 4](#), which shades higher elevation areas darker, shows almost the opposite. The prefectures with the highest elevations (Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Kibuye) had early and mid-onset. By contrast, the prefectures with the lowest elevations (areas south of Kigali, Gitarama, Butare, Kibungo and Gikongoro) run the onset spectrum. There are similar results for changes in elevation. All 11 prefectures in Rwanda have at least a 1,500-metre spread in elevation.¹⁵ However, the prefectures with the greatest height variance (Gisenyi, Ruhengeri and Kibuye) are areas where violence started earliest.

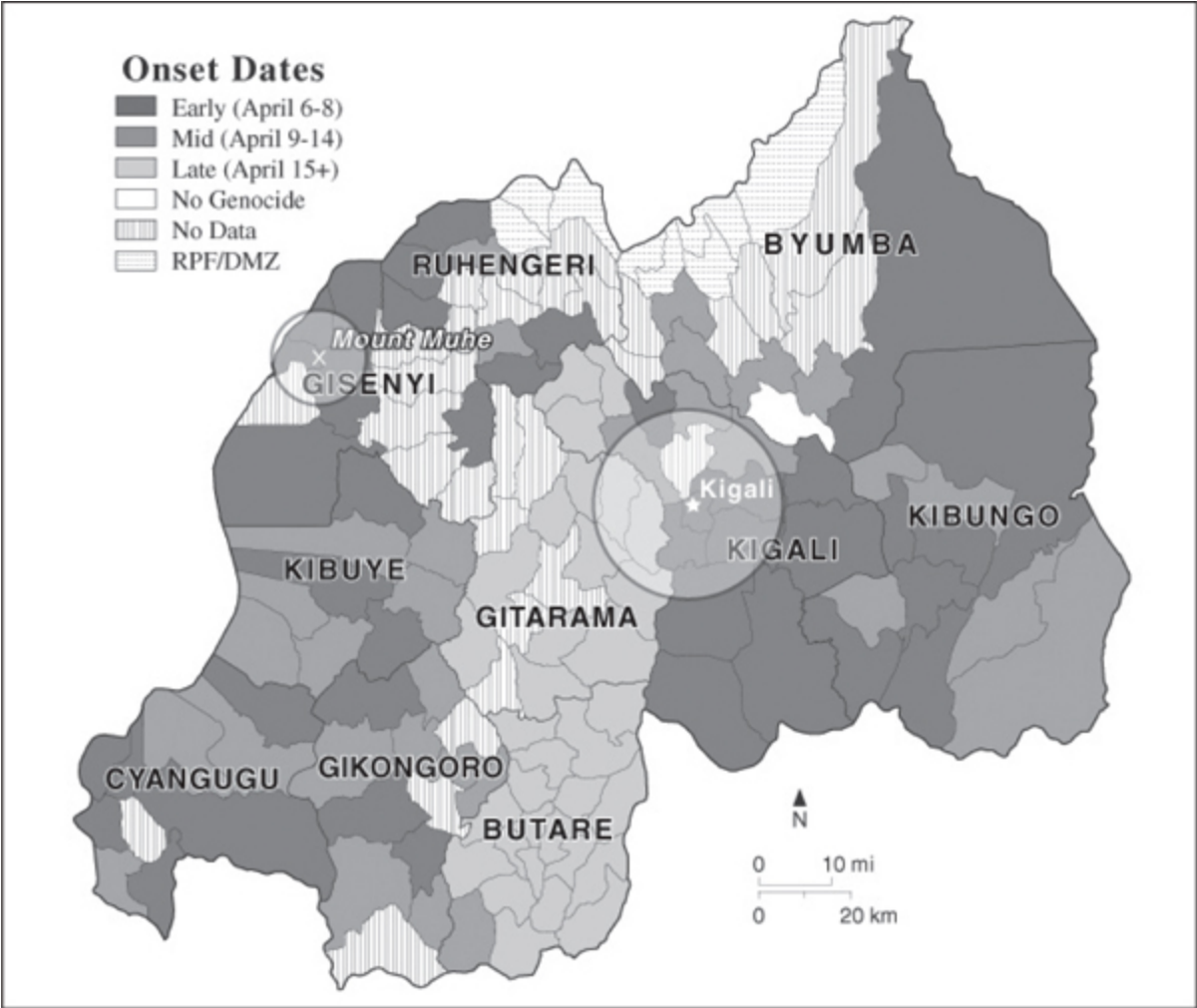
Figure 2: Genocide Onset Dates and Hypothetical RTLTM Broadcast Range of Kigali City and Environs



Source: Author.

In sum, the mapping analysis indicates that broadcast range does not correlate well with onset of genocidal violence in different regions. Of four tested hypothetical models of broadcast range, only one (the third) lends minimal support to the hypothesis that violence started earliest where RTLTM reached. The three other models show either no correlation between early onset and broadcast range or an inverted relationship. Moreover, the third model leaves out many areas where violence started earliest, which indicates that RTLTM would not have been necessary to trigger the onset of genocide.

Figure 3: Genocide Onset Dates and Hypothetical RTLTM Broadcast Range of Kigali City and Environs, and Mount Muhe and Environs



Source: Author.

Timing II: Broadcasts and Violence

A related timing issue is whether violence tended to happen when broadcasts tended to air. In some cases, the answer to the question is “yes.” There are examples where RTLTM broadcast specific names and places, which were followed by attacks on those individuals and locations. However, the cases comprise a tiny fraction of the total violence and appear to be limited to the capital and its environs. The ICTR Media Trial decision, for example, lists about 10 instances. The ICTR may not have discovered or reported all such incidents, but even if the number were increased twentyfold to 200, the percentage of attacks would be small

compared to the total numbers of attacks and murders during the genocide, which left at least 500,000 dead countrywide.

Figure 4: Genocide Onset Dates and Elevation Levels (higher areas shaded darker)



Source: Author.

With regard to general trends of broadcasts and violence, the existing data show a limited temporal relationship at best. Most violence during the genocide happened in April. The only comprehensive data on timing of deaths comes from Kibuye Prefecture, where a survivors' organization conducted a household survey documenting the date and location of deaths. The organization's findings show that some 85 percent of all reported deaths took place between April 7 and April 20 (IBUKA, 1999).

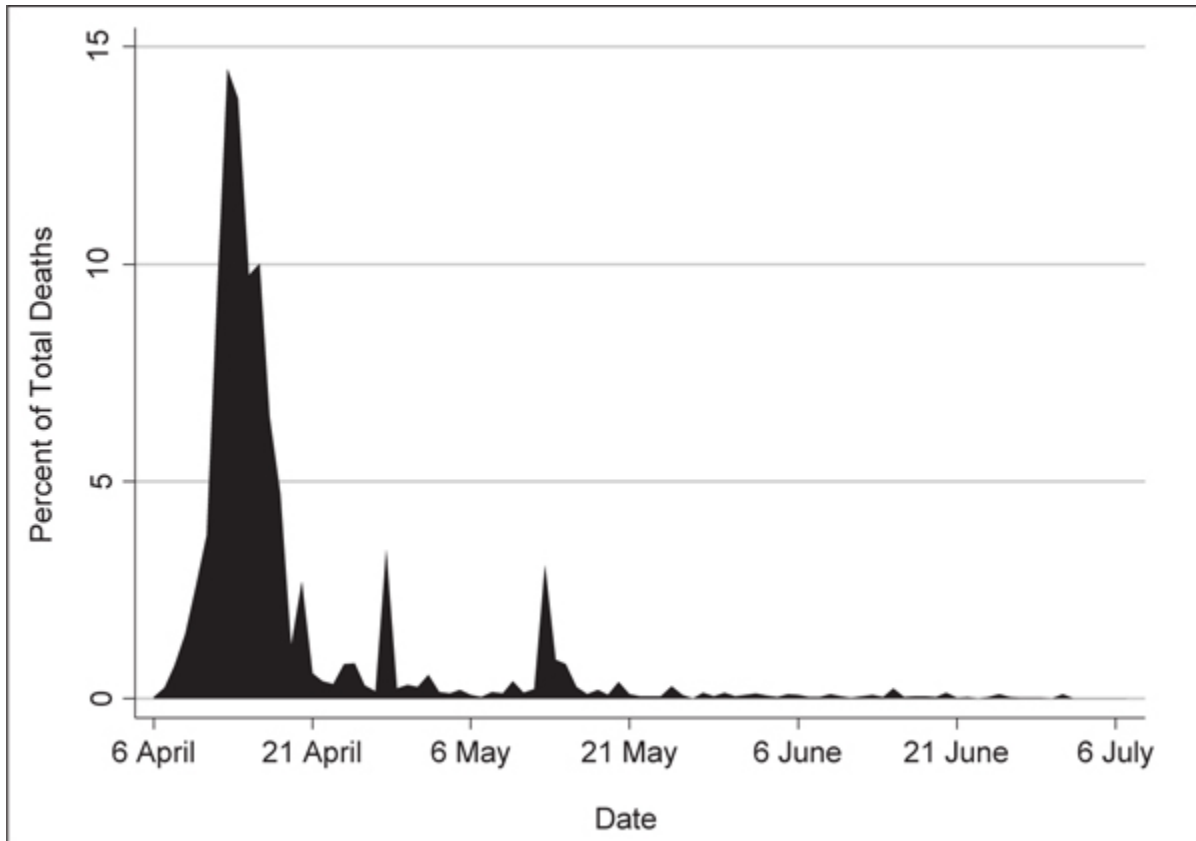
Kibuye was a mid-onset prefecture, meaning that violence spiked earlier in Kigali, Gisenyi and Rugengeri. By contrast, violence spiked later in Gitarama and Butare, between April 21 and the first week of May. By mid-May, moreover, the RPF rebels had won control over large areas of the country. For simplicity, I categorize the genocide into two periods: a “high genocide” period (between April 6 and May 7) and a “low genocide” period (between May 8 and early July). When then did most inflammatory broadcasts take place? The ICTR decision lists relatively few specific broadcasts from the high genocide period, and those that are listed focus on the Kigali area. The decision discusses three broadcasts in which people were named on April 7 and 8 and subsequently killed (ICTR 2003a, 151, 162). A separate broadcast took place “days after” the president’s assassination, according to the ICTR, and it encouraged listeners in three locations in and around Kigali to search for *inyenzi* (ibid., 133). (The Kinyarwanda word *inyenzi* means “cockroach” and was a pejorative term for the rebels and sometimes all Tutsis.) A broadcast from April 11 encouraged Tutsis to return from their hiding places to their homes; a court witness testified that some who did return after the broadcast were subsequently murdered. On April 12, an RTLM announcer claimed armed *inyenzi* were at an Islamic Center in Kigali; a day later, attackers stormed the center’s mosque and massacred hundreds of unarmed civilians (ibid., 152). On April 13, the same announcer implied that Tutsis, as a minority, should be exterminated for seeking to take power (ibid., 136-37).

The broadcasts provide evidence of direct media effects, especially where attacks followed the broadcasting of a name or location. At the same time, the broadcasts amount to a handful of examples from the high genocide period, and they focus on the capital of Kigali. The ICTR decision cites many other broadcasts in the decision, but they date from May 13 onward. The later broadcasts are indeed consistently inflammatory, urging listeners in instances to quash the rebels and their Tutsi “accomplices” or to “break” Tutsis’ noses. On several occasions, the broadcasts refer to “exterminating” the rebels and the “enemy.” Indeed, as Mary Kimani concludes, RTLM broadcasts appear to have become more extreme during the later stages of the genocide, as the government side lost ground to Tutsi rebels (Kimani 2007, 122). However, as [Figure 5](#) shows, by mid-May, most killing of Tutsi civilians had already taken place. Thus, citing

mid-May or later broadcasts is weak evidence to support the hypothesis that broadcasts drove the violence and participation in it.

Other sources show similar patterns. In the seminal book *Les Médias du Génocide*, Chrétien and his coauthors list only three specific April 1994 RTLM broadcasts (Chrétien et al. 1995, 393). Almost all of the most explicit and inflammatory RTLM broadcasts cited in the book are dated from mid-May onward (ibid.). Communication scholars Kellow and Steeves (1998) make generalizations about radio broadcasts after April 6, but the earliest specific RTLM broadcast they cite is from May 14. The report *Broadcasting Genocide*, from media watchdog group Article 19, cites five specific broadcasts in the high genocide period. According to the report, on April 8, listeners at roadblocks (where violence happened frequently) were told to remain “strong” and to know that the radio supported them. On April 10, listeners were told to “remain vigilant,” to “defend themselves” and to man roadblocks. On April 13, listeners were additionally told to “give punishment,” to remain “heroic” and to prepare for “battle.” On April 15, listeners were told to “stand up” and “take action” lest they be exterminated (Article 19 1996, 114–19). The report provides some evidence of a temporal link between belligerent broadcasts and the bulk of killing countrywide, as well as evidence that hate radio served to bolster and encourage those who were committing violence. Even so, the frequency of broadcasts and their reception are not documented.

Figure 5: Dates of Killings in Kibuye Prefecture



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CONTENT ANALYSIS

Another way to consider media effects is to examine the content of entire RTLTM transcripts systematically. The ICTR produced transcripts of 34 distinct broadcasts that were translated from Kinyarwanda to French and English and that were provided to me (see [Appendix](#)).¹⁶ The transcripts include nine that aired before the genocide, four that aired during the high genocide period, 10 that aired during the low genocide period and 11 that are undated. In total, the transcripts amount to 973 pages and an estimated 2,070 minutes of airtime. My analysis proceeds in two ways: first, quantitatively and second, qualitatively. The latter focuses on the broadcasts from the high genocide period.

To conduct the quantitative content analysis, I selected five indicators of inflammatory broadcasts: calls to be “vigilant”; calls to “fight” or “kill”;

calls to “defend” the nation or themselves; mention of the word “exterminate”; and mention of the word *inyenzi*. The results are fairly consistent with the pattern seen so far. During the high genocide period, there are some hateful and inciting messages, but they are not overwhelmingly frequent. During the low genocide period, the inflammatory broadcasts are more frequent and virulent, but again citing broadcasts from mid-May onward is weak evidence to show that radio broadcasts sowed violence.

The results are as follows. There are 80 total references to being “vigilant,” including 14 in the high genocide period and 28 in the low genocide period. There are 86 total references to “fight” or “kill,” including 11 in the high genocide period and 36 in the low genocide period. There are 87 total references to “defence,” including 12 in the high genocide period and 50 in the low genocide period. There are 46 total references to “exterminate,” with none in the high genocide period and 32 in the low genocide period. Finally, there are 460 total references to *inyenzi*, including nine in the high genocide period and 399 in the low genocide period.¹⁷

The qualitative analysis reveals the same patterns. The pregenocide broadcasts present Rwandan history in a tendentious, nationalist and antirebel fashion, often accompanied by negative commentary about Tutsi behaviour. The low genocide broadcasts include inflammatory calls to arms. Broadcasters urge listeners to fight the *inyenzi* and “their accomplices” (references to Tutsi civilians). However, a close reading of the four available broadcasts from the high genocide period reveals little evidence of direct calls for violence against Tutsis. In fact, on several occasions, announcers or interviewees urge listeners not to attack civilians; they also advocate negotiation with the rebels. To be sure, the tone of the broadcasts is decidedly hostile toward the rebels, and it is hard to know how the tone was interpreted. Moreover, speakers urge the population to assist the armed forces, and on two occasions, broadcasters mention place-names where listeners are supposed to go to find *inkotanyi* (another Kinyarwanda synonym for rebels). But officials also sometimes encourage listeners to avoid excesses and spare civilians. A discussion of the four broadcasts follows.

The April 9 broadcast is primarily a report on the swearing-in ceremony of the new transitional government. Speeches by the new prime minister and president emphasize the importance of future elections, the constitution and negotiations with the rebels. The tone of the broadcast is mild, and there is no evidence of orders to kill.

The April 14 broadcast is, on balance, more aggressive, but it displays some of the complexity of the broadcasts from this period. Early in the transcript, the announcer urges listeners to be courageous in the war. The announcer also makes reference to a busload of *inkotanyi* in Kigali and calls on listeners to protect the area. Later the announcer urges the “sons of Sebahinzi” (codeword for Hutus) to “unite” and “be on guard.” But he adds: “We would like however to say that those who kill and loot must stop....You have been given a gun to be on guard and to maintain security, not to intimidate people, steal goods from them or to kill them....Stop this business, you have done enough!”

The latter parts of the transcript include interviews with the prime minister and the president. The officials blame the rebels for the current crisis, but they also encourage negotiations. When asked by a journalist to address the population, the prime minister urges listeners to help the armed forces but to “avoid divisions on regional or ethnic grounds.” Similarly, the president urges listeners to “forget excess anger, hatred, and vengeance because if you are attacked and you fight amongst yourselves, what will that accomplish?” The prefect of Kigali (who also is interviewed) takes a similar line. He urges the population to take part in the government’s self-defence operations, but he calls for an end to violence against innocents.

The April 15 transcript is also aggressive and hostile toward the rebels, but there are again no direct calls to attack the Tutsi population. The transcript begins with a telephone interview with a caller from abroad; he encourages listeners to be vigilant and to recognize the ethnic minority basis of the RPF rebels. An RTLM journalist similarly urges the population to remain vigilant and to fight alongside the soldiers. He also publicizes rebel atrocities, claiming he had seen evidence that the rebels were murdering Hutu civilians. The remainder of the transcript, however

— more than a third of it — is an interview with a captured rebel soldier. Throughout the interview, the tone of the RTLM journalist is anti-rebel and jingoistic.

The April 22 broadcast is similarly hostile to the rebels. An interviewed political party leader rebuts claims made on Radio Muhabura that the rebels enjoy the support of the Rwandan population. At one point, an RTLM announcer broadcasts the name of a location in the capital, where four inkotanyi in civilian clothes allegedly were. He additionally says, “You people manning roadblocks should also double your efforts, be alert and observe the situation to make sure they do not trick you...and slip through. So stay firm, remain vigilant.” Later the announcer rails against Hutus who joined the RPF and counters claims that the rebels have taken certain locations. He further presents a nationalist-inflected rendition of Rwandan history, emphasizing Tutsis’ alleged superiority complex. Yet at the same time, the announcer admits that the rebels have bombed their studio and that RTLM is operating from a different one.

In sum, the qualitative analysis of the existing high genocide RTLM broadcasts paints a more complex picture than the conventional wisdom suggests. The tone on RTLM was belligerent; the ideology was consistently pro-government, nationalist, virulently anti-rebel and hostile to Tutsis in general. But the available full transcripts from the high genocide period complicate the “Radio Machete” image of a station openly and repeatedly calling for genocide.

Reception I: Quantitative Analysis of Perpetrator Interviews

It is possible that RTLM aired more virulent broadcasts during key periods in the genocide but that the broadcasts were not recorded, have since disappeared or are otherwise inaccessible. Thus, another way to triangulate evidence is through interviews: do those who took part in the genocide say that radio influenced them to commit violence? To answer the question, I draw on results from a survey I conducted of 210 sentenced and self-confessed perpetrators, who were sampled randomly in 15 prisons nationwide in 2002. The results are consistent with the thread of analysis so far: there is evidence that radio broadcasts had a conditional effect of catalyzing some hard-line individuals, but most respondents claim radio

was not the primary reason that they joined attacks. Most commonly, individuals say they chose to participate in the genocide after face-to-face solicitation, usually from an authority, an elite figure or a group of violent men.

The general pattern of mobilization at the local level reported by respondents is that elites and young toughs formed a core of violence. They then traversed their communities, recruiting a large number of Hutu men to participate in manhunts of Tutsis or to participate in other forms of “self-defence,” such as manning roadblocks. The recruiting most often was done house to house, at markets or rural commercial centres, at rural bars, or at meetings called by local authorities. Radio, in short, was not the principal reason why men entered into violence; rather, mobilization was locally organized and face-to-face. Those results are consistent with other extended, interview-based studies of genocide perpetrators in Rwanda. Researchers consistently find that face-to-face mobilization and social ties were the primary vectors through which ordinary citizens joined the killings (Mironko 2006; Fujii 2006).

In the survey, respondents claimed that they participated in the violence for various reasons. The stated motivations included intra-ethnic coercion and intimidation, obedience, wartime fear, a desire for revenge, anger, a desire to loot or gain land, and interpersonal rivalries, among other factors. The two most commonly cited responses were intimidation from other Hutus — respondents said they feared negative consequences for themselves and their families if they refused to take part in the violence after being solicited to do so — and wartime fear and anger — they said they feared Tutsi rebels and wanted to attack their supposed ethnic supporters first, or they said they were angry at the president’s assassination and sought revenge. Asked to name the most important reason why they participated, not one respondent said radio broadcasts (although many claimed that they participated because “the authorities” instructed them to). Asked to name the most important reason why the genocide happened, not one respondent cited radio broadcasts. Most blamed the genocide on the assassination of the president, which they attributed to the rebels.¹⁸

Closed-ended questions in the survey reveal much the same. The most direct question about radio media effects put to respondents was “Did the radio lead you to take part in the attacks?” About 85 percent of respondents said “no”; 15 percent said “yes” ($N = 176$). About 52 percent of respondents said they owned a radio ($N = 157$). A subsample of those were asked what stations they listened to during or prior to the genocide. About 60 percent did not cite RTLM; 34 percent named RTLM and at least one other radio station, and six percent said they listened to RTLM exclusively ($N = 65$). Cross-tabulated with age, the results about RTLM listening conform to expectation. The majority of RTLM listeners (exclusive or not) were 20 to 39 years old in 1994. As for education, RTLM listeners tended to have above-average education (which in the sample meant completion of primary school or greater).

One indirect test of media effects is whether respondents had heard or believed anti-Tutsi and nationalist themes that were common on RTLM prior to the genocide. The survey included three relevant questions: first, whether Tutsis were racial others, in particular “Hamites” who had, according to legend, descended from North Africa to dominate Hutus in the past; second, whether respondents had heard that Tutsi rebels’ objective was to reinstall a monarchy and enslave Hutus; and third, whether respondents believed the rebels were dangerous. RTLM was not the only source of such views, but any correlation would be at least some plausible evidence of a media impact. The results are mixed. On the Hamite question, of 204 respondents, 58 percent said they had not heard that idea; 28 percent said they had heard it but did not believe the claim; 14 percent said they believed the statement to be true. On the monarchy question, of 197 respondents, 49 percent said that they had not heard the idea; 32 percent said they heard it but did not believe it; and 20 percent said they had heard it and believed it. On fear of the rebels, of 198 respondents, half said they were afraid of the RPF. The survey includes other relevant questions on interethnic relations. One in particular is a question about how respondents got along with their Tutsi neighbours. Of 200 respondents, 87 percent said the relationships were good; 11 percent said they were without problem; two percent said they were bad.¹⁹

The descriptive statistics show, again, that radio was not the main vector of mobilization. According to the respondents, radio was neither the primary cause for their individual participation nor for the genocide as a whole. Asked directly if radio contributed to their decision to join the killing, 85 percent of the respondents — again, all perpetrators — answered negatively. The survey results also show that many perpetrators may not have been exposed to RTL: many respondents did not have a radio, and only a fraction of those who did listened to RTL. Of equal significance, the survey results indicate that, even for respondents who were exposed to anti-Tutsi propaganda, there is evidence that many listeners did not internalize what they heard. The findings are consistent with other efforts to measure media impact through interviews with genocide perpetrators in Rwanda; listeners critically evaluated and discussed what they heard on the radio (Li 2002; Mironko 2007).

Regression analysis offers another cut on the evidence. I ran a series of bivariate and multivariate analyses. The most important finding is that radio incitement — whether individuals say radio influenced them to participate — has a statistically significant relationship with degree of participation in bivariate and multivariate models. In other words, the perpetrators who say radio incited them were more likely to commit more violence and to be leaders of the killing than those who said radio did not incite them.

Seen in the context of the local dynamics of violence described above, whereby local elites and especially violent young men would circulate in their communities mobilizing other men to take part in the genocide, the results provide some evidence that radio catalyzed the more hard-core among the broader pool of perpetrators. The causal arrows remain unclear. Those who say they were incited by radio may have been those elites and youth already predisposed to committing the most violence. But at a minimum, the regression results provide some plausible evidence that RTL radio empowered a few key local leaders of violence in some locations.

Reception II: Qualitative Analysis of Perpetrator Interviews

To probe the issue further, I examine interviews with perpetrators qualitatively. I start with a typical example of face-to-face mobilization in the survey. The respondent describes how national government officials travelled to his commune and held meetings, and then local officials instructed the population to attack Tutsis: “After the death of the president, the Hutu authorities thought that they would lose power. The high authorities of Kigali went to their home areas....[They] met the local authorities, notably the burgomasters [local officials] who had never before incited people to kill others....Afterwards, our burgomaster changed his behavior and started to look for others to join him. He called a meeting of leaders from political parties and the local administration....*How did you become involved in these events?* I left to go and loot.”²⁰

Radio plays little evident role here. Rather, national elites fanned out to local areas to meet with local officials; the latter, in turn, mobilized citizens directly.

Another excerpt mentions radio, but only as relaying information about the president’s assassination and violence elsewhere in the country. As in the excerpt above, the respondent described how violence started after high authorities (in this case, Interim President Théodore Sindikubwabo) travelled to the region:

After the crash of the president’s plane, on April 7th we heard on the radio that in other regions the massacres started immediately. On April 19th, when Théodore came... he met the leaders of the administration. After the meeting, these leaders of the administration told us that the Tutsis had to be killed as it was in other regions...In a meeting by the *conseiller* [a local official], he told us, “One must look for the inyenzi among us and put them to one side.” When we left the meeting, people began to burn Tutsi homes. Then one looted and took cows. The next day, roadblocks were erected to look for Tutsis.

As in the first excerpt, face-to-face mobilization and coordination among officials precipitated the anti-Tutsi killing. National elites travelled to local areas to order the killing to start. Having initially opposed the violence, local officials in turn decided to join the program. They then held meetings and instructed Hutus under their jurisdiction to attack Tutsis. Radio did not unleash the violence: meetings and direct mobilization did. Rather, radio conveyed information and framed the context in which political action took place.

The two excerpts are representative of the dynamics that most respondents in the survey described. Below is a panel of different excerpts from respondents who, in the survey, answered negatively when asked if radio led them to participate in the genocide:

Radio is where we learned that the president died. But radio is not what led me to join. I went in order to obey the authorities.

Did the radio lead you to take arms? No. Why not? I am not a politician. I was not part of the state. So the broadcasts were for the authorities? Yes.

The radio did not lead me to take part in the attacks. It was the meetings.

Did the radio lead you to take arms? No. If other people did not demand this of me, I would not have gone.

I participated because all Rwandans had to participate...to save his own life.

Those who did not participate were considered enemies and the penalty was death.

Did the radio encourage you? No, but it did for others. Why do you say that? Because after the radio said the enemy is

such and such, it was then that the leaders said that to the population and that is when the killings began.

We were people convinced the Tutsis would kill us. I would not say that RTL M encouraged us. To the contrary, it lied saying we were winning.

In these excerpts, the principal motivations to join attacks are coercion, compliance with authorities and wartime fear. Radio mattered, but according to one respondent, broadcasts were intended for the authorities, and according to another, radio shaped and encouraged elite actions.²¹ In that sense, there is some, albeit weak, evidence that radio broadcasts served as an elite coordinating device and as a tool that strengthened the hand of elites who advocated violence. But the broadcasts were not the principal reason why the respondents participated. Rather, face-to-face mobilization and fear were the primary drivers.

In contrast is a panel of excerpts from respondents (again, a significant minority) who claimed radio did encourage them to commit violence. But the described dynamics of mobilization are not altogether different from the excerpts above:

Yes, the radio encouraged this. *Did you listen and go out to attack?* No. We waited for the order from the authorities. We had to wait for the order from them. We knew them and they were closer.

Did the radio have an effect? Yes, the radio confirmed what the *responsable* [a local official] directed us to do.

Yes [the radio had an effect]. When we were in the fields and we heard that the enemy was the Tutsi and that came from the high authorities, we understood it was serious.

The radio encouraged people to participate because it said, "The enemy is the Tutsi." If the radio had not declared things, people would not have gone into the attacks.

What declarations? There was a communiqué that came over the radio that said Habyarimana's plane was shot down by the RPF and that there was a combat between the FAR [the Rwandan government army] and the RPF and that the Tutsis were the enemy...Leaders' ideas were on the radio.

The station that encouraged me was RTL. *Was there a specific broadcast?* There were songs about how Hutus had to rise up and fight for their country.

RTL said the Tutsi is the enemy. That is where I heard the word *inyenzi*. They said you could not sleep: you had to look everywhere for the enemy.

In these accounts, respondents claim several radio media effects. First, radio broadcasts communicated the intent and instructions of authorities. Second, radio broadcasts reinforced messages that authorities communicated in person. And third, radio broadcasts framed the political crisis: broadcasts categorized Tutsis as “the enemy” or as *inyenzi*. In these accounts — a minority in the survey of 210 perpetrators — radio is not the only or even the primary cause of onset or mobilization. Rather, radio broadcasts had more marginal and conditional effects. Radio communicated who had power, what “authorities” supposedly wanted, and how to think about the crisis, but the issues took on significance in the context of what individuals knew was happening around them in their communities or what they were being told directly through face-to-face mobilization and interpersonal communication.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF MEDIA EFFECTS IN THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

The evidence presented above consistently contradicts the conventional wisdom. There appears to be a substantial gap between RTL's broadcast range and where genocidal violence took place; there is little positive and much negative evidence that broadcast range corresponds to where violence started earliest in different regions; the bulk of violence appears to have occurred before the most inflammatory broadcasts aired; most

perpetrators in a survey say face-to-face mobilization and fear, not radio, led them to join attacks; and, when asked, no respondent identified radio as the primary determinant of the genocide. Each piece of evidence has limits. RTLM's range is not conclusively known; a full transcript record of RTLM broadcasts is not available; convicted perpetrators may not tell the truth. But together, the evidence amounts to a persuasive refutation of the commonly held beliefs that radio had widespread, direct effects and that hate radio was the primary driver of the genocide and participation in it.

That said, the evidence suggests radio had some marginal and conditional effects. RTLM broadcasts instigated certain attacks, particularly in and around the capital. The survey research shows statistically significant correlations between radio incitement and higher levels of violence among perpetrators.

From that, it might be deduced that RTLM catalyzed some key agents of violence in some locations. Qualitative analysis additionally shows that a minority of the survey genocide perpetrators believed radio coordinated elites and signaled that authorities wanted the population to fight "the Tutsi enemy." In sum, then, the positive evidence of radio media effects is that radio instigated a limited number of acts of violence, catalyzed some key actors, coordinated elites, and bolstered local messages of violence. Based on these findings, it is plausible to hypothesize that radio had conditional and marginal effects. Radio did not cause the genocide or have direct, massive effects. Rather, radio emboldened hard-liners and reinforced face-to-face mobilization, which helped those who advocated violence assert dominance and carry out the genocide.

If radio was not the primary driver of violence, what explains how and why the genocide took place? The field research I conducted in Rwanda yielded three primary factors: an intense civil war following a presidential assassination, a state with strong local capacity, and a pronounced history of ethnic categorization. The civil war had two principal effects. The war legitimized the logic of killing (in war, enemies are killed), and war created a sense of acute uncertainty and fear, which radicalized some and led others to be convinced that killing was necessary. Rwanda is a low-income country, but Rwanda's state is compact and dense at the local level,

with multiple layers of administration. Rwanda additionally has entrenched practices of civilian labour mobilization that date to the pre-colonial era. State power in Rwanda thus bequeathed on those authorities and elites who promulgated violence the institutional means to gain citizen compliance quickly. Finally, the logic of genocide was at base an equation between “enemy” and “Tutsi.” A condition for the success of such an operation depended on the resonance and preexistence of the Tutsi category, and indeed ethnicity has a long and pronounced political history in Rwanda, dating especially to the colonial period. Hutus did not, in general, hate Tutsis before the genocide, but ethnic categories were meaningful and salient and particularly so in wartime.

The unfolding of the genocide was not mechanical, as the maps of onset variation demonstrate. In early April, immediately after the president’s assassination and the renewed onset of civil war, hard-liners within the military and ruling political party engineered control of the central state. They set out to eliminate their immediate political rivals, Hutu and Tutsi alike, and proceeded to advocate violence against Tutsi civilians. At the subnational level in rural areas, the crisis triggered different responses. In areas with strong support for the deceased president and ruling party, coalitions of local hard-liners quickly formed and initiated violence against Tutsi civilians. In other areas, moderates sought to prevent violence from starting. Over time, however, in all areas not yet lost to rebels, hard-liners succeeded in undermining moderates, eventually consolidating control. Once they did, those hard-liners — usually local elites and violent young men, as we have seen — would mobilize a large number of ordinary Hutu citizens to commit violence. Communities in turn switched from a period of heightened anxiety and confusion because of the president’s assassination and resumption of civil war to a period of participatory and exterminatory violence. War set the immediate context for mass violence, but the primary means of communication and mobilization was face-to-face solicitation, which was made effective by a strong, dense state at the local level and pre-existing labour practices.²²

To the extent radio mattered, it had a second-order impact. In the capital, RTLM’s broadcasting of names and locations, as well as its generally hostile tone, inspired attacks and were a factor in the hard-liners’ ability to

assert dominance. But radio was not the only reason that Hutu hard-liners advocating genocide won the upper hand. Most important, the hard-liners controlled the balance of power among Hutus in the country; they controlled key military units and militia. Moreover, the civil war and advance of rebels undermined moderates and calls for peace. At the micro level, most individuals chose to enter the violence because they were afraid of the consequences of disobeying or afraid of what a rebel victory meant. In articulating hard-liners' positions, signalling who had power and setting a tone of war and belligerence, hate radio narrowed the choices some individuals believed they had and reinforced the choices they faced in their communities — at least where RTLM was heard.

The conceptions of media effects hypothesized here — of catalyzing hard-liners, reinforcing messages and framing public choice — point to real impacts. Hate radio constituted one dimension by which hard-liners achieved dominance and were able to persuade individuals to join attacks against Tutsi civilians. But the conceptualized effects are more marginal and conditional than the conventional wisdom would have. More significant was the immediate context of war and the state institutions that facilitated face-to-face mobilization. The effects advanced here also avoid what the article has shown to be the empirically untenable and theoretically doubtful notion that radio media had massive, direct effects on genocide onset and mobilization. Finally, the claims are consistent with cumulative findings in the political communications field, which stress agenda setting, elite persuasion and marginal media impacts.

In sum, to claim that RTLM had no effect would be to overstate the case, just as to claim radio caused the genocide is overly simplistic and empirically unsupportable. Highlighting modern media is perhaps an easy way to make sense of mind-numbing violence in faraway lands. But to understand how such terrible events occur, we need to look well beyond simplistic frameworks and consider complex issues of agency, context, institutions and history. Perpetrators of genocide in resource-poor countries are like decision makers elsewhere: they act on the basis of what they see, experience, know and fear, not simply on the basis of what they hear — or even what they are told — on the radio.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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APPENDIX: RTLM TRANSCRIPTS

ICTR Identification	Date of Broadcast	Language	Source	Pages	Minutes
1. P103-97C-K022-6840	10/29/1993	French	RTLTM	38	60
2. P36-14G-K025-9139	12/17/1993	French	RTLTM	30	60
3. P36-23C-K024-9406	1/4/1994	French	RTLTM	47	60
4. P36-34B-K025-9331	1/14/1994	English	RTLTM	27	30
5. P36-44E-K025-8264	2/2/1994	French	RTLTM	26	60
6. P36-53E-K025-8290	3/10/1994	French	RTLTM	36	60
7. P103-343C-K026-3167	3/22/1994	French	RTLTM	26	60
8. P103-188C-K026-3378	3/31/1994	French	RTLTM	33	60
9. P103-192G-K025-8873	4/3/1994	French	RTLTM	29	60
10. P103-58B-K023-6570	4/9/1994	English	RTLTM	29	60
11. P103-65C-K026-4687	4/14/1994	French	RTLTM/ Radio Rwanda	33	60
12. P103-70B-R-K026-3118	4/15/1994	English	RTLTM	17	90
13. P103-205B-K026-0705	4/22/1994	English	RTLTM	27	60
14. P103-207E-K026-2374	5/17/1994	French	RTLTM	34	60
15. P103-296C-K026-3696	5/28/1994	French	RTLTM	28	60
16. P103-16D-K023-8685	5/30/1994	English	RTLTM	20	60
17. P103-267C-K024-8397	6/3/1994	French	RTLTM	26	90
18. P103-84B-K024-8176	6/10/1994	English	RTLTM	28	60
19. P103-300C-K024-8229	6/23/1994	French	RTLTM	25	60
20. P103-302E-K026-0345	6/25/1994	French	RTLTM	25	60
21. P103-304C-K025-9931	6/27/1994	French	RTLTM	39	60
22. P103-214E-K024-9642	7/1/1994	French	RTLTM	35	60
23. P103-217D-K026-0917	7/3/1994	English	RTLTM	26	60
24. P36-54E-K024-9596	Undated	French	RTLTM	25	60
25. P36-64C-K024-9062	Undated	French	RTLTM	24	60
26. P36-73E-K024-9743	Undated	French	RTLTM	35	60
27. P103-11C-K023-5676	Undated	French	RTLTM	25	60
28. P103-47C-K023-7778	Undated	French	RTLTM	34	90
29. P103-120C-K024-8484	Undated	French	RTLTM/ Radio Rwanda	32	60
30. P103-130C-K024-7927	Undated	French	RTLTM/ Radio Rwanda	22	60
31. P103-170C-K024-9879	Undated	French	RTLTM	29	60
32. P103-198C-K023-0533	Undated	French	RTLTM	25	60
33. P103-249E-K026-7579	Undated	French	RTLTM	10	30
34. P103-295B-K024-4819	Undated	English	RTLTM	28	60

Note: RTLTM = Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines.

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- 1 See for example the films *Hotel Rwanda*, *Sometimes in April* and *Sleeping Dogs*, as well as the PBS documentaries *The Triumph of Evil* and *Ghosts of Rwanda*, and the November 30, 2006, *60 Minutes* episode, “Rwandan Genocide Survivor Recalls Horror.”

- 2 These included Radio-France International, the Voice of America, the BBC and Deutsche Welle.
- 3 The term is found throughout the ICTR Media Trial decision (ICTR 2003a); see also ICTR (2003b).
- 4 Translations from Chrétien et al. (1995) provided by the author.
- 5 The specific reference here is to the magazine *Kangura*.
- 6 This is true even in a non-US setting. See, for example, Lawson and McCann (2005), and White, Oates and McAllister (2005).
- 7 On the latter point, see Carver (2000).
- 8 A similar point is made in Kirschke (2000, 239).
- 9 Two of the most important studies are good examples: the ICTR Media Trial judgment (ICTR 2003a) and Chrétien et al. (1995).
- 10 The broadcast is attributed to RTLM and was the basis for a title of a popular book on Africa, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe, and Power in the Heart of Africa* (Berkeley 2001).
- 11 There is no record of the broadcast (Article 19 1996, 112), and the ICTR (2003a) does not cite it.
- 12 Rwanda in 1994 had 67 radio receivers for every 1,000 inhabitants, making Rwanda the country with the eleventh fewest per-capita radio receivers in Africa (UNESCO 1996).
- 13 An exception is Mironko (2007).
- 14 For greater details on onset dates in the data set and their sources, see Straus (2006, Appendix, Table 2.1, 249–55).
- 15 The noted ranges are (from lowest to highest averages, measured in 500-metre increments): 500–2,000 m (Kibungo); 1,000–2,500 m (Butare, Gikongoro, Gitarama, Cyangugu, and Byumba); 1,000–3,000 m (Kibuye); 1,000–4,500 m (Gisenyi and Ruhengeri). The analysis is based on elevations reported in International Travel Maps & Books (1998).
- 16 These would appear to be a fraction of the total entered into evidence, but they are the only translated ones made available. See ICTR (2003a, 117-18).
- 17 See also Kimani (2007, 118-19), who has a larger sample of transcripts with some apparently similar results, even if timing and content are not correlated in the study.
- 18 Lee Ann Fujii's microlevel research in Rwanda produced similar results. While not probing specifically for radio effects, in her interviews with perpetrators, survivors and witnesses in rural areas, radio was not mentioned as a primary driver of the violence (personal communication with author).
- 19 For further details on the survey, see Straus (2006, [chapters 4 and 5](#)).
- 20 A longer excerpt from the same interview, as well as a number of other interview transcripts that show similar dynamics, can be found in Lyons and Straus (2006).
- 21 This is consistent with the findings in Mironko (2007).
- 22 For a fuller elaboration of the argument, see Straus (2006).



6

THE RWANDAN PATRIOTIC FRONT'S INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

FILIP REYNTJENS

“A NEW WAY OF DOING THINGS”

From the beginning of the civil war, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)¹ realized that battles are fought in the media as much as, if not more than, on the ground. The RPF was well prepared and, because it managed public opinion in a very professional manner, succeeded with surprising ease in having a simple, dual message penetrate the international media. On the one hand, the RPF invasion from Uganda in 1990 sought to rid Rwanda of a corrupt, regionalist, discriminatory and totalitarian regime; on the other, the RPF was going to put into place democracy, harmony between ethnic groups and regions, social justice and a healthy and rigorous management of public affairs. The RPF portrayed itself as a liberation movement, the “good guys.” This was achieved by using efficient diaspora networks,

creating relays in international media and political circles and using the right discourse.

Information and communication management is an important political weapon the RPF used to protect its continued hold on power. Through it, they have developed a coherent and comprehensive narrative on the past, present and future of the country and its citizens. Tightly policing this “truth” is an essential ingredient of the RPF’s political strategy. Indeed, the regime considers knowledge production to be an aspect of its (international) sovereignty (Fisher 2015). RPF leader and Rwandan President Paul Kagame once stated: “We used communication and information warfare better than anyone. We have found a new way of doing things” (Gowing 1998, 4). This “new way” has proven very effective. This chapter addresses six pillars on which the RPF’s information and communication strategy rests.

DENIAL

Johan Pottier (2002, 55) notes that Kagame’s information strategy was “built around denial.” Often, it actually amounted to shameless lying, as on Rwanda’s involvement in and plunder of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), its human rights record, electoral fraud and political assassinations at home and abroad. Some examples among many serve to illustrate this point. A practice of systematic denial started right after the RPF took power. Faced with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) consultant Robert Gersony’s findings of massive killings of civilians by the RPF, in early October 1994, President Pasteur Bizimungu issued a flat and virulent denial, and accused the United Nations of having “commanded a biased and hasty inquiry, with the sole aim of damaging the image of the government of national union.” Then vice president Kagame lashed out at the UNHCR with a warning to “beware of foreigners who preach ethnic divisions” (Lorch 1994b). In January 1997, when Belgium stated publicly what everyone knew — namely, that thousands of Rwandan soldiers were deployed in Zaire (as the DRC was then known) — presidential adviser Claude Dusaidi reacted, saying “I believe that Belgium has gone senile.... It looks like they don’t know where the borders are, nor do they distinguish between Zairians and Rwandans”

(Agence France-Presse [AFP] 1997). Many more denials were aggressively issued, but they sounded very hollow after Kagame himself unveiled the public secret in an interview with *The Washington Post* after the end of the first Congo war (Pomfret 1997). Although more than 20,000 Rwandan troops were again deployed in the DRC from 1998, Kigali denied any involvement. Rwanda once more took the risk of destabilizing North Kivu in the spring of 2012. Several reports (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2012; UN Security Council [UNSC] 2012) showed that Rwanda supplied weapons, ammunition and recruits to a new rebel movement, the M23. The reports documented direct Rwanda Defence Force interventions into Congolese territory to reinforce M23, as well as support to other mutinous and secessionist politicians in eastern DRC. Rwanda again flatly denied the charges, but no one, even its closest allies, believed them.

On November 30, 2011, Charles Ingabire, editor of the Uganda-based online publication *Inyenyeri News*, which was very critical of the Kagame regime, was shot and killed in a Kampala neighbourhood. He had been attacked two months earlier and received telephone death threats warning him to stop writing articles critical of the Rwandan government. There were strong indications that Rwandan operatives were involved, but Kagame rejected the allegations, claiming that Rwandan authorities had unearthed evidence showing that Ingabire had stolen money from an organization helping orphans that he had headed before fleeing to Uganda. “We have many cases like this in Rwanda of people committing crimes and claiming political persecution,” Kagame said (AFP 2011).

A final example is both recent and tragic. In July 2017, HRW issued a report on extrajudicial executions in northwestern Rwanda (HRW 2017a). It showed that dozens of suspected petty offenders were summarily executed between July 2016 and March 2017. The report contained names and photographs of victims, the identity of responsible state agents and a precise description of the events. Justice Minister Johnston Busingye immediately reacted on Twitter, stating that the report “is clearly fake. They [HRW] have been duped, yet again, wilfully.” Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo claimed that the report “has names of people purportedly killed by security forces, yet they are alive and well” (Mugisha 2017). On October 13, the (governmental) National Commission

for Human Rights (NCHR) dismissed the HRW findings, claiming that seven of the alleged victims were alive, 10 died of natural causes or accidents and 10 were unknown to local authorities of the administrative entities mentioned in the report (NCHR 2017). HRW responded on November 1 with evidence of manipulation by the NCHR. For instance, the NCHR produced a different person at its news conference, with the same name, but from a different sector and almost 30 years older than the person who was killed. The NCHR also presented a woman who said a person allegedly killed was her husband and that he was living in Belgium. However, the man said to be in Belgium is a different person. The man killed in March was a fisherman who never had a passport. Numerous family members of victims told HRW that local authorities had interrogated, threatened or even detained them since the publication of the July report. Authorities attempted to coerce some family members to provide a false account of what happened to their relatives. HRW also documented threats to local communities where the killings took place (HRW 2017b). A France 24 investigation, aired on October 31, also found numerous discrepancies in the NCHR report and corroborated the circumstances surrounding four of the summary executions documented by HRW. This practice of denial can be linked to a broader feature of Rwandan culture. Pottier notes that for people caught red-handed, whether petty thieves or political leaders, Rwandans can only feel contempt (Pottier 2002, 155). This explains why the regime, just like ordinary Rwandans, never admits any wrongdoing, even if the evidence flies in the face.

CLOSING OFF THE CONFLICT SCENE

The technique of closing off the conflict scene was first used by the RPF and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) in Rwanda before, during and after the genocide. A reporter noted in 1994 that “journalists are required to travel with armed escorts in rebel-controlled territory and are closely monitored” (Lorch 1994a). This was also the experience of an international commission of inquiry (the International Commission of Investigation on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda since October 1, 1990 [ICIHRVR]), which visited the RPF-held area in early 1993 (ICIHRVR 1993, 70). Amnesty International noted that “the RPA closely

monitored and controlled movements of foreigners in areas under its control...This ensured that...very limited information about abuses by the RPA could be gathered or made public by independent observers” (Amnesty International 1994). Even during the months the RPF was just establishing its control, it was remarkably successful in restricting access by foreigners to areas where it was “cleaning up”: “The RPF established close control over foreigners working or travelling in areas under its authority. Information and liaison officers worked hard at shaping the ideas of outsiders while persons employed by foreigners were ordered to report on their activities and conversations. Ordinarily journalists and aid workers were allowed to travel in RPF territory only in the company of officially designated ‘guides’ who sought to ensure that they travel just to approved areas, usually via the main roads. The RPF closed whole regions to UNAMIR [the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda] and other foreign observers for weeks at a time” (Des Forges 1999, 723).

This practice continued during the campaign of refugee extermination in Zaire/DRC. Indeed, Kagame confirmed that “the aim was to let them (the NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and the press) continue their work, but deny them what would be dangerous to us” (Gowing 1998, 15). As early as November 1996, humanitarian agencies were denied access to the area around Goma, declared a military zone. A similar decision was taken in Bukavu, where access was made impossible beyond a 30-km radius around the town; even within that radius, freedom of movement was severely restricted. Similar strategies were used in April 1997 to the south of Kisangani. When grave massacres were committed there by RPA “search and destroy” units, Biaro and later Kasese were made no-go areas. Next, when the humanitarian agencies were allowed in, the surviving refugees were herded to Ubundu, which was in turn declared inaccessible. In a number of places, humanitarian organizations located the whereabouts of refugee groups in need of assistance and made them leave the bush. The area would then be declared a military zone with prohibited access. When the humanitarian agencies were allowed back in, the refugees had disappeared.

A final violent episode that needs to be mentioned is the brutal anti-insurgency operation in the northwest from 1997 to 1999. In October 1997,

the RPA killed thousands of civilians hiding in natural caves in Nyakinama, but the UN Human Rights Field Operation for Rwanda was denied access to the site. The absence on the ground of impartial international observers was achieved by the intimidation and even killing of foreigners, which led them to leave these areas. On January 19, 1997, three Spanish workers of Médicos del mundo who had witnessed a massacre were killed by the RPA. Other foreigners who were killed include five priests from Canada, Spain and Croatia, and a Belgian school director, all suspected of informing international opinion after witnessing killings.

EXPLOITING THE “GENOCIDE CREDIT”

The regime astutely maintains and exploits the “genocide credit” to escape condemnation. The constant reference to the genocide serves several purposes: justifying Tutsi dominance (without saying so), keeping alive the fear of Hutu revenge,² maintaining the support of many Tutsi and keeping the international community at bay. It became a powerful ideological weapon that allowed the RPF to acquire and maintain victim status and to enjoy impunity for its own crimes. Pottier observed that “those who represent the victims of genocide are not to be challenged” (Pottier 2002, 176).

A few examples among many illustrate this strategy. During discussions about the deployment of UNAMIR, three weeks into the genocide, the RPF opposed it, stating, among other things, that “the international community was forewarned but did not find it possible or necessary to take any measures to prevent (the) massacres....It has...fallen upon us to rescue many Rwandans from (the) atrocities....The international community stood by and helplessly watched while hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens perished” (RPF 1994). A report by Amnesty International on the human toll of the Rwandan occupation of eastern DRC (Amnesty International 2001), was called “an insupportable insult to the memory of more than a million victims of the 1994 genocide” (Government of Rwanda 2001). In a widely reported speech at the genocide commemoration on April 7, 2007, Kagame reprimanded religious faiths, local associations and the international community, which “needs to

confess and plead guilty.” Kagame said that some members of the international community, and not just the usual culprit, France, “have played an important role in the genocide.”

When a report discussed in the UN Security Council (UNSC 2008) documented Rwanda’s continuing support for the DRC rebel group National Congress for the Defence of the People, the government spokesperson claimed that the report was “a continuous ploy by powerful countries to disregard the truth when it comes to Rwanda (and) to hide their guilt after they abandoned Rwandans during the genocide” (Government of Rwanda 2010). Attacking French and Spanish judges who had indicted Rwandan officials, Kagame said they “are nothing but vagabonds (and) the games (they) play are a mockery of the one million people who were killed during the genocide” (*The New Times* 2008). Before the “Mapping Report” on crimes committed by the Rwandan army in the DRC came out, the government attempted to prevent its publication by all means. It stated that “it is immoral and unacceptable that the United Nations, an organization that failed outright to prevent genocide in Rwanda and the subsequent refugee crisis...now accuses the army that stopped the genocide of committing atrocities in the Democratic Republic of Congo” (Government of Rwanda 2010).

This strategy of blaming others has proved very efficient. A diplomat interviewed by *Le Monde* in New York acknowledged that “any action undertaken against the regime in Kigali is always perceived as offering moral support to those guilty of genocide; it is true that the Rwandan regime is benefiting from this ambivalence, and we know it” (Cornu 1996). The regime also knew. Long-time Kagame cabinet minister Patrick Mazimhaka stated that “we were (diplomatically) stronger because nobody could argue against us,” while a US diplomat (Duke 1998) admitted that “the Americans were terribly manipulated by this government and now we are almost held hostage by it.” A donor representative quoted by Eugenie Zorbas (2011, 108) remarked that there is “an element of ‘we know better’ and ‘you have no moral authority.’ And it is hard to disagree with them.” However, a panel put in place by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was not fooled. It concluded that the RPF:

...are masters of shrewd communication strategies. RPF leaders have long understood that they begin with the benefit of the doubt, based on a combination of guilt and sympathy from the world at large. Guilt for failing to prevent the genocide and sympathy for the RPF as the government of the victims help explain why the international community, bolstered by like-minded journalists and NGOs, has often been ready to believe the RPF version that most human rights violations have been perpetrated by the genocidaires...[C]ritics of the government are simply dismissed as genocide sympathisers — a technique that puts a chill on legitimate dissent. (OAU 2000)

DESIGNING THE “TRUTH”

The monopoly on “truth” that the regime successfully gained extended not just to Rwanda’s visions and analyses of current affairs — for instance, its democratic credentials, human rights record and involvement in the DRC — but to history generally. In summary, this official history claims that pre-colonial Rwanda had been for centuries a unified, harmonious and peaceful society. And that, inspired by the so-called “Hamitic Hypothesis” (Sanders 1969), ethnicity was introduced by the Belgian administration and the Catholic Church in the context of a divide and rule policy, which they did in an artificial fashion, by basing ethnic identity on the possession of cattle. The RPF put an end to the genocide that resulted from divisive politics, and restored peace and harmony.³ This narrative is coherent and articulated in a systematic fashion. Pottier notes “the pervasiveness and power of clustered narratives that simplify reality to make the post-genocide government of Rwanda and its practices intelligible, rational and legitimate in the eyes of the world” (Pottier 2002, 47).

However, a leading historian of Rwanda, Jan Vansina (2004, 197-98), finds “a whole set of false propositions and assertions” in this narrative. “The linguistic and cultural unity of the country today did not exist in the seventeenth century and Rwanda is not a ‘natural’ nation....Rwanda really became a nation in the twentieth century” (ibid., 198). He furthermore

asserts, “Formerly, neither abundance nor order flourished in the country and it is false to think that everyone was happy with their station in life and all lived in peace under the shepherd’s staff of wise kings” (ibid.).

Zinaida Miller (2007, 46) also finds that “the problem...is that the narrative is — from a scholarly perspective — inaccurate....The effects of these particularized versions are both to suppress discussion in the population and to perform a certain narrative for the internationals who involve themselves with Rwanda.”

The RPF strictly polices its truth. During a scholarly debate in Kigali in 2004 about the nature of the genocide, one foreign academic expert mentioned the value of different “truths.” A high-ranking official in the audience immediately demanded the floor to insist: “There is only one truth and we know it” (HRW 2008, 36). This was also made clear by Kagame: “Those who have divergent interpretations of how and why the genocide occurred are revisionists and/or proponents of the theory of double genocide. This, as we know, is another phase of genocide” (Kagame 2008, xxii). The stated aim of an “international conference” held in Kigali in July 2008 was “on the one hand, to observe the failure of the human and social sciences that have led to genocide, on the other, the resourcing of the human and social sciences thanks to the efforts of the Rwandans.” The meeting called for “a new methodology, a new literature, *a new history*” (Rwanda News Agency/Agence Rwandaise d’Information [RNA/ARI] 2008a; emphasis added).

The problem with the official truth is that it doesn’t go with the grain. A wealth of field research data shows that alternative narratives circulate, but they are confined to the hidden transcript that silently, and in a sense subversively, challenges the regime’s public transcript (Scott 1992).⁴ This creates a situation “in which competing singular versions of history — the RPF metanarrative and the counter-narrative — effectively continue the conflict through discursive means” (McLean Hilker 2011, 327). Relegating this counter-narrative to the private domain may render it invisible, but does not make it disappear. To the contrary, research on political values of ordinary Hutu found public policy risks contributing to the very dangers the regime claims to combat (Chakravarty 2014). There

is considerable anecdotal evidence that many Rwandan Hutu, in the privacy of their homes, in conversations with people they trust (“their own”), and in expressions of everyday resistance (Thomson 2013), develop a mythico-history that is miles apart from the RPF’s meta-history (Eltringham 2004, 147–79). Both histories are factually erroneous, and no bridge is built to unite them.

The legacy of genocide has created a powerful rhetorical weapon for the RPF, giving it “a right to remake Rwanda” (Straus and Waldorf 2011, 13), including its history. The RPF views alternative historical interpretations as challenges to its legitimacy and its politics. Its version is protected against challenges by laws on divisionism and genocide ideology, judicial prosecution and political repression.

ELIMINATING OR INTIMIDATING DISSENTING VOICES

Critical voices both inside and outside the country were aggressively tackled. Domestically, the political opposition, civil society and independent media were soon eliminated as autonomous forces. What little was left of the political opposition disappeared in 2003 in what Amnesty International called a “government-orchestrated crackdown on the political opposition” with the help of the concept of “divisionism... vague terminology used by the government to disenfranchise the political opposition in an election year” (Amnesty International 2003). HRW arrived at the same conclusion, which it substantiated in detail (HRW 2003). On April 15, 2003, Parliament recommended the banning of the opposition party Republican Democratic Movement (MDR). The government did not play hard to get; on May 16, “the Council of Ministers, having studied the conclusions of Parliament on the case of the MDR, approves these conclusions and confirms the banning of the MDR because of its divisionism, and requests the competent authorities to give effect to this decision in accordance with the law.”⁵

Since the second half of the 1990s, human rights defenders, advocates of rural development and NGOs generally were threatened by arrests, “disappearances” and intimidation.⁶ In 1998, two leaders of the human

rights associations Collectif des ligues et associations de défense des droits de l'homme (CLADHO, a human rights umbrella organization created in 1993) and of the Ligue rwandaise pour la promotion et la défense des droits de l'homme (Liprodhor) went into exile, while the chair of another human rights group (the Rwandan Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Person and of Public Liberties), André Sibomana, died of an illness that might have been cured had he been allowed to seek treatment abroad, but he was prevented from leaving the country. In addition to direct persecution, the secret services infiltrated civil society groups; "such tactics have largely succeeded in breaking up the Rwandan local NGO network."⁷ The final assault on civil society came in 2004. At the end of June, parliament sent a list of a dozen Liprodhor cadres to the government with the request that they be arrested and prosecuted; in early July most of the Liprodhor leadership fled to Uganda and Burundi. This was the end of Liprodhor as an autonomous organization, something the government openly welcomed. In a September 18 declaration, it noted "that Liprodhor has separated itself from those among its members corroded by the ideology of genocide (and that) the General Assembly of Liprodhor, during its meeting of 11 September 2004, has asked forgiveness to the people and government of Rwanda for the bad behaviour of some of its representatives and members" (Government of Rwanda 2004). This satisfaction was understandable, as most new members of the board of Liprodhor were now RPF faithful. Rather than banning it, the RPF took over and thus neutralized Liprodhor.⁸

The media underwent the same fate as the political opposition and civil society.⁹ In 2006, Amnesty International cited a list of about 40 journalists who were "arbitrarily detained, unjustly judged, forced to flee the country, 'disappeared' or assassinated" since the RPF came to power (Amnesty International 2006). In a section titled "An atrophied and muzzled press," the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that "since 1998, each stage in the concentration of power seems to have been accompanied by additional restrictions on the subjects the press could cover" (ICG 2002).

In the run-up to the 2010 presidential election, two of the three remaining independent newspapers, *Umuseso* and *Umuwugizi*, were suspended by the

High Media Council, thus preventing them from covering the campaign and the polls. The director of *Umuvugizi*, Jean-Bosco Gasasira, fled the country for Uganda after having received repeated death threats; he was followed by his *Umuseso* colleague, Didas Gasana. At the end of June, the co-director of *Umuvugizi*, Jean-Léonard Rugambage, was murdered in Kigali on the very day his newspaper's website (whose access was blocked inside Rwanda) published a story about the regime's "hit squads" operating in South Africa. The government pretended that Rugambage was the victim of an act of vengeance, but his colleague Gasasira stated that "the Rwandan intelligence services were on a killing spree...with the knowledge of President Paul Kagame himself" (Howden 2010). In July, two journalists of *Umurabyo* were arrested, accused of "insurrection, publishing material insulting for the President, incitement to public disorder, ethnic divisionism, and the promotion of genocide ideology" (Tumwebaze 2010). They were sentenced to 17 and seven years imprisonment respectively in February 2011. The situation has not improved since, and Rwanda is ranked 159th out of a total of 180 countries in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders.

Externally, the regime reacts to criticism formulated by outside sources with intimidating contempt. Not a single expression of concern was accepted, nor did the RPF engage in dialogue with critical voices. Instead, it vehemently denounced them, accused them of acting in bad faith, practised character assassination and systematically avoided debate. This heavy-handed approach was applied to all: journalists, academics, international civil society, the United Nations, the OAU and bilateral partners and human rights organizations. A few examples illustrate this point. A report issued in 2000 by HRW (2000a) was described as "very mean-spirited, grossly prejudiced and shallowly researched," and the organization was accused of "consciously waging a war of lies and defamation against the Rwandan government of national unity." The report was called a "patent and shameless attempt to interfere in the internal politics of Rwanda and an immoral attempt to enhance the political agendas of certain opponents." Barely a month later, another HRW report accusing the Rwandan army of massacring civilians and practising rape at a large scale in the DRC (HRW 2000b) was said to be "malicious, baseless and biased" by the government spokesperson Joseph Bideri. He wrote,

“These are not human rights reports, but just political documents....These documents are authored by one Dr Alison Des Forges who wants to slander the Rwandan government in the face of the donor community” (Bideri 2000). Almost a decade later, Des Forges, HRW senior adviser for Africa, was declared *persona non grata*. Without addressing the substance of a report by the ICG (2002), the government accused the organization of waging an “anti-Rwanda misinformation campaign” and claimed that two of its researchers were working as “agents of the French government, whose hostile position towards Rwanda has never been a secret” (AFP 2002).

Critical voices from academia were also treated with contempt. A document signed by some 50 Rwanda researchers worldwide who advocated the prosecution of RPF suspects before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda provoked an angry reaction. The authors were “an alliance of strange bed fellows found in the western academia, those who have worked for the previous Genocide regime, including known negationists of the Genocide against the Tutsi” (Tumwebaze 2009). Canadian academic Susan Thomson (2011, 331), who was told that her research was “against national unity and reconciliation” and “not the kind of research the government needed,” had her passport confiscated and was sent to an *ingando* “re-education camp.” Several scholars have described the difficulties and even the anguish that accompanies field research in Rwanda. Larissa Begley (2009) tells about pervasive control and threats by officials and about how fear became a recurring theme throughout her research, for both herself and her participants and translators. Marc Sommers (2012, 41-42) recounts how the experience of another researcher, whose assistants were detained and who was given 24 hours to leave the country, had an impact on his own work. The need to be careful extended to the writing of his initial draft: “I had internalized the restrictive environment within which I had carried out the field research in Rwanda....I wrote the draft anticipating government criticism.” More surprisingly, other foreign researchers and international agency officials did not criticize the Rwandan government for having shut down the previous research effort. The fault lay with the researcher who “had done things that researchers cannot do in Rwanda.” To a large extent, the regime’s aggressive way of reacting to research seen as threatening has

paid off, as many in academia were intimidated enough to either keep silent, tone down criticism or abandon Rwanda studies.

SPREADING THE GOOD WORD: INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS OF SYMPATHIZERS AND LOBBYISTS

The RPF finds willing allies in policing its truth. Some of them probably act in good faith, genuinely believing that the RPF is unjustly attacked and must be given some leeway in light of Rwanda's history. Three recent examples show that point.¹⁰ On October 12, 2014, 38 signatories sent a letter to the BBC's director-general to protest against the contents of the documentary "Rwanda's Untold Story," first broadcast by BBC 2 on October 1, 2014. The letter stated that the BBC had been "recklessly irresponsible" in broadcasting the film, which has "fuelled genocide denial" and "further emboldened the génocidaires." The story was actually not "untold," but commonly put forward in mainstream academia.¹¹ The signatories' rebuttal of two of the three claims they called "untenable" was based on a biased and selective reading of available evidence. The documentary did not deny the genocide, but instead strongly remembered it. Rather, the struggle was over other facets of history potentially harmful to the RPF, namely aspects of the story on which the BBC challenged the RPF's narrative on empirical grounds, and where a convincing case against the RPF could be made.

On March 15, 2017, seven signatories wrote to the editors of *Human Rights Quarterly* "to protest, in the strongest terms," the publication of an article by Luc Reydam's (2016), "for its ill-founded and intemperate attack on the human rights work of a small NGO in London, African Rights." The signatories demanded the publication of a 10-page rebuttal. African Rights had in the past toed the RPF line and exonerated it of human rights abuse, and Reydam's showed that the organization had had close links with the Rwandan regime. Clearly the aim of the signatories was to destroy Reydam's career, and they nearly succeeded.¹²

A third recent example concerns this author. On September 25, 2017, a "collective" of 19 signatories published an aggressive attack (*Le Monde*

2017) on a book published six months earlier (Reyntjens 2017a). While it was claimed to trivialize and even to “indirectly deny” the genocide, the signatories were concerned first and foremost by the fact that the book challenged the RPF’s narrative on issues such as its responsibility in this tragedy, its own human rights record and its role in downing the presidential aircraft, an act that triggered the genocide. This was clearly an attempt at intimidation (Reyntjens 2017b), as was made clear by a text published a week earlier by Survie (2017), an association that systematically takes the defence of the Kigali regime, which stated that the “methods of falsehood” used in the book “*ipso facto* exclude [the author] from the field of honest and serious historiographic research.”

While in the cases mentioned above, the initiators seem to have acted on their own initiative, the Rwandan government also creates its own networks of sympathizers. At a September 2010 meeting of ambassadors accredited in European countries, it was suggested that “Friends of Rwanda” be used as “our advocates and spokespeople.” At the end of the month, the “Group of the Friends of Rwanda” was launched at the European Parliament, with Belgian member of the European Parliament and former foreign minister Louis Michel as chair. Michel has been a keen supporter of the RPF, particularly since 2003, and he was a guest of honour at the celebration of its silver jubilee in December 2012.

In a number of cases, supporters have been paid sizable amounts of money. In June 2008, the executive secretary of the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide mentioned an amount of more than US\$ 100,000 that the government owed African Rights for the drafting of a report. Money changed hands at other occasions too. The way in which one of the best Ugandan journalists, Andrew Mwenda, praised Kagame for years intrigued many, but things became clear in March 2011, when it appeared that he received a payment of US\$ 200,000 from the Rwandan government for “advertising.” The money was paid “confidentially” from a classified account. In September 2011, Mwenda was appointed a member of Kagame’s Presidential Advisory Council, a network of Rwandan and international personalities lobbying in support of the regime. In 2009, the Rwandan government agreed to a lobbying plan with the W2 Group at a cost of US\$50,000 per month. Its goals included objectives to “build a

strong and sustained image campaign communicating the successes of Rwanda with key stakeholders in the political and financial elite communities...[and] offset the negative and factually incorrect information of those parties with vested interests in mis-portraying Rwanda's advancements" (US Department of Justice 2011). With regard to the latter, "the campaign will help insure [to] negate the misinformation being pedalled by expats, NGOs and others with a vested interest in creating an image of Rwanda as a failed state." The "strategic roadmap" included objectives such as "develop a believable narrative," "establishing an influencer network," "seeding the story" and "erecting a perimeter" (to "blunt the online impact of our opposition by initiating a wall of defense debunking their accusations") (ibid.). BTP Advisers, another public relations firm, created an Internet "attack site" for the government. It targeted people who "over-criticised" when it came to "who did what in the genocide" (Newman and Wright 2011).¹³

CONCLUSION

The regime's strong performance in information and communication management may well be traceable to the intelligence background and experience of some of the RPF's military leaders, including Kagame himself. Monitoring and disseminating information is part of a strategy for both external and internal consumption. Externally, the RPF has successfully cordoned off the arena of massive human rights abuse in Rwanda and the DRC, and imposed a monopoly on the reading of history. In combination with the moral high ground achieved through the genocide credit, this has made the regime nearly unchallengeable for the international community. Domestically, the RPF has decreed that there is one single truth and devised instruments (legislation, intimidation, "re-education" and silencing alternative voices), to avoid it being challenged, at least publicly. By doing so, it has privileged the public transcript of the powerful; however, it has not, of course, eliminated the transcript of the oppressed. That story remains, but is hidden. In the privacy of their homes, in discreet conversations and in the body language that accompanies their silence, the powerless construct their truth, which may well be more radical than the RPF believes. In Rwanda, as in some other places, history

is a highly political stake of the present and the future rather than a way of analyzing and understanding the past.

The so-called international community bears overwhelming responsibility for allowing the RPF to successfully deploy its communication skills. It has been a willing hostage to Kigali's spin on so many issues — on political governance and human rights, on massive violations of international humanitarian law, on the aggression and plunder of the DRC, on its hazardous social and economic engineering, and on the way it has injected structural violence across the country and the region.

Under these circumstances, the moment soon came when dialogue was futile, and the Rwandan showcase reached a point of no return. Peter Uvin's (2004, 116-17) judgment is severe: "In the case of post-genocide Rwanda, those who provide significant budgetary support claim to do so as part of a deliberate and respectful strategy in which both sides dialogue to produce a long-term political and economic vision for the future....In practice, the Rwandan side gains greater power, partly because no one in annual monitoring exercise wants to rock the boat and undermine the nice setup."

The RPF's strategy has been very successful, but it has been waning in recent years. Even such "friends of Rwanda" as the United States and the United Kingdom have increasingly become critical of regime behaviour. For instance, they have condemned its support for rebel movements in the DRC and Burundi, the 2015 constitutional revision potentially allowing Kagame to stay in power until 2034, the persecution of alleged opponents, "disappearances" and torture in illegal detention centres, and electoral fraud. For example, US Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto, in a recent appearance before a House subcommittee, expressed "serious concerns about weak democratic institutions, freedom of speech, and respect for human rights" and "deep disappointment with President Kagame's decision" to run for a third term. He observed that the 2017 presidential election showed "notable shortcomings," including "voting irregularities" and "concerns over the integrity of the vote-counting process." He pointed at the targeting of opposition figures and suggested that "tight restrictions remain on political opposition and critics

of the ruling party.” Government actions aimed “to suppress dissent, prosecute journalists and pressure human rights groups to refrain from investigating and reporting on their findings” (Yamamoto 2017). This critical reaction from a long-standing ally suggests that there are limits to the RPF’s spin, and that its discourse has become increasingly unconvincing.

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- 1 The RPF is the rebel movement that invaded Rwanda in October 1990 and is now the country's ruling party.
 - 2 Indeed, referring to "Tutsi Power," Mahmood Mamdani (2001, 271) noted that not only the genocide of the past but also preventing one in the future was part of the RPF's argument: "The moral certainty about preventing another genocide imparts a moral justification to the pursuit of power with impunity."
 - 3 This presentation is found in many official statements and documents. For a summary of the government's reading of history, see Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2009, 33–38).
 - 4 Brandon Finn (2017) has recently shown the gap between the two transcripts among urban youth in Kigali.
 - 5 See RNA/ARI 2003. At the time of this decision, the prime minister and the minister of the Interior were members of the MDR.
 - 6 A survey of these practices can be found in *Front Line Rwanda* (Front Line 2005). The report highlights the persecution of human rights defenders, rural defenders, independent journalists and NGOs.
 - 7 See ICG (2001, 20). This tactic of infiltration was widely used from the very beginning of RPF rule. The ICG noted that from July 1994, RPF cadres "applied to work in UN agencies, local and foreign NGOs and key businesses to monitor attitudes towards the government and general activities" (ibid., 7).
 - 8 The destruction of Liprodhor is extensively discussed in *Front Line Rwanda* (Front Line 2005, 45–56).

- 9 An excellent survey of the fate of the media under RPF rule can be found in Waldorf 2007. Also see a chapter on “Silencing Independent Journalists” in *Front Line Rwanda* (Front Line 2005, 67–81).
- 10 While much in his book is debatable, Pierre Péan (2005) offers useful insights into the activities of networks supporting the RPF in France and Belgium. Similar networks exist in the English-speaking world. Their support is much appreciated by the regime: on November 18, 2017, Kagame awarded the Igihango National Order of Outstanding Friendship medal to nine persons “in recognition of their exemplary service to the nation in various capacities” (Mwai 2017). One of the individuals honoured was British journalist and author Linda Melvern, who was a signatory of the first two initiatives in support of the RPF mentioned below.
- 11 A good survey can be found in Straus and Waldorf (2011). When this book appeared, the Rwandan regime launched a blog — “Remaking Rwanda: Facts and opinions on the ground” — which was short on substance, but attempted to assassinate the characters of several contributors to the volume (www.thermakingrwanda.blogspot.be/).
- 12 Reydams insisted the rebuttal should be published along with his answer. Both appeared in the May 2018 issue of *HRQ* (Debelle et al. 2018; Reydams 2018).
- 13 For a survey of PR firms working for the Rwandan government, see Corporate Europe Observatory (2015, 17–19).



**AFTER
MASS
ATROCITY**



7

BEYOND RWANDA? REPORTING ATROCITY IN A CHANGING COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT

SIMON COTTLE

This chapter sets out to reflect on what's changed in the world of humanitarian crises and communications since the Rwandan genocide of 1994. It seeks to better understand the roles and responsibilities of media and communications in acts of collective violence and atrocity, and how today's more complex and rapidly changing communications environment can open up new possibilities for progressive intervention before, during and following such murderous collective events.

As a way of securing some traction on this task and in keeping with this volume, it is instructive to revisit the key findings and arguments from its earlier companion volume, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (2007), also edited by Allan Thompson. That volume clearly set out findings and arguments on the part played by media and communications in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. To what extent do these core arguments and

findings about media and atrocity still pertain today? How, if at all, may changes in contemporary communication and news ecology afford enhanced or new opportunities for news organizations and journalists to enact their “responsibility to report” and, in so doing, serve the wider global community’s increasing recognition of their “responsibility to protect?”

It is productive, then, to revisit six key findings and arguments from this earlier study and to do so in the light of more recent developments in the world’s communication ecology and academic scholarship researching the same. The central proposition of *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* was succinctly stated: “local hate media fomented the genocide and international media essentially facilitated the process by turning their backs” (Thompson 2007, 6). Thompson elaborated on these twin propositions through six more detailed claims, each of which will be discussed in turn. First, he proposed that most international news organizations misunderstood the nature of the genocide and reported it through a parochial if not colonialist lens. Second, he suggested that through their relative absence and failure to adequately observe and record events, journalists contributed to the behaviour of the perpetrators who acted with impunity. Third, he stated that the Rwandan genocide was largely “a genocide without images” and this contributed to the world’s lack of response. Fourth, he claimed that the media themselves, not simply their accessed contributors, were responsible for disseminating messages of hate. Fifth, he asserted that it is important to examine the role of domestic hate media and international media in tandem. And finally, based on the above findings, Thompson called for a new journalism paradigm, which he termed the “responsibility to report.”

Together, these findings and arguments cohered into a general and, for the most part, damning critique of the media’s roles and responsibilities in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. We now revisit each in turn to explore what may have changed across subsequent decades and to see if more recent developments in today’s media and communication ecology may afford enhanced ways of reporting and responding to collective violence and atrocity around the world.

FROM THE “CALCULUS OF DEATH” TO THE “INJUNCTION TO CARE”?

As Thompson stated at the outset of *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, “Most international news organizations initially misunderstood the nature of the killing in Rwanda, portraying it as the result of tribal warfare, rather than genocide,” and he also observed that “Much of the international coverage focused on the scramble to evacuate expatriates” (Thompson 2007, 2). This finding is entirely in keeping with countless studies examining mainstream Western reporting of conflicts, crises and catastrophes around the world (for reviews, see Cottle 2006; 2009). In such studies, researchers have generally found how an institutionalized and routinized news orientation, combined with a Western geopolitical and cultural outlook, inform the selection and shaping of news about foreign events.

I use the term “calculus of death” to capture this conventionalized Western news orientation based on news organizations’ routinized and — it has to be said — cynical disposition that regards some events of mass death, whether through conflicts and wars or major accidents and disasters, as more newsworthy than others (Cottle 2013a). As has often been observed, news organizations and journalists are imbued with a sense for the newsworthy, and that events closer to home that touch their audiences through past or personal acquaintance with the countries and people concerned are more likely to receive extensive and, sometimes, emotionally invested reporting than those that do not (Galtung and Ruge 1981; Moeller 1999; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012; Cottle 2013a). This is also often shaped by a geopolitical lens, with some events in distant locations receiving news attention because, for example, of past colonial connections or current tourist destinations or national strategic interests, whether economic or military. In other words, the operation of combined and ingrained news values — whether conflict, deviance, drama, violence, negativity or compelling visuals, for example — is not sufficient as an explanation for the news media’s often predictable content patterns and silences in its reporting of conflicts and killings around the world (Mody 2010). Journalists produce the news with a culturally proximate and geopolitically informed sense of what constitutes relevant news, and the pursuit of ratings, readers and revenue by media corporations and news

organizations underpins this selective view of the world. This fundamental orientation continues to inform the conduct and coverage of large mainstream news organizations who deploy their resources, including foreign correspondents, to places deemed to be relevant to their audiences, and not to others (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012; Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell 2016; McLaughlin 2016). Together, these factors help to account for the Western-centric news orientation, its silences and misunderstanding identified by Thompson and his colleagues in the reporting of the Rwandan genocide. These findings continue to help account for the operations of much mainstream news journalism today.

However, on the basis of more recent studies, it can also be demonstrated that journalism and journalists are capable, on occasion, of producing a less routinized and cynical response to mass deaths and killings around the world, and this I term “the injunction to care” (Cottle 2013a). Journalists inhabit a changing world and contribute to this same world through their practices and in how they craft their stories. This becomes enacted in and through the stories they write and narrate, the words they choose and say, the selection of camera angles, close-ups and panning shots, the evocation of bodily senses, whether seeing, hearing, touch, smell or taste, as well as in the accessing of different views and voices and the different communicative opportunities granted to each of them. In these and other multifaceted ways, journalists craft their stories — and they do so sometimes inscribed with an injunction to care. That is, they invite audiences and readers through their reporting practices to see the plight of distant “others” and to recognize those at the sharp end of suffering as not so different to ourselves. This more compassionate and cosmopolitan journalist outlook can be situated in a considerably longer historical time frame that stretches back through human history and what some have referred to as the expansion of “the human circle” (Ignatieff 1998; Rifkin 2009; Singer 2011; Nussbaum 2013).

Today, in a globalized world of increased interconnection and interdependence, of trade, tourism and travel, our cultural parameters and moral horizons are no longer confined behind the borders of nation-states or those smaller political fiefdoms preceding their violent formation. Recent populism-based political developments that seek to reassert

national imaginaries and build walls of exclusion do so precisely in a context of globalizing change and, increasingly, globalized society. Deep historical trajectories based on conflicts and struggle have led, over millennia, to an expansion of the human circle based on increased mutual recognition, interdependency and felt moral responsibility. More recently, this has seen the growth of institutionalized humanitarianism, international enforcement of human rights and increasing recognition of the iniquities and inequality of human (in)security around the globe. Journalists inhabit this same world and some, as we shall see below, have sought to contribute to it through their reporting with an injunction to care (Cottle 2013a). This is not to suggest that the institutionalized routines and amoral professional outlook encapsulated in the calculus of death no longer predominate in much news reporting, but it is to say that journalism is not historically static and that today it harbours and gives expression to other societal impulses. These may offer seeds of hope when enacted in and through reporting with an injunction to care.

ON THE NEWS MEDIA’S “SILENT MORAL SCREAM” AND ITS EFFECTS

A second major argument, and one frequently heard today in different contexts of atrocity, is that “Through their absence and a failure to adequately observe and record events, journalists contributed to the behaviour of the perpetrators of the genocide — who were encouraged by the world’s apathy and acted with impunity” (Thompson 2007, 3). This view, in fact, contains two propositions, one to do with the media’s involvement in the actions of the perpetrators and the other with the media’s contribution to the inaction of the world community.

It is clear, although there are exceptions, that perpetrators of collective violence and atrocity do not generally want their actions documented or caught on camera, for fear of possible future retribution and criminal prosecution. And this is true notwithstanding the sense of self-righteousness or self-defence, and not simply blood-lust, which we know often animates heinous acts of collective violence (Reicher, Haslem and Rath 2008; Mann 2005; Fiske and Rai 2015). In the absence of reporters and cameras, therefore, it is reasonable to infer that this attitude can

indirectly contribute to unfettered killing, although clearly even when reporters are present in conflict zones the organization of mass killings can still be arranged out of sight, if not always out of mind (as was the case, for example, in the Srebrenica 1995 massacre of 8,000 Bosnian men and boys). The absence of reporters and cameras can be seen as a major deficiency in documenting and thereby possibly inhibiting collective acts of violence. This said, since 1994 the revolution in communications technology has meant that perpetrators of collective violence find it increasingly difficult to ensure concealment and anonymity — whether from “eye in the sky” satellites documenting bombardments, the erasure of villages and mass graves (Kreps 2010; Rotberg 2010); or from citizen journalists on the ground equipped with smart phones bearing close-up witness to the victims and survivors struggling to stay alive in conflict zones (Mathieson and Allan 2009); or even from their own incriminating “trophy videos,” recording their acts of atrocity, whether for personal edification, compatriot consumption or as a weapon of intimidation, which then often leak out to the wider world via the internet (Ignatieff 2004; Sontag 2004; Cottle 2009).

Sadly, it also the case that the world has recently witnessed the deliberate choreographing and filming of atrocious acts of violence against Western hostages by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and others. The violent symbolism of such staged media events is designed to send a chill down the spine of the world and undermine the moral and political resolve of combatants, publics and Western governments. Such brutality depends for its shock value precisely on the growing acceptance of the world norm that is repulsed by the deliberate use of violence for the purpose of image wars and when perpetrated on humanitarian workers, journalists and other non-combatants (Cottle 2006, 1558211;62).¹ The understandable fears of journalists that they may be taken as hostages and endure a ghastly fate have evidently taken their toll in Western reporting of ISIS operations. They have contributed to the partial concealment of mass atrocities known to have been perpetrated by ISIS on civilians within captured territories.

The “silent moral scream” of the media, in its absence, is also, as we have heard, identified as a major contributor to the world’s apathy and lack of action in times of atrocity. While the world needs to know, and must know,

what is occurring under its watch, unfortunately, as many have argued, it is not the case that media reporting precipitates international responses and/or military humanitarian intervention. This thinking is a variant of the so-called “CNN effect,” which maintains that reporting, and especially reporting comprising scenes of human suffering transmitted around the globe via 24/7 news channels, can so outrage public opinion that governments are compelled to respond with policy decisions to militarily intervene. Even in some of the seemingly strongest cases of the CNN effect, such as the US intervention into Somalia in 1992–1995, we find, for example, on closer examination, that there wasn’t the claimed upsurge in media reporting before policy decisions to intervene were made, and that geopolitical strategic interests were more likely to have been at work (Livingston 1997; Robinson 2002; Gilboa 2005).

Audience responses to media reporting, supposedly compelling governments to respond, in fact have few effective channels to do so. In any case, audiences are more differentiated and inconsistent in their “humanitarian responses” than is often presumed. Responses can depend, in part, on the perceived political and “natural” causes of different humanitarian disasters, as well as the intensity of emotive or distancing forms of media reporting encountered. In other words, there is no straightforward media causality, but rather a host of mediating factors, including the play of geopolitical interests, are thought to be at work.

Three media and communications models help here to better understand this complexity. The well-known propaganda model generally positions and conceives media and communication systems working in support of dominant political and economic interests (Herman and Chomsky 1988). This is explained through a confluence of five filters: determinants of markets and ownership; advertising pressures; dependency on dominant sources; containment through political pressure or “flak”; and subservience to national culture. Seen through this conceptual and theoretical prism, news media are unlikely to behave in ways motivated by humanitarian interests, given their subservience to dominant interests and political elites, and they have little opportunity to influence power-holders.

The elite indexing model, for its part, opens up a more politically contingent view on the media than the propaganda model by recognizing circumstances under which the media can become emboldened and, sometimes, critical of political elites (Hallin 1994; Bennett 1990). This happens when political elites become internally fractured and media report within this “sphere of legitimate controversy.” Even here, however, as we have heard, it is hard to find empirical cases of a claimed CNN effect that do not also have an evident strategic interest in the background and that can thereby undermine claims of a strong media effect (Robinson 2002).

A third model, the media-policy interaction model (Robinson 2001), incorporates and builds on the previous two. This recognizes how the systemic position of mainstream media generally operates within the “sphere of consensus” (Hallin 1994) and helps to “manufacture consent” (Herman and Chomsky 1988), as well as moments of elite dissent that open up political opportunities for more independent and critical media reporting in the “sphere of legitimate controversy,” as predicted by Hallin (1994) and Bennett (1990). But this model also further suggests that the nature of media reporting, whether empathetic or distancing, and the extent to which there is a policy vacuum in government or not, can also prove crucial. It is under these conditions that the media can, sometimes at least, adopt a robust position in the ensuing public debate and even advance calls for something to be done. Such circumstances and media performance, however, are deemed extremely rare (Robinson 2001).

The debate continues (Robinson 2011; Livingstone 2011), but hopes placed on media reporting as the precipitating factor galvanizing governments into humanitarian action appear to be sadly misplaced, given the complexities and contingencies involved, even when media reporting is analytically informed, conducted on the ground and shaped by empathetic framing and an injunction to care.

FROM “A GENOCIDE WITHOUT IMAGES” TO THE “TRANSFORMATION OF VISIBILITY”

Great store is often placed on the power of images to stir emotions, unleash feelings of compassion and, ultimately, compel government policy

and intervention. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, however, it was said to be “a genocide without images.” As Allan Thompson (2007, 3) observed, “Because there were so few foreign journalists on the ground at the height of the killing and because the domestic media had either been cowed or co-opted into the massacres there are no other known images (other than Nick Hughes’ ‘grainy video’), of the crime itself, the crime of genocide.” The video referred to here was a reporter’s distanced, covert recording of Interahamwe militia summarily, nonchalantly even, executing a father and his daughter with machetes and clubs at the roadside as the father visibly pleaded for their lives. Although it may be the case, as suggested above by doubters of the CNN effect, that images on their own do not have the magical power to propel governments into action, we know nonetheless that such images of human suffering can stir emotions and sometimes consciences. We also know that shocking images of atrocity sometimes unleash strong feelings of group solidarity, allegiance and even demands for violent revenge when these are of acts of violence perpetrated on in-group members.

John Thompson (1995) has referred to the historically profound “transformation of visibility” facilitated by modern media and communication systems and how this enters into the conduct of social relations and reconfigures the operation of power in late modern societies. Today, courtesy of media and communications, the many, *contra* Foucault, can now gaze on the few; in consequence, political elites confront increased risks through their heightened public exposure to media attention of whatever they say and do. More pertinent for our discussion, Thompson also observes how media “have helped to create a sense of responsibility which is not restricted to localized communities,” and have set in motion “a certain democratization of responsibility.” He goes on: “It is difficult to watch images of civilians caught up in military conflict or of children dying of malnutrition without feeling that the plight of these individuals is — in some senses and to some degree — a matter of our concern” (ibid., 263). Many journalists, as intimated, would seem to now feel this same sense of responsibility and some evidently enact it in and through their reporting with an “injunction to care” (Cottle 2013a). How news stories are narrated and visualized can therefore variously deepen or diminish this wider call for the democratization of responsibility.

Lilie Chouliaraki, more than any other scholar, has helped to draw attention to how the “politics of pity” is differently communicated in and through the typical forms of the broadcast news story. She discerns three fundamental “regimes of pity” embedded in different ways of telling news stories of human suffering (Chouliaraki 2006). Adventure news is a form of news without pity, she argues; it is typically delivered in a brief reporting style, with minimal pictures and distancing maps, and does not include or portray individual victims and survivors caught up in disasters and humanitarian calamities. Emergency news, by contrast, is news with pity; this form of reporting is inclined to include close-up, humanizing shots and thereby offers the possibility of a more meaningful relationship in which we, as spectators, are more inclined to care and, possibly, act. Ecstatic news has the capacity to bring us even closer to those whom we perceive to be suffering, possibly because the victims are now represented and seen as potentially the same as us, and this produces intensified interest, reflexivity and even political demands for action or denunciation (ibid.).

In a large study of 57 television news outlets and their programs broadcast across six politically different countries and around the world by four major global news channels, a universal “communicative architecture” is identified and analyzed (Cottle and Rai 2006; 2010). Here, established and seemingly conventionalized communicative forms of TV broadcast news are found to variously open up or close down possibilities of cultural recognition and democratic deepening (Cottle and Rai 2006; 2010; 2016). Specifically, 12 distinct and recurring communicative forms are documented, which, at their most democratizing and expansive, include live, dialogic, in-depth analytical and visually expressive forms of news subject treatment, with access granted to diverse voices and views. At their most restricted and democratically closed, however, this communicative architecture includes news forms that are temporally brief, informationally thin, visually sparse and largely descriptive and offer little or no access to relevant views and voices — whether expressive or analytic (Cottle and Rai 2006; 2010). Attending to the communicative architecture of news forms thus opens up a more complex and variegated sense of how TV news, as well as other news forms (Cottle 2004), can report on serious news events and issues, and in ways that variously invite

different empathetic and analytic responses — including varied responses to the reporting of collective violence and atrocity.

ON THE DISSEMINATION OF HATE AND PERFORMATIVE MEDIA

With respect to local media and the part played by local media, including (notoriously) RTLM radio, Allan Thompson (2007, 7) concluded that, “Individual broadcasters — not their guests or government officials — were most likely to use the airwaves to disseminate hate.” The role performed by local radio in the Rwandan genocide has been well documented. Unfortunately there have been other cases since of local media, in particular in developing countries where dependence on local radio can be high, sowing seeds of mistrust and hatred. This invariably positions a distinct outgroup, based on ethnicity, religion or some other group characteristic, as a threat, whether based on past mythic events or claims of imminent attack. This, in turn, serves to legitimize violence on this outgroup, as both righteous and as an act of self-defence (Reicher, Haslem and Rath 2008; Fiske and Rai 2015).

These same media, however, can also perform more progressive roles and responsibilities. When harnessed to developmental and democratizing goals based on inclusivity and participation, local media can prove an indispensable adjunct to processes of peace building, transitional justice, civic deepening and civil society repair (Hoffman and Hawkins 2015). Communication for development, peace journalism and other forms of advocacy journalism invariably seek to challenge mainstream media and traditional nostrums of journalism, seeing them as wedded to epistemological claims of “objectivity,” “professional independence” and “political neutrality” as well as “traditional news values” and “dependency on elite sources” (Cottle 2006, 100–19). Journalism and journalists have an obligation to expose and engage with those who seek to stir enmities and hatreds to unleash violence. These new forms of advocacy journalism open up new performative ways of conducting journalism in support of wider societal projects and goals.

Across the arc of violence, responsible journalism has an important part to play in signalling to power-holders and the outside world known warning signs of imminent collective violence, including an increase in public hate speech, increased attacks on the media or a rise in cases of intimidation and violence directed at members of an outgroup. When violence is underway, journalists and journalism have an obligation to report as best they can what is happening and aim to explore local, regional and international options and efforts to bring that violence to an end. And, post conflict, media have an important part to play in processes of truth, reconciliation and the reconstitution of damaged civil society. This is all easily said, of course, and in practice is likely fraught with risks and dangers, as well as practical difficulties and dilemmas (Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell 2016). Evidence shows that the role performed by local media in the lead-up to the Rwanda genocide was grotesque, but local media are not destined to repeat such travesties. When embedded in and wedded to civil society norms of inclusivity, social justice and democratic deepening, local media can perform very differently and play important roles in minimizing and mitigating — not mobilizing — potential violence.

FROM LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TO GLOBAL COMMUNICATION ECOLOGY

Following the discussion about the failure and culpability of local media in the context of the Rwandan genocide, Allan Thompson (2007, 3) makes the argument that, “It is important to examine the role of domestic hate media and international media in tandem.” This statement implicitly posits a possible interconnection, for good or ill, between these different media systems. Today, the interconnections and overlapping of these systems have been rendered even more complex and crucial in the new communications ecology that now spans the globe (Cottle 2012). This affords, potentially at least, new opportunities to align communication power to purposeful efforts to thwart incipient violence.

We inhabit a world where the conceptual ways of thinking about media and media systems in the recent past have become increasingly problematic, if not redundant. We still hear this in the binary dualisms of

language and in such media designations as “old-new,” “legacy-digital,” “mainstream-alternative.” In today’s globally expansive, interconnected and multi-medium communication networks, global-local media formations and flows frequently interconnect and interpenetrate. This is based in part on the recent exponential rise in world telecommunications, the expansion of satellite broadcasting and satellite surveillance capabilities, and the migration of traditional journalism forms online with customized content for particular and niched audiences as well as national and global markets. Social media are also inside this global communication ecology, sometimes challenging elite-to-mass, few-to-many, top-down communication flows with their networked, many-to-many, bottom-up and horizontal flows, and self-originated content. This chips away at former producer-audience distinctions as so-called “user-generated-content” seeps into and is voraciously sought by content-hungry media corporations.

If scholars of media and communications struggle to conceptually nail such moving complexity to a theoretical mast, the affordances of this rapidly changing communication ecology have yet to be fully theorized and conceptualized (Castells 2009; Chadwick 2013; Reese 2018). Efforts to fully recognize and take advantage of these new communication affordances in different fields have only just begun, whether related to environmental communications and ecology (Cottle 2013b), global disasters (Cottle 2014), digital humanitarianism (Cottle and Cooper 2015), or atrocity (Rotberg 2010).

Six fundamental characteristics of today’s communication ecology are worth underlining in regard to their possible leverage in situations of collective violence and the mitigation of atrocity. I call these the 6xSs of contemporary global communications. First is the *scale* of contemporary communications which, via the exponential growth in world telecommunications, reach of satellite broadcasting and growing penetration of social media, has reconfigured communications space and facilitated communications to and from some of the most remote locations and violent places in the world. There were the desperate telephone calls from Yazidis on Mount Sinjar in Iraq in 2014, fleeing for their lives from ISIS, and alerting the world’s news media to their dreadful plight. And

there were besieged communities and families enduring the relentless, deadly bombardment from Syrian forces in Aleppo in 2014, including a seven-year-old girl, Bana al-Abed, who set up a Twitter account and reported on life in the besieged city from a child's perspective. Her reports went viral around the world.

Second is the *speed* of global communications, which now facilitates live communications in real or near-real time, affording opportunities for up-to-the-moment communication before or during dreadful events. This real-time capacity to bear witness can ratchet up the emotional intensity of live reporting and is often claimed to propel media and international calls for bringing a halt to the violence. Western correspondents positioned on the border of Bangladesh with Myanmar reported live in late 2017 on the Rohingya fleeing from atrocities on the other side of the river. As they did so, camera crews filmed burning villages and captured sounds of gunshots from the military massacre occurring a short distance away. By these means, the world vicariously witnessed, in real time, "ethnic cleansing" as international pressure quickly mounted on the Burmese government and Aung San Suu Kyi to halt the campaign of persecution.

Third is the *saturation* of contemporary media and communications, and especially the exponential rise in mobile telephony in developing countries including remote places, which means that messages can be sent as well as received in times of unfolding violence, as we heard from the fleeing Yazidis in 2014. Monitoring the upsurge in communications from conflict and disaster zones through open crowd-sourcing can also be used to visually map and pinpoint the moving hotspots of human activity and human plight, alerting those within the danger zone as well as the outside world to the changing the locations and the course of unfolding violence (Kreps 2010; Leaning 2010).

The fourth relevant characteristic is *social relations*, as the balance of communicative power is now arguably shifting or being reconfigured by the affordances of today's communication ecology. For example, the conduct and practices of humanitarianism are now undergoing change, as survivors and local communities seek to influence humanitarian non-governmental organizations' (NGOs') priorities and responses, and distant

diasporic communities and volunteers harness new technologies to respond quickly to emergency events, whether by sending immediate electronic bank transfers via their mobile phones or collating satellite images and data from desk computers and laptops to help first responders pinpoint areas of need on the ground (Cottle and Cooper 2015).

Fifth is the enhanced *surveillance* capacity afforded by contemporary communications, combining remote geo-stationary satellites and computing power, which can now be deployed to accurately document in time and space warning signs and atrocity events and their aftermath. This constitutes possible evidence that can be used to prosecute perpetrators in the future and deter would-be perpetrators in the present (Dufour 2015). Whether documenting the villages in Darfur burned out by the Janjaweed militias in Sudan in 2005, the merciless bombardment of Tamils granted “safe passage” by the Sri Lankan military in 2009, the mass graves of people killed by the Burundian security forces in 2016 or the razed villages in Myanmar in 2017, satellites aligned to human rights commitments and international law can place such atrocious events in the eye of the world. Satellite images documenting atrocity are commissioned or recycled by NGOs and social justice groups and these are disseminated to supporters, power-holders and publics via tweets, social media and the internet, or more broadly through broadcast news, current affairs and documentaries by the world’s press. Drones equipped with cameras, hovering between “eye in the sky” satellites and hand-held cameras and smart phones on the ground, are also set to provide a further perspective on unfolding violence. The BBC, for example, deployed drones that helped to document the massive scale of the exodus of Rohingya as they fled massacres and burning villages to sanctuary across the Bangladesh border.

These observations also point, yet again, to the sixth factor, the heightened capacity to *see*, facilitated by the different mediums of today’s communication ecology. The centrality of the visual in contemporary communications offers enhanced opportunity to see and witness violent events or their aftermath, even occurring in some of the formerly most remote places in the world. This takes us back to Allan Thompson’s earlier observation on the power of visual images to galvanize responses to genocide and atrocity, of which much has been written (Sontag 2003;

Azoulay 2012; Linfield 2010). Although the power of images to document and bear witness to atrocity should not be underestimated, especially in a communications environment where the capacity to record, document and disseminate grows exponentially year over year, it needs to be said that the power to “see” and the capacity “to care” clearly do not reside in images themselves. These powers reside within the historically forged dispositions of us all (Rifkin 2009; Singer 2011). They are rooted in social relations, the deep trajectories of history, and the capacity of civil societies to recognize those who are experiencing precarity and existential threat as well as in our felt moral responsibility toward distant others.

ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO REPORT

“Perhaps it is time to advance a new paradigm for journalists: ‘the responsibility to report,’” argued Thompson (2007, 434) at the end of *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. This call was understandable, given the documented failings and silences of international media reporting of the genocide, as well as the active involvement of local media in hate speech that served to fuel the violence. It also chimed with the United Nations’ adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, elaborated at the World Summit in 2005, with its injunction to the world’s nations to protect the sovereignty of individuals, not only states, when populations confront the four atrocity crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Although surprisingly little has been written on the R2P and the roles of media in it (Sidahmed, Soderland and Briggs 2012; Cottle 2015), we can see that each of its three underpinning pillars contain critical opportunities for media reporting and intervention.

Pillar one of the R2P stipulates that every state has the responsibility to protect its population from the four principle atrocity crimes. In this, local and international media have a vital role to play in reporting on preceding risk factors, reminding national power-holders and publics of their obligations and facilitating wider understanding and deliberation of the conditions and changing propensities toward violence on the ground.

Pillar two, with its stipulation that the wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting their responsibility, also gives the international media a duty to shine a spotlight on those distant — and not so distant — societies about to descend into violence. They can help to alert regional powers and the international community to the deteriorating situation, remind publics and power-holders of their obligations and scrutinize the deliberations and decisions regarding mounting effective forms of intervention, whether through trade, diplomacy or by other political measures. The responsibility to report in such contexts demands that the slide, or push, toward collective violence does not go unnoticed or unopposed.

And the third pillar, which maintains that if a state fails to protect its population, or indeed is itself the perpetrator of violence, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action and in a timely and decisive manner. Journalism here has a key responsibility to help facilitate public debate and understanding about such options which, *in extremis*, can require the use of force and military intervention on humanitarian grounds. The criteria of legitimacy for such interventions, that is, the generally acknowledged precautionary principles of military intervention under the R2P doctrine, should also inform such reporting. These precautionary principles stipulate that the violence threatened must include large-scale actual or threatened loss of life or ethnic cleansing; the purpose of the intervention must be to prevent or halt suffering; military force must be the last resort; the means must be commensurate or proportionate to the ends, and the intervention must have a reasonable chance of success (Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect 2017, 2–3; Evans 2008). This broadly conforms to what John Keane has referred to as the “democratization of violence” (Keane 2004), where media and journalism specifically have a key role to perform in publicly scrutinizing and debating policy options in the face of violence. This can help ensure that the use of democratic force in such circumstances is accountable, necessary and proportionate and thereby helps to check knee-jerk reactions, “overkill” and the generation of “surplus violence.” Such media scrutiny must continue as the threat of atrocity continues, recedes or is displaced by processes of civil society reconstitution.

Practising journalism under such conditions, whether as a foreign correspondent or as a local journalist, is clearly fraught with risks and has increasingly positioned journalists in harm's way. Targeted threats against journalists and journalist killings are increasing around the world (Committee to Protect Journalists 2014; Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell 2016; Armoudian 2016; Carlsson and Pöyhtäri 2017) and, in circumstances of imminent or actual mass atrocity, journalists can be especially vulnerable to extreme and targeted violence. Journalist intimidation and killings are one of the known indicators of imminent collective violence and civil society breakdown. And yet many journalists continue to report in such dangerous conditions. Those who do generally proclaim a strong sense of moral commitment to reporting the worst abuses of human rights and human dignity, even more so reporters indigenous to the countries concerned (Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell 2016; Armoudian 2016). Such is the civil contract embedded in the historically forged claims and mission of not only journalism but all those who align themselves to the "civil sphere" based on shared democratic ideals and moral horizons of social justice (Alexander 2006).

Journalists working in such circumstances exhibit in their practice and proclaim, when invited, a strong commitment to what Jeffrey Alexander eloquently theorizes as "the civil sphere." Although an imagined place, it is a no less consequential and lived-in place for that. The civil sphere is where a solidary sense of social justice fuels the imagination of what can and should be and, when denied by the worst forms of human rights abuses and injustices, it creates a deep sense of indignation and felt obligation to do what can be done to repair the torn social fabric. This is not, then, a question of journalists confined by a "public sphere" mission conceived in terms of information exchange, rational intercourse, critical deliberation and political consensus formation (Habermas 1989). Rather, it speaks to more deep-seated ideas and sentiments sutured into everyday lives and social relations and is based on moral outlooks, normative horizons and a shared sense of (in)justice. It is these that generate solidary feelings of belonging, the imagined "good life" and commitments to the same, especially when life is defiled in the worst cases of inhumanity such as atrocity.

Arguably it is this “civil sense” of what should and can yet be that drives many journalists to report in and from some of the most dangerous places in the world, and it is this, too, that positions many of them at mortal risk. Although the contemporary world is characterized by much that can be deemed antithetical or opposed to the development of a civil sphere, in today’s globalized world many journalists recognize their responsibility to report on those threatened by extreme violence and to bring it to the world’s attention. This is a vital practice in enacting and serving to express the world’s emergent responsibility to protect.

BEYOND RWANDA?

Since the Rwandan genocide, the world continues to witness mass atrocity crimes, yet some continue to barely register in the global media spotlight (Hawkins 2009). Today’s global media ecology, it should be clearly stated, offers no panacea for addressing the underlying structural inequalities and vested political interests that underpin conflicts or those who seek to mobilize identities and enmities for their own venal ends. It is also demonstrably the case that the institutionalized and cynical “calculus of death” orientation of much mainstream journalism continues to shape the selective patterns and silences of much reporting of mass deaths and mass killings around the world.

Nonetheless, today’s global communication ecology affords rapidly changing and new opportunities to try to ensure that the warning signs of imminent collective violence do not go unnoticed and are not permitted to develop unchallenged. And journalism, as has been emphasized, has much to contribute within the processes of civil society repair and reconstruction, in sustaining peace and in deepening democracy. Many journalists, local and international, are aware of their “responsibility to report” and when doing so contribute invaluablely to the world’s emergent, if sometimes faltering, responsibility to protect (Cottle 2015). When reporting on the front line and witnessing close-up violence or its immediate aftermath, correspondents often infuse their reporting with a discernible and sometimes powerful injunction to care. Too many journalists are paying the ultimate price when seeking to report in, to and from “uncivil” places around the world. Many are subjected to targeted

intimidation and violence. Wherever this occurs, the chilling effects on journalism and extant or emergent civil societies reverberate widely, threatening to halt processes of democratic deepening and snuff out social justice.

How can new communications technologies be deployed and further developed to maximize their potential leverage in alerting publics and power-holders to imminent violence and atrocity, and also serve the task of challenging and combatting the underlying conditions as well as precipitating risk factors that coalesce in the arc of collective violence? These challenges demand serious consideration. The 6xSs of today's global communication ecology — *scale, speed, saturation, social relations, surveillance* and *seeing* — each afford new possibilities for the democratization of responsibility. The power to effect change, however, remains not in the technologies of communication per se, but more in the normative outlooks and political commitments of historically changing human society. It is imperative that communications scholars and those working in the field of journalism seek to ensure that today's global communication ecology, with its different affordances and communication possibilities, is harnessed and put to work in the mitigation of some of the worst human propensities toward violence in the world today.

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- 1 For my longer reflection on the changing contours of violence across history, up to and including today's mediated global age, see "On the Violent History of the Globalised Present" (Cottle, in Cottle, Sambrook and Mosdell 2016, 61–87).



8

DIGITIZING GENOCIDE: THE WORK OF THE GENOCIDE ARCHIVE OF RWANDA

PAUL RUKESHA

Among the many challenges facing a society coming to terms with genocide is ensuring that the history of the event is documented and that witness and survivor testimonies are recorded and catalogued along with the documentary and media-generated evidence of the events. Perhaps equally daunting is finding a way to make this vital information available to researchers and to the public at large. In our era, the only practical solution is to properly digitize these records, so that their integrity is retained and so the information can be available and accessible to future generations. In Rwanda, the task of “digitizing the genocide” has fallen to the Genocide Archive of Rwanda (GAR). This chapter attempts to document what is involved in digitizing a genocide.

This journey began with the establishment of the Kigali Genocide Memorial in 2004, in the Gisozi district of Kigali. The task of turning the memorial building into a living museum was assigned to the Aegis Trust, a British-based non-governmental organization founded in 2000 to work

toward the prediction, prevention and ultimate elimination of genocide. Aegis does this primarily through research, education and the dissemination of information and advice. The memorial was established by Aegis at the request of the Rwandan government and the Kigali City Council. The memorial continues to be run today by Aegis on behalf of Rwanda's National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (Commission nationale de lutte contre le génocide [CNLG]), and operates both as a place of remembrance and of learning.

In the lead-up to the tenth anniversary of the genocide in 2004, much information was collected by Aegis for the purpose of crafting the memorial building's extensive exhibitions. The collection included material on pre-colonial and colonial history, audiovisual testimonies mainly from genocide survivors, historical information (photos and text documents), and hard copies of newspapers published before and during the genocide. The newspaper collection was meant to illustrate how sensitization and propaganda were developed over time by the ruling systems, dating back to the earlier violence of 1959 and continuing until 1994 when genocide escalated.

Documenting the genocide has been one of the reconstruction efforts that is very important to the nation of Rwanda. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi is considered by many to be the result of numerous factors, which include but are not limited to the colonial legacy and ethnic-based politics. The original challenge was to collect and preserve the documents produced during that tumultuous period to give an opportunity to researchers to access evidence-based material for their analysis.

This chapter will examine the documenting strategy that the GAR has been using to collect life histories of different experience groups, from survivors to rescuers, perpetrators, elders and so on. The focus here will be on the digital archive, the creation of records, the types of documents we deal with, the techniques we use and challenges we face. We are exploring the processes of preservation and analyzing the channels that we use to provide access to the GAR website for the public. This chapter will examine the challenges in creating testimonies, including finding the right

people to testify, making them understand the importance of doing the interview and also training staff to conduct the interviews.

Interactions with the end-users are worth mentioning, because they show how the digital archive has helped users not only in Rwanda but worldwide to get access to evidence-based materials. Some of the archive's collection of 600 hour-long testimonies have been used by academic researchers. Prosecutors from around the world have consulted and interacted with the website for information concerning genocide fugitives, and educators are still developing materials based on records obtained from the GAR. For example, a variety of educational materials were recorded and developed into teaching materials and "peace and values education" has been introduced into the Rwanda education curriculum as a cross-cutting theme.

It is also important to note the psychological aspect of the work of documenting the genocide, because exposure to this material can take a toll on those who are digitizing these records. And while talking about access to digital materials, we must also look at the linguistic barriers that are part of the challenges of documentation work. Most of the testimonies are in Kinyarwanda, and yet the content has to be communicated faithfully in foreign languages; for that to happen, the best translators are needed. The Gacaca courts documents are also part of the discussion since they comprise a collection of almost 60 million pages produced during the Gacaca process between 2000 and 2012. The GAR is involved in the digitization of this invaluable collection.

Testimonies of genocide can be studied to provide a lesson for future generations, but that lesson can only be delivered if this material is digitized and made available. The intention is that the experience of Rwanda will reach far beyond its borders and, it is hoped, the world will learn the cost of losing *Ubumuntu* (humanity), and therefore take action.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE GAR

The archive and documentation centre now known as the Genocide Archive of Rwanda opened its doors in 2004 as part of the Kigali Genocide Memorial under the direction and expertise of the Aegis Trust Rwanda. On December 10, 2010, it changed its name to the Genocide Archive of

Rwanda with the goal of providing public access to its collections both in physical and digital format. The physical collections include, but are not limited to, more than 3,000 mini DV cassette-format video tapes on which the testimonies and other footage are recorded, more than 12,000 still photographs of victims and other experience groups, as well as artifacts and the personal belongings of some victims. This collection came from various sources. Funded by such donors as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation (the Institute for Visual History and Education), the Dutch embassy to Rwanda and the Annenberg Foundation, the Kigali Genocide Memorial's staff travelled all over the country collecting as many newspapers, books, essays, audiovisual materials, archival maps, photographs and artifacts as they could, from the archives of religious organizations, government institutions and individuals. Of course, as one would expect after the genocide, the lack of a functioning archive in a postwar environment posed an enormous challenge.

The first iteration of the digital archive was launched in 2010 with the creation of the GAR website, which for the first time made some of the material in the collection accessible online.

THE COLLECTIONS OF THE GAR

Oral testimonies make up the most significant part of the archives collection. These testimonies are the life histories or experiences of the interviewees. Each set of experiences has been clearly defined in an attempt to develop a consistent policy in interviewing and organizing new and existing audiovisual testimonies and recordings. Below are some categorizations that the GAR has defined so far as experience groups.

INARARIBONYE (ELDERS)

Interviewees from this experience group were at least 12 years of age in November 1959 (at the time of the Hutu uprising and "Social Revolution"). These interviewees provide historical accounts of Rwanda, and talk about who played key roles in the country's socio-political

history. But they do not speak of their experiences during the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

CONVICTED PERPETRATORS

This group of interviewees is comprised of those who were found guilty of participating in the murder and persecution of Tutsi, and those perceived as Tutsi within the context of the genocidal plan and ideology. This group also includes individuals guilty of persecuting and/or murdering those opposed to the former government that orchestrated the genocide. This category also includes individuals who might have helped those persecuted by momentarily hiding or feeding them because of their friendship or other relationship, while at the same time engaging in acts of genocide that endangered the lives of others. Others in this category include those who were found guilty by Rwanda's ordinary courts or the Gacaca process or the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda of pointing out people in hiding or giving verbal encouragement in support of killing the targeted group.

RESCUERS

Interviewees who managed to save the lives of, provided means of subsistence for, or were involved in any other activity or initiative aimed at saving the lives of targeted Tutsi, individuals perceived as Tutsi, individuals who were related and/or affiliated with Tutsi, or individuals who opposed genocide policies.

SURVIVORS OF THE 1994 GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI

Interviewees who were considered Tutsi and survived the genocide and persecution in Rwanda anytime between April 7 and July 19, 1994. This includes individuals who were of Tutsi descent or were perceived to be of Tutsi descent. While it is intended to achieve a demographic, regional and experientially diverse representation among survivor experiences, particular emphasis will be given to testimonies with: women, men (especially older survivors, to better understand the pre-1994 Rwandan history), survivors from areas where not many survived, survivors from areas where genocide acts were periodically perpetrated since the 1960s

(for example, Bugesera, Bufundu), children 17 and younger in 1994, survivors from areas where the 1994 genocide began immediately on April 7 and in the period up to the end of April, and survivors from areas where specific strategic procedures were implemented in the killing of individuals (for example, an emphasis on killing first the male population of the targeted group).

INDIVIDUALS RELATED TO TARGETED GROUP

Interviewees of non-Tutsi descent who were targeted because of their relationship with Tutsis and survived. These people were targeted because of their affiliation to Tutsis either by marriage, engagement or close friendship and yet they survived. They were targeted because they did not support the genocide ideology. This group does not encompass those individuals who were perceived as Tutsi, because they are covered under the survivor of the genocide against Tutsi experience group.

HUTU POWER OPPONENTS

Interviewees who were targeted for their opposition to the Hutu Power movement. This could include members of political parties and/or any unaffiliated individual.

OTHER EXPERIENCE GROUPS TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED

The gathering of testimonies is a work in progress and it is expected that other experience groups will be created.

THE ROLE OF VIDEORECORDING IN DOCUMENTING THE GENOCIDE

The archive devotes special attention to the audiovisual collection. For one thing, Rwandans do not have a habit of writing down their experiences for publication. One example is of Mr. Marcel R., who gave his testimony to the GAR in 2011. He admitted that it was easier for him talking before the camera than sitting and writing down his experience of the genocide. A culture of orally transmitting information persists, mostly in rural and remote areas. However, recent penetration of mobile and smart phones

across Rwanda has revolutionized the communication and sharing of experiences. While much has been written about the genocide against the Tutsi, few of those writings reflect the emotions, thoughts and reflections of those who experienced genocide, especially survivors. (One exception is the forthcoming book *After the Genocide in Rwanda: Testimonies of Violence, Change and Reconciliation* [Hitchcott et al. 2019], as well as *We Survived: Genocide in Rwanda* [Whitworth 2006].) Interpretations given to the testimonies sometimes appear to romanticize and politicize the interviewees' narratives. Videotaping individuals, however, gives them an opportunity to transmit authentically the story in an unaltered way, and the interviewees are comforted by the fact that the GAR does not perform any editing of the testimonies apart from minor editing for colour correction or sound levels.

PROCESSES OF DOCUMENTATION AT THE GAR

In order to facilitate the collection of testimonies, the GAR has established special connections with the interviewees and local organizations that are capable of mobilizing interviewees. Survivor organizations such as Ibuka and the Association of Widows of the Genocide (AVEGA) are close partners of the GAR in that they help to prepare interviewees and establish a comfortable environment for conducting interviews. In 2010, Ibuka released a list of 265 “upstanding” individuals from the Hutu ethnic group, in recognition of their role in protecting Tutsi victims during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. One year later, in 2011, the GAR, together with the USC Shoah Foundation, contracted Ibuka to collect some of the stories from those righteous people, or *indakemwa* (in Kinyarwanda), and about 40 life histories detailing their heroism were recorded. The GAR relies heavily on its collaboration with the survivors' organizations, and that collaboration goes beyond simply identifying the people to interview. Every initiative from the GAR related to documenting the genocide has to involve those organizations. While the GAR has been involved with the Gacaca archives through its work under contract to scan, digitize and arrange a physical repository for the records, the CNLG, as a government institution, is in charge of the Gacaca archives. In 2013, another project united the GAR and all survivor organizations in a consultative meeting focused on the collection of personal belongings of the victims. Pictures,

religious items, clothes, shoes, ID cards and other belongings are now physically preserved and digital records of some of those items are uploaded to the GAR platform and accessible to the public.

AVEGA is another survivor organization that continues to work with the GAR recording stories of women who experienced sexual assault and rape during the genocide. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (1996) notes that during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, women were subjected to sexual violence on a massive scale, perpetrated by the infamous Hutu militia groups, members of the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development and Coalition for the Defense of the Republic youth wings, known as Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi respectively. Other civilians, and soldiers of the Rwandan Armed Forces (Forces Armées Rwandaises), including the presidential guard, also participated in those crimes against women. “Administrative, military and political leaders at the national and local levels, as well as heads of militia, directed or encouraged both the killings and sexual violence to further their political goal: the destruction of the Tutsi as a group. They therefore bear responsibility for these abuses” (HRW 1996).

The GAR, through Ibuka and AVEGA, has approached some of the survivors of sexual assault to document their stories. In their own words, they give us a picture of their painful and traumatizing experiences through the war and the genocide. Only around 15 rape cases are in our archives, and yet, the United Nations reports that during the three months of genocide in 1994, between 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped.

Interviewees sign consent forms allowing the GAR to use their testimonies under agreed conditions. Those conditions include, but are not limited to, testimonies being posted online, in museums, in books and documentaries, as well as being translated and accessed by the international research community. The agreements also specify a time frame and deal with issues related to anonymity. The archivists set up interview guidelines for collecting testimonies, and biographical forms that interviewees have to fill in before each interview. In brief, the GAR has different kinds of forms, procedures and guidelines that archivists use throughout the process of collecting testimonies and information for writing web content.

COLLECTION

The collection team collects materials through the following main steps.

Research and Identification

When collecting testimonies, the team undertakes different identification processes for each type of experience group: elders, perpetrators, rescuers (*abimanyi* in Kinyarwanda) and survivors. The interviewees for these groups are identified with the help of partner organizations such as Ibuka, the umbrella association for survivors' associations in Rwanda, which assists the collection team in identifying survivors and rescuers for interview. Perpetrators who are still in prison, as well as those who have been released, are identified with assistance from community leaders and relevant government institutions, such as the Rwanda Correctional Services. Inteko Izirikana, the Rwanda's Elders Council, assists the collection team in identifying elders.

Planning and Pre-Interview Questionnaire

After identifying interviewees for each experience group, the collection team then contacts them to commence pre-interview sessions with the help of a questionnaire. The purpose of these pre-interview sessions is to introduce Aegis Trust and the GAR to the interviewee and to explain the purpose of collecting their testimony. It is also about meeting, informing and preparing the interviewee about the processes of providing their testimony. Moreover, the interviewers gather general information and basic facts about the interviewee's life by talking with them and asking them to complete the questionnaire. The pre-interview session gives the potential interviewee the chance to decide whether or not they are comfortable giving their testimony. During the pre-interview session, the details for the initial testimony interview session are established. The interviewee is asked where they would like to have the interview recorded, in what language they would like to conduct the interview (most interviews are conducted in Kinyarwanda), and to complete a consent form that allows the interviewee to determine the level of public access to their testimony. The consent form is used to inform the interviewee about the use of their testimony for educational and research purposes, and that their testimony may be accessible online via the GAR website. The consent

form gives the interviewee the option to impose restrictions on the use of their testimony. The GAR does not pay or offer any other compensation to interviewees in exchange for their testimonies.

Material Acquisition

The GAR receives donations of material from organizations and private institutions, as well as individual donations such as photographs and personal belongings of relatives who were killed in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, donated by survivors' friends and family members. The team receives audiovisual materials, objects and artifacts, photographs and documents. When receiving materials for the archive, the team ensures they receive the identification forms to know what items are brought into the archive, provide an acquisition form for each item entering the archive, and receive a consent form from the donor agreeing to the transfer of ownership or the terms and conditions on which the donation is based.

Cataloguing

The team tracks the location of its records and collections by using an advanced cataloguing process that has a controlled vocabulary and an established list of preferred terms to standardize the metadata used. A complete descriptive inventory, which provides introductory information about the provenance of the records, and their dates of creation, is also part of the process. Finally, there is a finding aid with detailed descriptions and information that provides an essential link between the archive and users.

Archiving

The preservation team uses archiving methodologies in keeping with international standards set out by the General International Standard Archival Description (International Council on Archives 2000). These methods include but are not limited to sorting all records and materials according to provenance and date of creation. Records are placed in acid-free folders that prevent the materials from decaying, and archivists proceed to labelling each file folder with names for ease when locating the folder later. The files are then placed in large acid-free boxes for long-

term storage. Labelling each box with the access name and number becomes a necessity; each box is given a number before storing it, and the archivists label shelving location. To ensure its safety, the physical collection is stored in a room that maintains a constant temperature of 16°C. This prevents the materials from succumbing to natural decay.

Digital Preservation and Access

The digitization, indexing and IT teams conduct digitizing, audiovisual editing, backup, indexing and access management of the digital collections of the GAR.

ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Audiovisual

The first recorded testimonies and most of the audiovisual material first collected after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi were recorded on VHS and audio tapes. To store these items properly and to have them accessible online, the analogue data was converted to digital data.

When materials are digitized, they are converted to digital data with the help of a digital video recorder and computer software. This process allows the data to be transferred to DVDs, uploaded, preserved digitally and backed up on a secure server, and finally to be accessed digitally worldwide. Once the analogue data on VHS and audio tapes has been digitized, the tapes are given to the physical preservation team to be stored in the physical GAR for proper preservation.

Photographs

Collected photographs are also digitized by being scanned and then stored digitally. The physical photographs are also given to the preservation team, which preserves and stores them in the physical archive. Piotr Cieplak, a lecturer in filmmaking at the University of Sussex, authored a book called *Death, Image, Memory: The Genocide in Rwanda and its Aftermath in Photography and Documentary Film* (2017a) and directed a

film called *The Faces We Lost* (2017b) to show how Rwandans remember through photography.

Capturing Audiovisual Footage and Images

The digitization team captures audiovisual, audio recordings and photographs for the archive's collection. The team assists the collection team in collecting testimonies with cameras and related materials. Another important activity is covering events and ceremonies that take place at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, and other places where documenting genocide and peace-building activities happen. The team also produces films for the Aegis Trust and the Rwanda Peace Education Programme (RPEP), and those films are part of the teaching and learning materials. Collecting audiovisual content for virtual tours posted on the GAR website's interactive maps has been another important task.

Editing

Once the collected audiovisual footage, audio recordings and photographs are digitized and stored, the digitization team then formats these items for the best quality for online viewing. However, testimonies (life histories) are never edited, because the GAR strives to be as faithful as possible to the witness accounts.

Indexing

Video indexing allows end-users to gain time-coded access to the archives of audiovisual testimony held by the Kigali Genocide Memorial. The content curation team also performs other activities that facilitate the access to information. Those activities include, but are not limited to, the translation of all content into Kinyarwanda, English and French, creation of subtitles for audiovisual material, creation of metadata and description for all the materials, uploading of the materials and their metadata to the archive's website, creation of content for all other sections of the website, and determination of levels of access to the collections based on the wishes of those who provided the items or testimony.

STORAGE AND PROVIDING ACCESS

The digital collections are managed by the IT and digitization teams, which are part of the GAR team. The collections are stored digitally on the archive's secure server, and are backed up on a cloud-based system. The IT team provides the necessary support to maintain proper digital preservation in several ways. They oversee technical implementation and support for the digital archive's systems and all other IT-related tasks in the archive. They assist archivists in digital archive management to ensure proper description, preservation and access to all digital collections. They enable uninterrupted access to digital content for the archive team and external users. They collaborate with partners, researchers and regional, national and international institutions for proper access provision and approved levels of access. And finally, all the work they do complies with, and contributes to, the development of the standards and practices of the digital preservation community, in Rwanda and internationally.

MAJOR PROJECTS OF THE GAR

The GAR has contributed to major projects undertaken by the Aegis Trust. Those projects include the RPEP. Integrating memory, testimony and documentation into peace education is core to the Aegis Trust, using a collaborative approach with strategic partners that share the same values and objectives (Aegis Trust 2017). Under this program, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Genocide Archive of Rwanda supported by the USC Shoah Foundation, focused on developing its policies and procedures regarding the collection of and access to audiovisual materials online. Specifically, the USC Shoah Foundation's role in the RPEP was to help the Kigali Genocide Memorial in strengthening the capacities of its own growing genocide archive to engage in collaborative educational programs, which include teaching with testimony and the use of the Institute's educational platform, IWitness, in Rwandan schools.

Another major achievement of the GAR through the RPEP is the development of education and teaching materials that include documentary films. *Words That Kill* (2013), co-produced with the USC Shoah Foundation, exposes the damage caused by hate speech and different techniques of hate propaganda that contributed to mass atrocities

such as the Holocaust and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. *Ubumuntu Film* (2013) features many ordinary people, Rwandans and an Italian, who risked their lives during the genocide to protect the targeted. *Two Hills* (2015) is the story of two opposed communities that overcame their distrust and chose to reconcile and work together toward peace. *Grace and Vanessa* (2013) is a daring and heartwarming story in which 10-year-old Grace, against the will of her family, rescues one-year-old Vanessa. Grace's fearlessness and love not only earned her admiration among Rwandans and everyone who came to know her, but also made her an inspiring model to all who believe in peace building, unity and reconciliation.¹

GENOCIDE RESEARCH AND RECONCILIATION PROJECT

When the Aegis Trust launched its Genocide Research and Reconciliation Program in Rwanda, the GAR became central to its implementation. This program seeks to strengthen the resilience against any possible return to genocide in the future in Rwanda by strengthening social cohesion and reconciliation processes. The GAR worked on the creation of interactive maps that feature genocide-related information to show the scale of genocide in Rwanda on one hand, but also the reconciliation and peace-building initiatives carried out by Rwandans to highlight the post-genocide recovery of Rwanda. The deliverables for this project, which was funded by the United Kingdom's DFID, include the documentation of 31 genocide memorials across Rwanda, 15 unity and reconciliation projects, development of virtual tours (3D tours) for the memorial sites, and their integration into memorial pages on the GAR website. Moreover, the GAR created background information for each memorial site and reconciliation project (in addition to related testimonies and virtual tours) that gives details to end-users about the site and/or reconciliation projects.

FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Aegis Trust aims to create a single GAR by consolidating the existing archives held by various organizations into one archive and building a documentation and archive centre at the Kigali Genocide Memorial. The purpose of this centre is to improve the physical and digital availability of these collections and facilitate research on the genocide against Tutsi in

Rwanda, its causes and the post-genocide recovery period. The GAR has already identified its partners among archival holding institutions. It identified 19 institutions and surveyed them throughout September to December 2014. It also conducted surveys of collections available around the country from local partners. Many workshops were conducted to present findings and share ideas with local and international partners. A feasibility study report was completed and the Gacaca project proposal was developed and presented to the government officials. As a result, a pilot phase for the Gacaca Archives Project started in 2014.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND LOCAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Since 2004, Aegis staff have continually gained skills and knowledge about archiving and information preservation through partnerships with local and international institutions. The Ibuka Association, AVEGA Agahozo, the USC Shoah Foundation, University of Texas Libraries, the Netherlands' NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and King's College London are all partners of the GAR in capacity building for best practices in cataloguing and indexing methodologies. The GAR has in recent years worked with a number of government and private institutions, from signing memoranda of understanding to knowledge transfer and exchange. Those institutions include, but are not limited to, the Ministry of Sports and Culture, the Office of the President of Rwanda, the National Archives of Rwanda (NAR), Rwanda Development Board and Rwanda Broadcasting Agency.

NAR PROJECT

Through a five-year memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Sports & Culture and the Aegis Trust, the Aegis Trust is mandated to set up archiving standards and best practices that meet international requirements for the NAR. This included physical preservation support and recommendations for digital preservation practices as well as capacity building for NAR staff. From 2013 to 2018, the GAR preserved physically and digitally 2.8 million pages of documentation belonging to the NAR. Moreover, it has upgraded the NAR digital platform and trained its staff on archival methodologies.

DIGITAL PLATFORM TO SUPPORT EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN RWANDA

The GAR platform has also been involved with the creation of a digital platform, funded by the embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium, to support Education for Sustainable Peace in Rwanda, another program of the Aegis Trust. The program aims to support curriculum changes that would embed “peace and values education” in the classroom, while strengthening the skills of teachers through “Peace Schools.”

According to the *Global Information Technology Report 2015* (World Economic Forum 2015), Rwanda is one of the fastest-growing African countries in information and communications technology development (Mzekandaba 2015) and this presents a rich opportunity to use digital infrastructure in innovative, context-sensitive ways to multiply knowledge that will help to train and equip teachers, parents, students, researchers and policy makers on how to use educational and research-based resources.

The digital platform for the Education for Sustainable Peace in Rwanda program anticipates achieving positive transformations of target audiences (mainly teachers in Rwanda’s education system at all levels, students and youth, parents, decision makers and researchers, as well as community members at large). The Aegis Trust has now engaged an experienced social experience design company, Inzovu Inc., to work with both the education team and the communications and engagement team to drive the brand and design of the digital platform. The GAR staff are fully involved in creating the digital content that will feature on the digital platform; the experience and skills acquired in the development of the GAR platform are driving this important educational enterprise.

CONTRIBUTION TO RESEARCH AND JUSTICE

The GAR welcomes research students, teachers and other visitors to contribute to research and to assist in creating content. Over the years, the GAR has received dozens of interns and volunteers from around the world, including Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, and it has also contributed to more than 20 research papers published by both Rwandan and non-Rwandan experts (see www.genocideresearchhub.com).

Rwandan Stories of Change, a 39-month research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, will publish a volume of translated testimonies from the archive in April 2019. This will widen access to the archive's materials by making them accessible to English speakers. The project is a collaboration between St. Andrews University, the Aegis Trust and the GAR. The project aims to gain a qualitative understanding of the impact of the genocide against the Tutsi with a particular focus on the expression of post-traumatic growth. A number of researchers have covered some of the topics important to post-conflict societies. One of the researchers is Caroline Williamson, who has written numerous works on gender identity, translation works and post-traumatic growth. Another is Phil Clark, a political scientist specializing in conflict and post-conflict issues in Africa, in particular questions of peace, truth, justice and reconciliation; his works about Rwanda's Gacaca courts have provided a breakthrough in the understanding of transitional justice in Rwanda's post genocide.

DOCUMENTING AND ARCHIVING THE GACACA COURTS' ARCHIVES

In order to cope with hundreds of thousands of genocide suspects awaiting trial before a justice system that was struggling to rebuild, the Rwandan government established the community-based Gacaca court system. Through this system of "justice on the grass,"² courts met at the local level, often outdoors. The activities of the Gacaca courts created an enormous archive, an estimated 60 million documents that deal with 1,958,634 case files. These figures illustrate the scale and impact of the Gacaca courts and the extraordinary value of the archive produced by these courts for Rwanda as a nation. Furthermore, the archive is also of interest for audiences from outside Rwanda. International researchers and investigators have shown their interest in using the records of Gacaca as a unique mechanism of transitional justice. Today, the GAR has trained the Gacaca Archives Project staff and supervised the scanning of all Gacaca documents. Trainees from the CNLG, the official guardian of the Gacaca archives, are stepping up to another level of indexing and providing access to the digital files. This training is essential in that it will allow the CNLG staff to respond effectively to many requests from a wider range of users.

TRANSLATING AND SUBTITLING CHALLENGES TO DOCUMENT THE GENOCIDE

Much of the information collected by the GAR is in the Kinyarwanda language. This could be a barrier to the mission of reaching a wider audience, especially non-Rwandans. As Caroline Williamson (2016b) puts it, all translation involves some level of alteration of the original, but a number of factors make the challenges particularly acute for the translation of testimony housed in the GAR. According to Williamson, these challenges include the recent shift from French to English as the main target language for the translation, timelines imposed by donors and what she called “ideological drift.” Williamson claims, for example, that she found significant inaccuracies (omissions, additions and other distortions) in the translations of survivors’ testimonies as well as a tendency among translators to portray survivors as stronger, less desperate and less critical of the West than the original versions.

Many audiovisual testimonies need to be translated into English and other languages, and the GAR works to secure funds from donors to ensure that as many testimonies as possible are translated. English is the main target because it is among the official languages in Rwanda, besides Kinyarwanda and French, and all of the GAR partners are English speakers. Over the past five years, the GAR has endeavoured to develop translation, transcription and subtitling guidelines for both in-house and consultant translators.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE DOCUMENTATION WORK

It is fair to say that everyone in the GAR has experienced some sort of psychological challenges because of the nature of the work. One can imagine, for example, an interviewer who is also a survivor conducting an interview with another survivor or with a perpetrator. Both sides are forced to go back and revisit the horrendous events of 1994. There have been many instances when interviewers, both survivors and non-survivors, admit to having negative psychological reactions following an interview. This is also the case for the interviewees. Some feel that giving their

testimony is both therapeutic and traumatizing, which might be prejudicial to the mission of the GAR to document the genocide, to preserve memory and provide evidence-based materials for historical and education purposes.

To address this issue, the GAR has made it a policy to involve psychological counsellors and psychologists in its process of collecting testimonies. Those psychologists have organized three retreats, outside of the workplace, to discuss with the staff of the GAR the challenges they face in their work. Many resolutions from those workshops and retreats have helped the GAR improve its practices. It is well understood that archival work can involve psychological challenges, especially when dealing with genocide-related materials.

THE GAR IS MAKING AN IMPACT

Increasingly, the research community worldwide is making use of the content of the GAR. More than 20 online requests come to the GAR each month and that number is increasing. More than nine European countries have sent their prosecutors to work with the GAR in search of information about alleged perpetrators living in their countries. Audiovisual testimonies are not only a powerful weapon against genocide denial and an educational resource for peace-building activities; they are also mediums for teaching core values such as empathy, personal responsibility, critical thinking and trust. The understanding of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi is widening and deepening as the GAR provides more content.

The collections of the GAR have contributed to academic works on writing translations and psychology issues. Peer-reviewed research papers such as those by Caroline Williamson are good examples of the richness and importance of the archive. Williamson's works include "Genocide, masculinity and posttraumatic growth in Rwanda: reconstructing male identity through *ndi umunyarwanda*" (2016a), "Post-traumatic growth at the international level: The obstructive role played by translators and editors of Rwandan Genocide testimonies" (2016b), "Towards a theory of collective posttraumatic growth in Rwanda: The pursuit of agency and communion" (2014a), "Posttraumatic growth and religion in Rwanda:

individual well-being vs. collective false consciousness” (2014b), and “Accessing Material from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda” (2013). Many other relevant works, mostly in psychology, can be found at the Rwandan Stories of Change website.³

CONCLUSION

Documenting the genocide has become a national preoccupation. The Aegis Trust’s creation of the GAR responds to and supports the Rwandan government’s dedication to archiving, as described by one of the resolutions of the Thirteenth National Dialogue, which took place December 21–22, 2015. It states that: “*Gukomeza gusigasira no kurinda ibyiza twagezeho dukeshya Inkiko Gacaca no kurushaho kubungabunga ibindi bimenyetso bya Jenoside yakorewe Abatutsi birimo inzibutso za Jenoside, no kwandika amateka ya Jenoside yakorewe Abatutsi mu Turere dutandukanye, mu Bigo bya Leta, iby’abikorera n’Amadini kugira ngo bikomeze gushyigikira ubumwe bw’Abanyarwanda*” (Government of Rwanda 2015).

In English (translation mine), the resolution reads: “To sustain important efforts already made, thanks to the Gacaca courts, and improve the preservation of other evidence related to the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi that include genocide memorials, and documenting the genocide; from different districts, government institutions, private institutions and individuals, and from religious organizations; for that evidence to be serving and strengthening the unity and reconciliation of Rwandans.”

The GAR has contributed greatly to the development of a number of archival projects on the national level, which include, but are not limited to, the NAR, the Gacaca Archives Project and the digital platform of Education for Sustainable Peace in Rwanda.

The GAR has also contributed to the world’s knowledge of Rwanda’s history, its culture, resilience and its hope for the future. A number of individual and institutional partners have participated in this effort of rebuilding Rwanda’s archives and ensuring that invaluable historical documents are shared with the world.⁴ Partnership is not only about

archiving, but also dealing with the psychological challenges that the GAR is facing. Interest in working with the GAR is increasing greatly. Local partners are now aware that documenting the genocide should be accompanied with efforts to tackle trauma issues that archivists are likely to face.

Finally, we can confidently say that the GAR has played a role in fighting against genocide denial through its collection of first-hand accounts of genocide survivors, perpetrators, rescuers and other witnesses. Content from other research and archiving organizations is not only an invaluable asset to the GAR, but also is contributing to the social reconstruction of the Rwandan community by responding to such current issues as gender, identity, youth and the empowerment of women. A GAR webpage called Post Genocide Reconstruction⁵ is designed to show how youth engage in projects of peace building, and learning Rwandan history, and how women, especially widows of the genocide and those whose husbands are serving sentences, come together to create projects that generate revenues, and to discuss other projects of empowerment such as gender equality and women's rights. Social media has contributed to the GAR by spreading its content worldwide, and the archive counts on the website to transform the archives into educational and learning materials designed to train future leaders and world citizens who understand the true meaning of "Never Again."

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- 1 The films can be viewed at: http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Words_that_Kill&gsearch=, 2013; <http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Ubumuntu&gsearch=>, 2013; http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Two_Hills&gsearch=, 2015; and <http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Ubumuntu&gsearch=>, 2013.
 - 2 In Kinyarwanda, the word *gacaca* refers to “a bed of soft green grass” on which, in ancient traditions, a community and its representatives, mainly elders, leaders and individuals known for their integrity and wisdom, would gather to discuss and resolve conflicts within or between families and inhabitants in a certain village. This definition is from <http://gacaca.rw/about/history-3/>.
 - 3 The Rwandan Stories of Change webpage lists links to papers from conferences and invited talks and other publications. See <http://rwandan.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/outputs/>.
 - 4 Visit www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Our_Partners for a list of partners and donors.
 - 5 See www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Post_Genocide.



9

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MASS ATROCITIES: EXAMPLES FROM RWANDA, COLOMBIA AND SOUTH SUDAN

MARK FROHARDT AND PAULA ORLANDO

INTRODUCTION

Academics and practitioners have long emphasized the role of the media in fuelling violence and promoting conflict — whether explicitly or involuntarily (Frohardt and Temin 2003). Information outlets may be used to disseminate rumours and hate speech that openly call for violence. They may also indirectly drive the re-emergence or continuation of aggression through reporting that taps into dehumanizing narratives and promotes stereotypes about different ethnic groups or revives old grievances. They can also be very effective in discrediting peaceful means for resolving conflict and generating fear between ethnic groups, thereby creating a perceived need for self-defence through violent action. Further, media

outlets may also serve as platforms for extremist groups to recruit people and coordinate action.

In scholarly literature, the most iconic cases concerning the key role played by media in mass atrocities involve the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the mass violence in the former Yugoslavia (Thompson 2007; Yanagizawa-Drott 2014; Bozic-Roberson 2004). In Rwanda, print publications and radio in particular spread messages that dehumanized Tutsis, disseminated hate speech and served as tools both to engage people to commit violence and also to coordinate operations. For instance, Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) broadcast the names, addresses and licence plate numbers of Tutsi targets (Power 2001). In the 1990s, Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic used media outlets to systematically spread fear and mobilize Serbs against Croats and Bosnian Muslims (Ferroggiaro 2014).

More recently, the use of media to disseminate rumours and propaganda contributed to deadly violence during the 2007 Kenyan elections and Kyrgyzstan's political crisis in 2010. In Burma, Buddhist groups have propagated anti-Muslim rhetoric through DVDs and social media. In one instance in 2014, false claims that a Muslim man had raped a Buddhist woman were spread via Facebook, triggering violence (ibid.). Further, the use of media platforms by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has become one of the most compelling examples of how social media can aid dissemination of graphic images, fuel hatred and support the recruitment of people to commit violence in unrelated locations (Awan 2017). Even in contexts where social media may not be available to a large segment of the population due to restrictions in internet access, key influencers — including members of the country's diaspora — can incite aggression via social media by spreading rumours that eventually get disseminated through word of mouth (PeaceTech Lab 2017).

Conversely, whether through formal structures, citizen media or social networking platforms, the media may play fundamental roles in times of crises and in the aftermath of mass violence. When atrocities are ongoing, “access to accurate, timely and relevant information can be the difference between life and death” (Internews 2017a, 10). Further, as Will

Ferroggiaro (2014) contends, conflict-sensitive reporting has the potential to offer nuanced information about the dynamics of the conflict, its actors and potential solutions. Journalism that accounts for the complexity of social and political relations may facilitate communication between opposing parties and help make different players accountable. Media outlets may also provide space for community members to come together and begin to rebuild social ties. However, as Susan Moeller (2009) emphasizes in a series of papers about the importance of media literacy, the effectiveness of media in fulfilling these positive roles depends not only on skilled journalists but also on the knowledge of their readers.

In this context, how can interventions involving media discourage further violence and contribute to the building of a culture that promotes some sense of justice and sustainable peace? Internews has decades of accumulated experience in more than 90 countries where mass violence and atrocities have occurred, and that experience suggests that the most effective way of working toward reconciliation and non-violence is by fostering a culture of critical engagement among the population. We make the argument that critical engagement through media can advance a group's sense of justice, help people come to terms with past events and promote a cultural shift that obviates future violations. Fostering critical engagement through media requires not only the provision of information but also providing opportunities to craft platforms through which community members can interact in a variety of ways, gain the ability to analyze and respond to information, and become multipliers of constructive content.

Promoting a cultural shift toward participation and engagement also helps individuals and communities to be less susceptible to manipulation and speech that incites violence. A culture of critical engagement with media presupposes a shift from community members as passive consumers of information to active participants in the processes of constructing, contesting, curating and disseminating information in a variety of forms. As Paul Mihailidis and James N. Cohen (2013, 4) note, in the current technological and media landscape, individuals have more direct access to information from sources, which “adds the responsibility of participation with media and requires savvy media engagement to consider how images

and real-time information coordinate.” Critically engaging with media, we suggest, also helps empower citizens to curate information sensibly and become more discerning of the impact of disseminating propaganda and rumours. Most important, interventions that privilege citizens’ engagement and participation contribute to strengthening collective resilience by helping restore social ties and increasing the community’s ability to establish critical media platforms once the political situation has stabilized. Ultimately, the goal of this cultural shift is to correct distortions in dialogue that have allowed violence to be the primary form of conflict resolution.

This chapter offers an exploratory analysis of interventions that promote cultural shifts toward critical engagement through media in three countries — Rwanda, Colombia and South Sudan. Each section contains examples that illustrate our argument. This analysis is based on a review of scholarly literature about critical media interventions and media literacy, extensive desk research to identify concrete examples, and input from experienced media development professionals. Based on these cases, we contend that through processes of interaction that involve not only media content, but also producers and fellow community members, affected populations gain the ability to meaningfully access, analyze and evaluate information as well as craft messages and circulate information that matters to their lives.

In the years that followed the genocide in Rwanda, narrowcasting newsreels about the international, national and local trials not only provided segments of the population with access to relevant content related to the justice systems, but also meaningfully engaged Rwandans across geographies, historical perspectives and individual experiences concerning the genocide. In Colombia, local media-making has fostered cooperation and helped citizens turn narratives of violence into more hopeful ones. In South Sudan, where mass atrocities are ongoing, displaced populations receive life-saving information in a controlled environment through another narrowcasting initiative while establishing dialogue with each other, the news production team and the aid agencies providing services locally.

CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONFLICT AND MASS ATROCITIES

Contexts marked by armed conflict and mass violence have heightened security risks and unique challenges concerning media and journalism. They present particular social dynamics and specific information needs. Because of these factors, one of the most important requirements of initiatives working toward a culture of critical engagement is a deep understanding of the local information ecosystem. These complex systems of information include, for example, “information infrastructure, tools, media, producers, consumers, curators” and influencers (Internews 2015, 12). Adopting an integral assessment of the information ecosystem ensures that interventions reflect a community-centred approach that can be continually adjusted for greatest impact. Moreover, understanding the barriers as well as the resources available enables implementers to maximize community involvement and participation.

The analysis of the case studies included in this chapter are based on elements of the information ecosystem framework developed by the Internews Center for Innovation and Learning — a model to assess these ecosystems through a human-centred and holistic lens. The framework sets forth eight dimensions of any given information ecosystem, namely: the information needs of different groups; the information landscape; the production and circulation of information; the dynamics of access; the use of information by various populations; the impact of information; the levels of social trust within a community; and who the influencers are (Internews 2015). In the context of conflict and mass atrocities, this means asking questions from the perspective of the affected population. These questions may include: What are people’s needs in terms of information? What are the political and social dynamics of violence? How do different groups access and use information? Where are they located and what are potential security risks that halt the production of information at these locations? Who controls the circulation of information? What are the resources available? Who is likely to influence people?

In general, the information ecosystems of communities during and after mass violence has taken place tend to be affected by a culture of impunity, where freedom of expression might be nearly absent, and information

about the atrocities is tightly controlled by those in power. Interventions aimed at peacebuilding and reconciliation are therefore likely obstructed, and media coverage of events is restricted. Further, lack of trust tends to pervade social relations. Vulnerable groups such as women, the elderly and internally displaced populations require basic information in order to make basic, routine decisions. Awareness of these aspects is key to program design, implementation and ongoing adjustments.

We by no means intend to use the information ecosystem framework in assessing all aspects of the programs discussed below. We will, however, use the framework to point out elements of media production, dissemination and use that are critical in the creation of community-centred interventions that support a culture of critical engagement.

CASE STUDIES

RWANDA

While Rwanda has made significant progress in terms of economic growth, its information ecosystem is still profoundly marked by the role of the media in the 1994 genocide. The government has invested heavily in the communication and technology sector, but information circulation in the country is still controlled (Internews 2012). As of 2016, there were 35 radio stations, 12 television stations and about 50 print media outlets, including two daily newspapers, and more than 80 web-based outlets in Rwanda (Rwanda Governance Board 2016). However, a Freedom House report about the country's media landscape in 2016 suggests that domestic media tends to reflect "a single narrative of unity, peace, and progress" (Freedom House n.d., 2).

Throughout the 2000s, in some respects, Rwanda advanced in terms of media liberalization. In 2013, a media self-regulatory body, the Rwanda Media Commission, was established. The commission was intended to remove state control of the sector and was perceived as a positive initiative (Rwanda Governance Board 2016). Gerald Caplan (2007, 31) notes the efforts of the government to foster reconciliation and establish unity in the population through new structures and institutions, "but on its

own terms.” Media practitioners, in turn, established a code of ethics by which all professionals in the sector are supposed to abide. Article 1 of this document reads: “The journalist and any other media professional shall defend the universal human values of peace, tolerance, democracy, human rights, social progress and national cohesion respectful of each citizen in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Rwanda Governance Board 2016, 52).

These developments achieved in recent decades were unthinkable in mid-1994. In the aftermath of the genocide, the country was under indescribable circumstances and had seemingly insurmountable obstacles ahead. Caplan (2007) notes that Rwanda “was wrecked — a wasteland.” Up to one million Rwandans, about 15 percent of the entire population, had died. Those who survived endured profound suffering thought to linger for generations. Nearly three million people were displaced, whether internally or beyond borders.

“An entire nation was brutalized and traumatized.... Yet killers and survivors had no alternative but to resume living side-by-side on Rwanda’s hills” (ibid., 29). Further, “as hundreds of thousands of ordinary Rwandans had...actively participated in the genocide,” the country faced extremely difficult questions related to justice, reconciliation and even national identity. In most situations of post mass atrocity, the process of reconciliation is difficult, if not impossible, to begin without some sense of justice or accountability for past crimes. This was particularly true in the case of post-genocide Rwanda.

The United Nations set up the International Criminal Court in Arusha (ICTR), while national and local courts prepared to conduct trials in Rwanda. From its inception, the ICTR was controversial for many reasons, in particular the lack of death penalties and the court’s location in neighbouring Tanzania. In fact, many Rwandans believed the structure of the ICTR and its location outside of the country indicated that the international community did not truly believe that genocide had taken place in Rwanda.

Although there was some reporting of the trials in Arusha, it was usually the negative coverage of the challenges and problems the court was

experiencing that reached the majority of Rwandans. There were problems in establishing the ICTR and significant delays during the trials, yet the court did successfully set precedent in the prosecution of rape as a war crime. The court also brought down the first conviction of news media executives for crimes of genocide since the Nuremberg trials of 1945-1946. In that case, the ICTR convicted Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza and Hassan Ngeze of genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide and crimes against humanity (persecution and extermination). Nahimana and Barayagwiza were influential members of RTLM, “which was found to have fanned the flames of hate and genocide in Rwanda,” and Ngeze was part of the extremist newspaper *Kangura* (Kimani 2007).

The role played by media in fuelling the atrocities contributed to the creation of an extremely controlled information environment, and prompted discussions about the appropriate strategies for media intervention in peacebuilding (Thompson 2007). In that context, the information production and circulation dynamics presented even more challenges.

Justice after Genocide: Situating Mass Atrocities Historically and Engaging Rwandans with Justice Proceedings

In light of the circumstances described above, Internews launched the “Justice after Genocide” newsreel project in Rwanda, which attempted to address the critical information needs of citizens from all over the country concerning the justice process and the genocide trials. The newsreel project was conceived to bring Rwandans firsthand journalistic video coverage of the trials, since they could not witness them in their own country. It was quickly determined that the newsreels had to be preceded by an introductory documentary bringing much needed historical context to the international justice framework and institutions, the ICTR and the mass atrocities that took place in Rwanda. Opening with footage of the Holocaust, “The Arusha Tapes” discussed the establishment of the genocide convention in 1948 and the creation of the ICTR in Arusha by the UN Security Council. More than 400 people — including farmers, merchants, retired civil servants, children and a local judge — attended

the initial screening in rural Gikongoro in 2001. The screening was followed by a discussion session (Internews 2001).

Although the monthly newsreels began with the trials of those charged with genocide at the ICTR in Arusha, the coverage of the proceedings at the Rwandan National Courts and at the local Gacaca courts was soon included. They also reported stories concerning the debate over the death penalty and relations between survivors and released prisoners (Relief Web 2005).

These screenings — or narrowcasts — took place in town halls, schools and other public buildings and were followed by discussions that engaged the audiences. To take full advantage of crowds gathered to view the screens newsreels, local organizations involved in justice and reconciliation issues were invited to take the stage following the newsreel discussion to promote other activities. Rwandan prosecutors also attended screenings whenever possible, in order to answer questions raised by the audience. The production team also gathered and conveyed additional questions to officials after the screenings. In many cases, questions and answers were often filmed so that they could be edited into subsequent newsreels (Hall 2014).

These question and answer segments, shown across the country, demonstrated that people from different geographies and ethnic divisions had similar concerns. As a Rwandan official pointed out, one of the greatest attributes of the newsreels was that Rwandans from around the country could see that they had the same questions as those from other distant regions. The recognition of these similarities highlighted a powerful element of shared humanity, even in such a devastating context. Wanda Hall (*ibid.*, 290), who participated in the implementation of the project, writes that “the most important factor in building a consciousness about the role of justice in Rwandan society was apparently not what the authorities said — and not even what the ICTR was doing — but what the people said about it, asked about it, and gained by having their voices heard.” In other words, the greatest impact for Rwandans seeking justice came from their critical engagement with new information sources and with each other.

The “Justice after Genocide” project showed more than 30 newsreels, which for many Rwandans were the only access they had to information about the trials and the only opportunity to participate in discussions about the subject. While the project aimed at providing factual information, “the most compelling part of the initiative was its use of the films to give voice to and encourage conversations among people in Rwanda who had lived through the genocide, whether they identified themselves as perpetrators or victims” (ibid.). The itinerant project reached villages all across the country where more than 200,000 people watched the documentaries, including 80,000 prisoners accused of war crimes (Hall 2014). An assessment of the impact of the program conducted by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) noted that “the films — which attempt[ed] to provide unbiased information — did not lead viewers to have uniformly positive opinions about the courts but rather enabled people to feel well enough informed to formulate opinions” (Longman 2014, 268).

According to the evaluation, showing the newsreels in prisons was particularly relevant, as those in detention lacked regular access to information. The films provided explanations about the prisoners’ situation, their legal rights and the ramifications of their actions. After screening the newsreels in the prisons, detainees were also filmed asking questions. These interviews were included in subsequent newsreels, which meant that Rwandans across the country could hear the words of those accused of genocide, whether to express regret or to question the slow pace of trials for those in Rwandan prisons. A man held in detention in Gikongoro, for example, reportedly said, “There were things [in the film] that reminded me of what happened in 1994. That made me ashamed, and I don’t want this to repeat itself ever again” (ibid.). In some cases, the prisoners’ complaints about the slowness of the process led to increased visits by the Rwandan prosecutors to the prisons in order to accelerate the trials. Further, the fact that interviews with prisoners were included in newsreels screened throughout the country countered the narrative by families of the accused that their concerns were not heard by officials or the general public.

Participatory Theatre, Mobile Cinema and Interactive Games: Alternative Avenues for Critical Engagement

Although not directly related to reconciliation or justice after genocide, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has also designed interventions that engage Rwandans in peaceful conflict resolution. These interventions recognize that in societies where mass atrocities have taken place, conflicts emerging over resources may lead to new waves of mass violence.

The first interventions involved mobile cinema (films projected onto portable screens across rural areas) and participatory theatre followed by engagement of the audiences in discussions. The films specifically addressed land disputes — a major source of conflict in contemporary Rwanda (SFCG 2017). The participatory theatre projects also concerned land conflicts. Before presentations, actors interviewed members of the community about their specific problems and concerns, using the information as the basis for the script. SFCG notes that “while radio programs are highly effective in reaching large numbers of people with information, participatory theatre achieves good results in helping people translate concepts into reality and apply them in their own lives” (SFCG n.d.). The use of drama in peace communication is well-established for the opportunity it provides for those involved “to participate in conflict narratives *outside* the burdening constraints and risks of real-life” (Arendshorst 2005). Even further, participatory theatre helps people develop a sense of agency over everyday life circumstances (ibid.).

Working toward better conflict-resolution skills is also a goal of Bana Dukine, an interactive computer game brought to schools by SFCG. The game seeks to increase Rwandan students’ understanding of how conflicts emerge and how they can be constructively resolved in their everyday lives. Students have control over “Little Lion,” the game’s main character, who must avoid fighting between other animals over the distribution of water. Students engage in the potential responses and choose the best strategy to solve conflict through a series of dialogue options. An evaluation conducted by SFCG in 2012 revealed that while the students already possessed high levels of conflict resolution knowledge, the game provided a safe space for them to practise skills and explore situations that

resonate with their lives (SFCG 2012). Besides the knowledge and skills gained by the students with the game, involving youth and children in interactive and participatory activities toward non-violent conflict resolution provides potential for a culture of engagement that extends far beyond the classroom and to future generations.

Interactive radio programming is another tool that simultaneously addresses isolation and information gaps and encourages community participation, even when violence and conflict are not the central theme. Community radios have provided “vital information to citizens and contribute[d] to development and peace reconciliation efforts in Rwanda” and contributed to sensitizing the local population about free speech and on the dangers of hate speech (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] n.d.). For example, Rwanda’s oldest community station, Izuba Radio, emphasizes the promotion of agriculture, small trade and the role of youth and women in development. As part of its efforts to maintain high levels of community participation, it set up special clubs, including clubs for child journalists, to listen to programming. Interactions between audiences and producers also take place during regular talk shows involving the community and local government officials (Mutasa 2015). Call-in shows tend to make the content of broadcast better understood as listeners voice questions that are often shared by others. As Hall (2014, 287) suggests, “Tens of thousands of people can be invited simultaneously into a dialogue with a radio program, and hearing neighbors rather than a journalist or some distant authority speak on subjects of concern to them encourages people to participate in the dialogue themselves as protagonists and not as mere passive observers.” Although the interventions discussed above involve multiple media and communication platforms, they all seek to fulfill information needs and foster non-violent conflict resolution skills through a culture of participation and critical engagement.

COLOMBIA

The armed conflict in Colombia has lasted for more than five decades, claiming 220,000 lives and leading to the displacement of almost seven million people. It has made Colombia a country with the second-highest number of internally displaced people in the world, just after Syria

(Human Rights Watch 2017). The current political context has been characterized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as “post-agreement but not post-conflict,” since the bilateral ceasefire involving the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army contributed to a significant reduction of armed confrontations in some areas (ICRC 2017). In other parts of the country, however, the situation has hardly improved, especially in rural and remote regions. In the context of this complex and multi-actor conflict, Colombians have faced massacres carried out by the paramilitaries, kidnapping by guerrillas, the use of landmines, torture, disappearances and forced displacement at the hands of armed forces in a matrix of violence that has social inequality at its core (Rincón and Rodríguez 2015).

Cartographies of information — a national level assessment of local media and information needs conducted by the Foundation for Press Freedom (Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa [FLIP]) — reveal a profoundly asymmetrical information landscape. This research found that Colombians present deep information needs at various levels, especially concerning local news. Of 509 municipalities mapped by the researchers, 287 are “zones of silence,” that is, places where there are no local outlets of information. Many others have some local news resources, although they are not sufficient (FLIP n.d.). Furthermore, information is highly centralized and flows between the capital and different parts of the country. In particular in the provinces mostly affected by armed violence, local media outlets are nearly non-existent.

Since the implementation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was approved in April 2017, experts have noted that the lack of information circulation — considering how little information from the different provinces (especially those most affected by the conflict) reaches the capital — is an important element hindering national dialogue. As media scholar Clemencia Rodríguez (2011) suggests, in remote and highly affected areas, citizens’ radio has been the only resource to engage individuals, mobilize collective action and even restore people’s participation in the public realm at the height of armed violence. However, even these outlets can be silenced or threatened by criminal groups or guerrillas (Reporters without Borders 2016).

The information landscape, dominated by private media, lacks pluralism, and outlets tend to reflect financial and political interests (Luna 2014). Colombia's newspapers for the most part still have strong ties to political parties and elite families who use the media to advance their agendas (Colombia Reports 2017). As in many parts of Latin America, media ownership in Colombia is very concentrated: eight conglomerates control the major newspapers, radio stations and television channels. This concentration of ownership and the interests behind it generate a lack of diverse perspectives and portrayals of the conflict in the traditional media. Journalists suffer from a culture of violence and self-censorship because they fear the retaliation that occurs after reports on atrocities committed by the various actors in the conflict. The organization Reporters without Borders notes that "physical attacks, death threats, and murders are still common, making Colombia one of the Western Hemisphere's most dangerous countries for the media" (Reporters without Borders 2016, para. 1).

At the same time, a number of news media outlets have emerged in recent years, especially online. *La Silla Vacía* (founded by a Colombian journalist and funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, Ford and Open Society, among others) and *¡Pacifista!* (a VICE media project) are some examples of higher level news providers that address the political landscape, the conflict and the implementation of the peace agreement. *¡Pacifista!* is openly geared toward the perspective of the conflict's victims. *Verdad Abierta* is another investigative journalism website entirely dedicated to Colombia's conflict and political violence and is considered one of the most reliable sources of verified information for the general public as well as for policy makers and researchers (Colombia Reports 2017).

As Colombia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons in the world, information targeting these specific audiences is crucial. Displaced persons need, for example, information about their surroundings and places of origin, the recently approved land restitution program, and any content that may help identify the whereabouts of missing relatives. There are, however, no designated areas for displaced populations in Colombia, making it difficult to reach them in any

systematic way. “Most [internally displaced persons] reside in impoverished metropolitan areas, thoroughly intermingled with other types of victims of armed conflict and the urban poor” (Shultz et al. 2014, para. 1). As in any environment nearing the end of conflict, citizens’ information needs include nuanced information about the peace process, the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission, justice-related procedures and government actions, as well as access to the perspective of victims and the impact of the conflict on their lives.

The next section highlights local-level initiatives that have attempted to critically engage Colombians with media and information and that are meant to transform cultural narratives of violence into more hopeful and peaceful ones. These interventions have taken into account important aspects of the local information ecosystem, including the needs of the community, information landscape, isolated geographies and the dynamics of information circulation.

Citizens’ Media: Critical Engagement to Reshape Narratives and Identities

Engagement with media involves not only how to critically use information — for example, learning how to differentiate facts from rumours and how to verify sources of information — but also helps people affected by conflict to reconstruct the symbolic narratives of their lives, both past and future, individually and collectively. Some scholars argue that transforming narratives of conflict that dehumanize and vilify other groups is a fundamental condition for reconciliation (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Bilali and Vollhardt 2013). Rezarta Bilali and Johanna Ray Vollhardt (2013), for example, suggest that in order for understanding and reconciliation to develop, it is fundamental to communicate a historical outlook about the conflict. This perspective allows both groups to understand each other’s perspectives and defy narratives of dehumanization and victimization, allowing for the agency of survivors to also be emphasized. However, taking on each other’s perspective requires willingness to engage with the adversary’s story (Epley and Caruso 2008). This is how programs engaging communities with media-making and storytelling lay the foundation for a culture of critical engagement and support a level of interaction between sometimes opposing groups.

The Colectivo Montes de María Línea 21 is one of the most famous examples of media-related interventions. The organization was established in the mid-1990s by a group of journalists, teachers and community leaders as a school of community journalism for children, adolescents and women. The collective is located in the town of Carmen de Bolívar in Montes de María, a hilly region in the northern part of the country where different armed actors have competed for control and sponsored continuous massacres. In the midst of violence, and lacking local news outlets, they teach technical skills necessary to produce media and develop citizen reporting. Moreover, through media-making, the organization engages residents in acknowledging and reshaping the narratives surrounding their lives in an environment of armed conflict (Gomez and Barón-Porras 2010).

For more than two decades, thousands of residents have gone through the program and cooperated to formulate accounts about the past as well as to craft narratives of a desirable future — processes that strengthen the community’s resilience and sense of agency. In producing media with local youth, children and women, the group has emphasized the need to avoid direct confrontation with armed groups and suggested that video cameras and photography can be used as “silent testimonies” of community members’ everyday reality without the need for commentary that may lead to controversy or confrontation, or, as they put it, *Digalo sin decirlo* — “say without saying it” (Rodriguez 2008, 35).

Through production of radio shows, documentaries and written stories, the collective emphasizes the importance of “remaking” meaning and storytelling for everyday lives and the need to move beyond the realities of the conflict. By having community members work together and develop friendships, their work contributes to decrease isolation, and strengthen relationships and social trust. They also host conferences that bring together people of different backgrounds across regions, including Colombian journalists, students, community members and other organizations.

In 2006, BBC Mundo produced a series of articles and videos about the work of Montes de María Línea 21. In one of the articles, they relayed the

story of a young participant who had been displaced by the conflict. When asked about his dream during one of the collective's workshops, he expressed the desire to become a soldier to kill those who had murdered his father. Three months later, during a meeting with the country's first lady, he was asked the same question and answered that he dreamed of becoming the owner of a transportation company (BBC Mundo 2006). Media scholar Clemencia Rodriguez has conducted extensive field research in Colombia, including with the Colectivo Montes de María. She contends that through engagement with citizens' media, communities terrorized by armed groups have been able to create spaces for interaction and reshape their participation in the public realm.

Similarly, another grassroots organization, Corporación Pasolini en Medellín, emerged in 2003 in low-income areas of the city to engage at-risk youth with community media production based on the concept of "visual anthropology." The group teaches technical skills but, most important, encourages participants to investigate and portray in their productions how fellow community members live. Promoting interactions between the young producers and other residents is core to their methodology. The group forms partnerships with academics, students and social science professionals. A statement on their website reads: "We seek to strengthen ideas and emphasize critical citizenship, the recovery of memory, fostering local storytelling, intercultural and intergenerational encounters, the exploration of emerging aesthetics, and the empowerment of the communities" (Pasolini en Medellín n.d., para. 2).

A third initiative that critically engages citizens with information, although not sponsored by a media organization, is worth mentioning. The National Center for Historical Memory (Centro de Memoria Historica), an independent research organization, has been compiling, discussing and sharing the memories and testimonies of violence with the communities. The researchers from the centre travel throughout the country visiting regions where mass atrocities have taken place, such as La Chorrera, Bojayá, San Carlos, the banks of the Carare River, Valle Encantado and around Medellín, among many others. They engage with community members through workshops, interviews, exhibitions and audiovisual explorations in order to "give the voices of victims of the regions hardest

struck by the conflict a privileged position” (Centro de Memoria Historica n.d.).

By gathering personal testimonies and generating collective memories, their work produces recognition of past and present violations and contributes to ensuring that no one is invisible or forgotten. The materials compiled by the centre are disseminated through radio programs, podcasts and print publications, and made available to educational and public institutions, partners, victims and citizens in general (ibid.). One of the products of their research is the gripping documentary *There Was No Time for Sadness*, which explores the experiences of those who have survived the half-century-long conflict.¹

Through these combined methodologies, the initiative brings communities and individuals close together, provides a space for painful testimonies to emerge and creates media about the conflict that reflect local perspectives and victims’ stories. By collecting these stories in remote areas, the National Center for Historical Memory has become the sponsor of a more inclusive political memory — an essential aspect of long-term peace.

These rich examples from Colombia show that critical engagement through media can assist communities affected by atrocities to “reconstitute symbolic universes that have been disrupted by violence” (Rodriguez 2011, 396). These initiatives emerge from collaboration between professionals, citizens and research and media organizations. They acknowledge aspects of the various information ecosystems in different regions of Colombia using available resources to foster participation and reconciliation. The investigations conducted by the National Center for Historical Memory, for example, engage citizens in memory creation and produce meaningful information about the past for sharing while Pasolini en Medellín and the Colectivo Montes de María Línea 21 help participants develop technical and analytical skills that include interviewing and curating information. They encourage people to engage with each other, thereby forging bridges between the general public, academics, researchers and local media makers. When these collaborations are expanded outside of their local contexts, they can contribute to the increase of information flows between remote

communities and the centres of information, and potentially expand dialogue across geographies and populations.

SOUTH SUDAN

After decades of internal conflict between the Khartoum government and the peoples of Southern Sudan, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and then leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army John Garang signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. This agreement led to South Sudan's emergence as an independent nation in July 2011. In December 2013, however, violence between the Dinka and the Nuer groups broke out in Juba and spread to other parts of the country, thanks to factors such as "highly-ethnicized politics, the ready availability of weapons, the proliferation of armed groups, corruption, and competition for limited economic opportunities" (US Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM] n.d., para. 4). The conflict has drastically affected livelihoods, food production and access, education and health. Despite the signing of another peace agreement in September 2018, atrocities still occur, with sporadic attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers, more than 50,000 deaths, almost 2.5 million people displaced and increasing fears of genocide (USHMM n.d.).

The information landscape in South Sudan also reveals a bleak scenario: media infrastructure is nearly absent — with information flows highly concentrated around the capital, local media in the early stages of development, and state-owned TV at the service of the political interests (Forcier Consulting 2015a). The lack of media laws in the country coupled with the tight information control exercised by the government puts journalists at risk of violence and arbitrary detention. In this context, fear and self-censorship dominate news reporting (Committee to Protect Journalists 2017).

Although radio is the primary medium through which the South Sudanese population obtains information, in many communities, not having a radio handset within reach, combined with low levels of literacy, creates overwhelming barriers to information access (Internews 2017b). An assessment of audiences conducted in 2015 revealed that more than a third of the population surveyed had never come in contact with radio,

television, newspapers, internet or mobile phones in their entire lives (Forcier Consulting 2015b). Gender inequality generates even deeper marginalization within the population. The assessment also found that it is more common for women (39 percent) than for men (26 percent) to have never accessed media. Additionally, there are few women journalists to bring visibility to the specific types of violence that women suffer during conflict (ibid.).

The information needs of various groups can be immense. For example, internally displaced people need accurate information about their surroundings and their security concerns. In 2014 and 2015, Internews conducted an information needs assessment at the UN House in Juba (a United Nations Mission in South Sudan [UNMISS] peacekeeping base) that found local news was the number-one information demand among the displaced population (Internews 2017c, 19).² Further, people living in areas where the conflict is not as prevalent still require information that supports their livelihoods as well as health and education-related content in order to make daily life decisions.

In South Sudan, radio is considered the most trustworthy outlet, affecting communities through life-saving information and by promoting cultural change. In an assessment conducted by Forcier Consulting in 2015, about two-thirds (63 percent) of respondents said information received via radio helped them to stay safe at some point and 43 percent of the respondents considered that radio programming had helped them improve their views about a group of people from another area. In this context it is not surprising that the majority of survey respondents said that radio broadcasts helped to reduce conflict (67 percent) compared to those five percent who believed it would increase it (Forcier Consulting 2015b, 15).

As a report by PeaceTech Lab (2017) revealed, less than 10 percent of the population has ever accessed the internet, but online hate speech and the use of language that incites violence between the Dinka and non-Dinka groups is on the rise. Elite influencers, such as members of the military and members of the South Sudanese diaspora, are among the segments of the population who have engaged in spreading rumours and inciting violence online (ibid.).

Boda Boda Talk Talk: A Narrowcasting Experience inside UN Protected Sites

The elements of the South Sudanese information ecosystem discussed above suggest that interventions there must grapple with security concerns, restrictions in the circulation of information, censorship — whether self-imposed or official — and a very fragile infrastructure in order to fulfill basic information needs of the population. In February 2014, Internews began implementing an initiative in the UN Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites to provide humanitarian information for internally displaced populations while engaging the residents with hyper-local radio programming. PoC sites were meant to provide temporary refuge at existing UN bases, where hundreds of thousands of people had fled to when the violence started. However, nearly four years after the war began, there are still more than 200,000 people seeking shelter and safety at these sites (UNMISS 2017). The scale and permanence of PoC sites in South Sudan is considered unprecedented in UN history. As such, these places, where people are isolated and often surrounded by a hostile environment, present a unique information ecosystem.

In this context, Boda Boda Talk Talk (BBTT) was designed as a narrowcasting intervention to provide humanitarian information in local languages. The twice-weekly 25-minute audio shows are produced by people from the camps who are trained locally. The pre-recorded shows are played during gatherings of listening groups and at designated stops by loudspeakers attached to three-wheeled motorbikes. This means that only those within the camp have access to the information provided. BBTT fosters a culture of critical engagement by recruiting residents as community correspondents and through direct interaction between staff and audiences who take part in discussions following the shows. The community correspondents seek to find appropriate answers and solutions to the problems facing the community from the humanitarian partners working at the sites. This design was initially put in place to ensure that potentially antagonistic groups living in close proximity to the sites would not have access to the content and, as such, provides reassurance to the participants and builds trust between producers and the community. Over time, two of the BBTT projects moved to FM radio stations — located inside the UN base for security of the infrastructure— where they were

then able to start widening their reach to outside the PoC. BBTT has produced and broadcasted 546 programs, providing more than 200,000 displaced South Sudanese with essential information (Internews n.d.).

As a narrowcast initiative, BBTT was also designed to provide people with a safe space to discuss concerns and ideas, ask questions to local aid workers, and share personal messages, including notes about peace and opinions involving the services available to the residents living at each site. In order to work as an interactive platform, a central aspect of the initiative involves groups of up to 10 people who gather to listen to BBTT's programming together (Internews 2017a). Listening groups were conceived to engage people with information, facilitate two-way communication with humanitarian organizations working at the site, and address inequities in information access and community engagement. Women, minorities, people with disabilities and the elderly are deliberately included in the formation of groups and targeted for the distribution of radio devices. In this way, the initiative works as a platform as well as a mechanism for community members to obtain relevant information, express their concerns and views, and become critical advocates for their needs. The goal of these targeted groups is to develop spaces where people feel comfortable raising concerns and using their voice to engage critically with information, their neighbours and their surroundings. At the end of each narrowcast, a BBTT facilitator helps conduct a discussion about the content played (Internews 2015). In 2016, more than 6,600 residents participated in 700 listening groups (Internews n.d.).

This form of critical engagement with media is a way of strengthening resilience, analytical skills and the ability to manage some conflict. These instances in which people have opportunities to engage meaningfully with each other and the issues that surround their lives contribute to the rebuilding of social ties and help to defy isolation within the camps. The hope is that by constantly evaluating and helping to curate and craft the information circulating in these sites, the local population becomes better prepared to push back on potential rumours and discern the reliability of sources of information, develops a sustainable expectation of accountability toward local media and other service providers, and

becomes more likely to replicate media initiatives when the political situation allows.

Sawa Shabab: Fostering Engagement through Radio Drama

In South Sudan, about 70 percent of the population is under the age of 30. Young people live in a “precarious state” with low education and employment opportunities, immersed in violent conflict (Mercy Corps 2014). This group represents one of the most pressing information needs in the country and has the greatest potential to become influencers.

Since 2014, Free Voice South Sudan and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) have produced an interactive drama series that portrays the lives of four young South Sudanese trying to navigate daily challenges and seeking to be forces for peace in their respective communities. Currently in its third season, *Sawa Shabab* — or Together Youth — creates space for a dialogue with listeners about problems and traumas that permeate South Sudanese culture and social life, including gender inequality and conflicts that emerge between different ethnic groups (Dolan 2016). Although the show acknowledges the ongoing war, the topics addressed also involve a more normal part of a youth’s everyday life, including friendships, family life, school, relationships and prospects for the future (Free Press Unlimited 2014). A USIP publication notes that “the underlying curriculum includes a strong focus on countering stereotypes, respecting diversity and promoting gender equality” (Payne 2015, para. 5).

The episodes are translated into English, Arabic, Nuer and Dinka, and broadcast by radio stations throughout the country, making the show widely available. After each broadcast, audience members are invited to ask questions via phone calls and text messages and participate in discussions about the choices made by the characters. The engagement promoted by the show seems to have generated positive results: as reported by USIP, focus groups indicated that after listening to the show, young female participants considered “being educated as an important quality for young women” (ibid.). Awareness about the importance of gender equality among male participants has also increased. In response to a survey conducted in 2016, more than 60 percent of listeners identified the program’s focus on peacebuilding, and 99 percent of the current

listeners surveyed said they are interested in following the next season of the show. Combining drama, radio broadcast and youth participation provides audiences with a sense of ownership. On average, 150 listeners respond from across the country after each episode (Payne 2015).

By engaging youth through drama, the show takes advantage of one of the few possibilities that exist in the South Sudanese information landscape in order to intervene in the violent culture that currently permeates social relations.

Similarly to the participatory theatre initiative in Rwanda, this initiative embraces the notion that entertainment narratives help increase knowledge and change beliefs and even attitudes and behaviours. In this sense, drama opens a unique avenue for people to become observers of themselves and through this process, “to discover what is not and imagine what we could become” (Arendshorst 2005, para. 4).

#defyhatenow: Countering Online Hate Speech while Engaging People on the Ground

Another initiative related to countering violence that involves critical engagement with media in South Sudan is the project #defyhatenow — a “digital media literacy campaign for community peacebuilding” (Fielder and Kovats 2017, 375). Developed by the German based organization r0g_agency, the initiative seeks to monitor online hate speech and incitement of violence. They also provide on-the-ground responses by partnering with various civil society groups to neutralize the spread of misinformation and violent speech.

“There is the perception if you live in the West [that] you are educated and better informed,” says Achol Jok, a project manager at #defyhatenow. So, Jok says, “when [members of the diaspora] write something or say something it is difficult for people to differentiate between what is true and what is not” (Clifford 2017, para. 6). To counter the actions of these influencers, the program conducts workshops, conferences and cultural events in South Sudan where people from different backgrounds engage in discussions about hate speech, “bridging gaps of knowledge and awareness of social media mechanisms between those with access to technology and

those without” (#defyhatenow 2017, para. 3). In September 2017, for example, the group organized discussions about online and offline hate speech involving local comedians and commuters by boarding buses that travelled along different routes in the Jubek State (Bormann 2016).

In the context of mass atrocities, immense security risks and deep information needs such as those found in South Sudan, interventions have discovered ways to foster engagement through listening groups, casual conversations, radio programming and drama. At the same time, initiatives such as #defyhatenow tap into existing networks to build awareness about online speech and mobilize people on the ground. As it is nearly impossible to discuss past and ongoing atrocities openly, media-related programs are attempting to lay the groundwork to tackle broader issues such as reconciliation and justice as the political environment allows. Although the impacts of such interventions may not be readily visible, we believe that in the long term these processes of engagement contribute to the strengthening of a community’s sense of agency and resilience, especially when no other interventions are possible.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter argues that in societies where mass violence and atrocities have taken place, a culture shift toward critical engagement is crucial to help correct distortions in dialogue that have led to violence, and to achieve some level of reconciliation and sustainable peace. We suggest that during or in the aftermath of atrocities, media-related interventions should not only provide information but also help build platforms, spaces and practices that encourage interaction and critical engagement. We believe that the thoughtful incorporation of these spaces and practices contributes to create a cultural change in which discussions become part of daily lives and the population is able to reject discourses that encourage dehumanization and violent conflict. Of course, these interventions face multiple challenges, including security risks, control and circulation of information, political and social dynamics and even lack of information infrastructure.

At the strategic level, we suggest that in designing and implementing initiatives, media practitioners must carefully assess the various critical elements of the information ecosystem of any given context. Further, the information needs and concerns of the population must be at the centre of project design and implementation. The examples highlighted in this chapter are meant to illustrate creative solutions for specific challenges and to offer insights to academics and practitioners working in different information ecosystems.

A brief recap of the examples discussed here suggests, among other things, the following considerations:

- When information circulation is limited due to censorship or security concerns, it may be necessary to restrict information to what is essential for survival. In the case of BBTT in South Sudan, humanitarian information is produced and transmitted by residents of the UN protected sites, in local languages and for local residents only.
- Likewise, in post-genocide Rwanda, where broadcasting news about atrocities would have been very challenging, the newsreel project provided information and space for discussion for different groups, while creating a conversation that extended beyond each screening and location.
- BBTT and the newsreels project also demonstrate that closed environments may be the best option to provide information safely and allow for open discussions among individuals affected by violence. By employing the use of listening and discussion groups, the program furthers its goal of engaging residents and extending their participation in the local form of public sphere. These controlled environments are particularly important to encourage the participation of victims, women and other marginalized groups in dialogue.
- Training and engaging citizens to gather, curate and disseminate content, as BBTT does with community correspondents, is an effective way to provide information that matters to people's lives and to foster a culture of critical engagement. These processes potentially help

communities rebuild media structures once the political situation stabilizes.

- Media outlets that create avenues for interaction and feedback tend to be most successful in providing content that is relevant and engaging to audiences, as in the case of *Sawa Shabab* in South Sudan.
- Drama, games, storytelling and other forms of engagement with narratives provide opportunities for individuals to work together, regain social trust, learn about alternate forms of participation and reconstruct symbolic narratives, as demonstrated by the examples in Colombia.
- Recognition of the suffering of the victims as well as of their agency in resisting violence is also crucial in a post-atrocities context. This may come in the form of interactive media-making by citizens or in initiatives supported by media or research organizations such as the National Center for Historical Memory.

Similar initiatives involving engagement through media and communication platforms exist all over the world. However, there is also a long way to go before the fundamental element of critical engagement is explicitly set as a core component of interventions in contexts of mass atrocities and as a distinct point of investigation in research. Generally, participation emerges as a by-product of other core initiatives. These interventions tend to take a long time to make their results measurable, therefore, impact evaluations may not immediately show the results desired by donors. Much more research is needed to develop a coherent multidisciplinary body of literature that provides evidence of effectiveness in media interventions for critical engagement in the context of mass atrocity. In this context, academics and practitioners are instrumental in identifying problems, opportunities and successes of interventions that seek to ultimately advance a cultural shift that promotes lasting engagement.

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1 Available on YouTube, in Spanish with English subtitles, at https://youtu.be/z1jEoKlC8pg?list=PLAaTPARKqv4UX7APKhMaE3ok_2V_cuT9c.

2 The base currently hosts two civilian protection sites.



**ECHOES
OF
RWANDA**



10

“WE HAVE FAILED AS A CONTINENT”: COVERING AN AFRICAN ATROCITY FOR AN AFRICAN AUDIENCE

J. SIGURU WAHUTU

Who tells the story of African atrocities to African audiences? Whoever tells these stories plays a central role in how knowledge about an atrocity is not only constructed but disseminated. Students of sociology have long recognized the media’s part in constructing knowledge, dating back to Max Weber’s (1976) seminal speech at the first Congress of Sociologists meeting in Frankfurt in 1910, published 66 years later in the *Journal of Communication Studies*. Weber asked how the press got the information it gave to the public and “what does [the press] contribute to the making of modern man: how are the objective, supra-individual cultural values influenced, what shifts occur, what is destroyed and what is newly created to the beliefs and hopes of the masses?” (ibid., 100-01).

These questions have been mostly analyzed and answered by various media scholars in multiple disciplines. However, much of this work has

focused on how the press in the Global North have framed different international issues, especially how the media have framed the Global South. Little has been done, however, to try to understand how the press in Africa cover atrocity in Africa.¹ Citing Chuka Onwumechili and Ritchard M'Bayo (1995), Emmanuel Alozie reminds us that African media have historically “paid more attention to events outside the continent — especially those in Europe and the United States — than they did to events in Africa” (2007, 216). If we are to take Weber’s call to heart, the important task of understanding how the press in Africa report atrocity in Africa should become also an essential scholarly endeavour.

The intent of this chapter is to move this process forward. It brings to light the intricacies and challenges journalists in African countries contend with when trying to tell the story of African suffering. I rely on interviews with journalists in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, while building on prior — albeit nascent — work on African media and Darfur (see Ray 2009; Mody 2010; Alozie 2005; Wahutu 2017a; 2017b; 2018b). My analysis of the narrative construction is based on the premise that news articles are group efforts involving not only journalists but editors, sub-editors and the sources quoted in the story. Thus the question posed at the start of this chapter takes on even more significance when broken down to examine not only who covers the stories of African suffering but also, just as important, who journalists quote as sources when reporting on this suffering. This approach to studying who tells African stories is firmly established in Karl Mannheim’s (1936) assertion that scholars should not be satisfied with an undifferentiated concept of groups, even within similar social groupings. It is therefore not enough to talk about how the press cover atrocity in Africa; it is vital to dig deeper and examine how media organizations located in different countries within Africa, with their differing contextual and political realities, cover an atrocity.

This approach, recognizing differentiation in the coverage of atrocity, is epitomized in work by Joachim Savelsberg (2015), Savelsberg and Hollie Nyseth-Brehm (2015) and in my work (Wahutu 2017a). Savelsberg (2015) refers to journalist communities that have formed networks locally yet are simultaneously international by virtue of the “international composition of their participants” as “clustered local cosmopolitan media networks”

(2015, 219). These networks, Savelsberg states, are both “local and international, and thus cosmopolitan” (ibid.). Concomitantly, my work (Wahutu 2017c) on how to research media in Africa highlights the benefit of taking a more nuanced approach to analytical categories rather than relying on a monolithic “African media” category. These works highlight the observation that scholars have to reckon with, and take seriously, “the position of the national media field within the global media field” (Bourdieu 1999, 41) and also note how this affects the types of narratives formed and disseminated about events happening in Africa.

Nonetheless, calls for nuance and differentiation do not imply that one cannot conduct a cross-national analysis of how media organizations in Africa frame events such as the atrocities in Darfur. Instead, they ask us to be more cautious in our attempts to understand how media in Africa represent events in other African countries. Indeed, such analyses are not only necessary — if we are to make any real claims about the representation of Africa — but they also alert us to the need for understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by African journalists in trying to cover stories on the continent.

In this chapter, I do not seek to elucidate an “African story.” I am firmly in agreement with Sean Jacobs (2015, 73), who argues that the phrase “African story” is a “cliché of no value.” Additionally, this chapter does not analyze how media organizations in the Global North frame and represent Africa and Africans more generally, despite recent work by Toussaint Nothias (2016) and Martin Scott (2015) noting that successive waves of scholars have misunderstood even this branch of scholarship. Nor does it analyze how these media organizations specifically frame and represent genocide and atrocity in Africa. For that line of analysis, scholars such as Savelsberg (2015), Savelsberg and Nyseth-Brehm (2015), Joel Gruley and Chris Duvall (2012), Garth Myers, Thomas Klak and Timothy Koehl (1996), Ammina Kothari (2010) and Jo Ellen Fair and Lisa Parks (2001) have conducted extensive work.

DATA AND METHODS

The analysis relied on here focuses on 800 articles published in Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa between January 1, 2003, and December 31, 2008. These articles were collected and analyzed over a period of four years, starting in the fall of 2011 and ending in the summer of 2015. The newspaper analysis is coupled with interviews with journalists conducted between 2012 and 2015.² The combination of newspaper content analysis and journalist interviews allows us to put the numbers relied upon in context, as understood by journalists, while also highlighting the disjuncture between journalists' perceptions of their coverage of Darfur and the content analysis results. To code the news articles, I rely on an already present coding instrument that focuses on manifest frames rather than trying to explicate latent frames. Rodney Benson (2013, 5) describes manifest frames as working to exert the "first and uncontested level of influence." Manifest frames are therefore more likely to provide a path-dependent way for readers to interpret and understand the knowledge being constructed. Moreover, the reliance on an already available coding instrument situates this analysis within a body of current and ongoing scholarship on not only how Darfur was framed in the Global North (see Savelsberg 2015; Savelsberg and Nyseth-Brehm 2015; Zacher, Nyseth-Brehm and Savelsberg 2014), but also how it was framed in some or all of the countries analyzed here (see Wahutu 2017b; 2017c; 2018b).

NARRATING AFRICAN SUFFERING

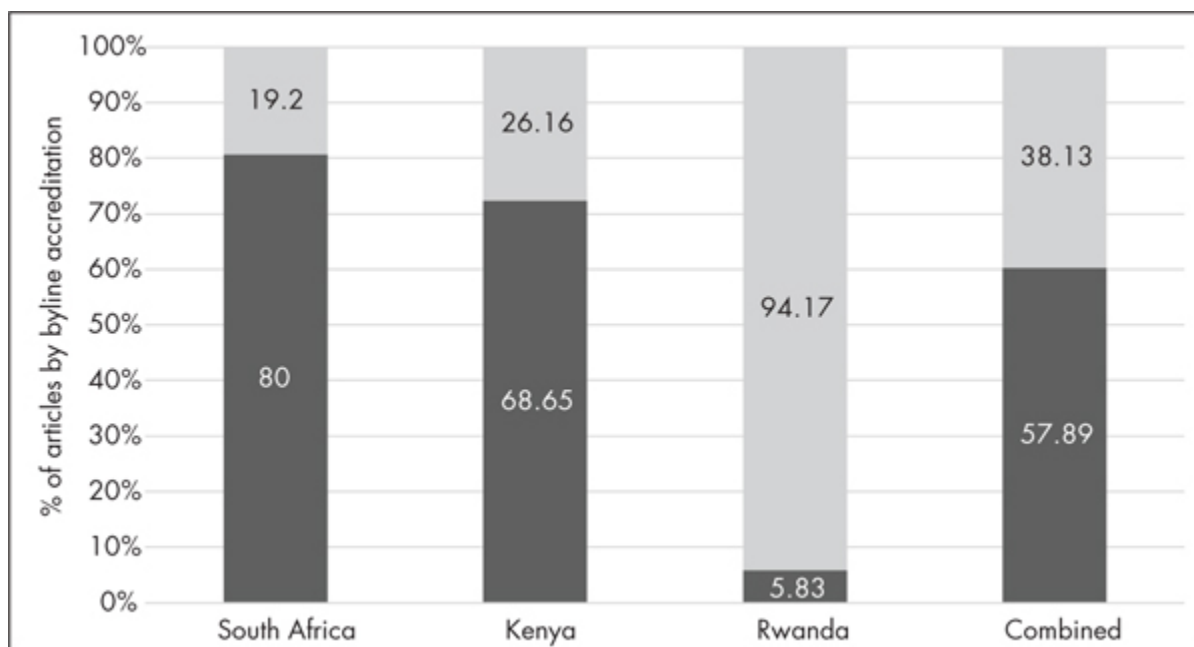
Perhaps one of the least surprising findings is, as shown in [Figure 1](#), a bifurcation of media fields in African countries (see Jacobs 2015; Styan 1999; Wahutu 2017c; Mody 2010). Thus, within a country's media field, there exist two subfields operating in contexts that hardly ever interact.

The first is the cosmopolitan media subfield. Unlike Savelsberg's (2015, 275) "cosmopolitan media networks," this particular subfield consists of journalists clustered both by nationality and by working for wire agencies. This subfield consists not just of foreign journalists but also of "local-national foreign correspondents" (Bunce 2011). The latter are African journalists who cover events in African countries for wire agencies' global audiences.

The second is the national media subfield, which is made up of local journalists who work for local national news organizations.

The extent of this bifurcation is evidenced in the numbers. Between 2004 and 2005, when coverage of Darfur was gathering momentum globally, Kenya had only 24.87 percent of its coverage credited to journalists in the national media subfield compared to 70.99 percent lifted from wire agencies (Wahutu 2017c, 7; Savelsberg and Siguru 2017). As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), the first number increases to 26.16 percent and the second decreases to 68.65 percent when the time frame is 2003 to 2008. [Figure 1](#) also reveals that when looking at the three countries together, that is, Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa, the national media subfield is credited with 38.13 percent of coverage compared to the cosmopolitan media subfield's 57.89 percent. A Kenyan journalist summed up the impact of essentially lifting stories from the wire services like this: "That is actually the failing of the media in this continent. Where is your credibility going to be? Ten years from now, 20 years from now, somebody reading what *The New York Times* published in the *Standard* or the *Nation* or *Mail & Guardian*, what perceptions will they have about the media in the continent? We have failed as a continent" (interview with journalist, Kenya 2012).

Figure 1: News Coverage on Darfur Credited to National and Cosmopolitan Media Subfields, 2003–2008



Note: Totals do not add up to 100 percent, since articles without a byline are not included.

Key: Light grey is national media subfields; dark grey is cosmopolitan media subfields.

An editor for a South African news organization justified the reliance of the cosmopolitan media subfield in that country for its Darfur coverage: “We are at the mercy of our readers. So we don’t ignore the crisis altogether, that would be irresponsible, but we don’t necessarily want to spend exorbitant money on something which we know our readers are not interested in” (interview with an editor, South Africa 2012, cited in Wahutu 2017a, 922).

Although some editors argue that this reliance on the cosmopolitan media subfield is mostly the result of limited resources, among rank-and-file journalists this economic explanation is deemed insufficient (Wahutu 2017a). Journalists view this reliance as anchored in a colonial mindset that sees Western journalists and organizational coverage as being “better.” This preference is even more evident in instances where media houses send in-house journalists to cover events only to eventually publish reports by the cosmopolitan subfield instead of those by in-house journalists. A Kenyan journalist narrated his experience of travelling to cover a negotiation meeting on Darfur only to find that the story he had filed had been rejected: “The following day what do you see? You see there’s a story from Reuters, yours has been killed, and if you look at even

the stuff that has come from Reuters, it's very sketchy. Yet you are here, you took your time, and even interviewed people on the sidelines of that conference and they still go ahead and pick Reuters. And then we also have this mentality. We have this mentality that foreign media is the best you know, until they bash us" (interview with a journalist, Kenya 2015).

One journalist I interviewed (Wahutu 2018b) spoke about the preference for stories by the cosmopolitan media subfield over those by in-house journalists. "It's a practice that goes on in the newsroom, and it frustrates most reporters. If you come across most reporters, they are very frustrated" (interview with a journalist, Kenya 2015). That this sense of frustration is not misplaced is highlighted in [Figure 1](#), which reveals that the cosmopolitan media subfield's role in shaping the narrative on Darfur is significantly larger than the role of national media fields in these three countries combined. Even within the cosmopolitan media subfield, the knowledge production labour is not equally shared among the various organizations that make up this subfield. The dominant player in this subfield is Reuters news organization, which is credited with 37.59 percent of the coverage over the five years studied here.

What organizations in the cosmopolitan media subfield have managed to do, moreover, is become the primary arbiters of what counts as international news and thus what is worth knowing for multiple domestic markets in Africa. What we have in these three countries is a process through which the media fields in these countries are not what Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) refer to as "incumbents" within the global media field's construction of knowledge about an atrocity in Africa. A Kenyan journalist captured this latter point when he described this imbalance as leading to the national media not being in control of the narrative (interview with a journalist, Kenya 2015).

WHO IS ANOINTED A CREDIBLE SOURCE?

Results from [Figure 1](#) lead to questions about who is quoted as a source. In the "hierarchy of credibility" (Becker 1967), where do African voices fall? This is especially important since the news is often not what happened but what "someone said happened, thus making the choice of sources crucial"

(Sigal 1973, 69). Herbert J. Gans (1979) discussed the relationship between journalists and sources, generally, as crucial in determining what is important for the audience. Moreover, Rodney Benson (2006, 196) views political sources, specifically, as “largely” determining “what is important.” The importance of state actors is even more critical during moments of uncertainty, such as when covering an ongoing atrocity (Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2008; Pedelty 1995). As was explained by an editor in Nigeria, “We rely on official sources, from the government and especially for the military. They brief regularly, and even though sometimes some people doubt these things, at least you have official information from them” (interview with a journalist, Nigeria 2015).

The news is thus a product of negotiation between journalists and sources, making source selection an implicit anointment of a source as having knowledge worth sharing (Rosen 1999; Schudson 2011; Pedelty 1995). As illustrated in [Table 1](#), although sources from Sudan are the largest group of voices African audiences heard from, only minimal non-Sudanese African sources were quoted to act as a counter-balance. [Table 1](#) also reveals that in Kenya and South Africa, more American voices were present in the coverage than voices from Kenya or South African respectively. In Kenya, voices from Kenyan sources account for only 1 percent of the total number of sources quoted, compared to American sources, who account for 16.2 percent. In South Africa, South African sources accounted for a mere four percent, compared to American sources, who account for 14.5 percent.

Rwanda, however, provides a cautionary note about over-generalizing who is quoted in the various media fields. Rwandan sources account for 53 percent of the sources cited, with Sudanese sources being the second-most quoted group of sources at 12.5 percent. There is nonetheless one caveat necessary to understand Rwanda’s approach regarding who is quoted. Rwanda’s coverage of Darfur centred primarily on the actions of its military personnel attached to the Africa Union peacekeeping force. Most of those quoted were therefore military personnel: Major Jill Rutaremara (the military spokesperson) was quoted 48 times, which is 16 times more than the defence secretary and 12 times more than President Paul Kagame was quoted over the same period.

How do the findings of [Table 1](#) relate to analysis of sources quoted by journalists in the national media subfield compared to their counterparts in the cosmopolitan media subfield? Out of a total of 237 sources quoted by the former, Sudanese sources still play a crucial role and account for 39 percent, while Kenyan sources accounted for 3 percent, and American and British sources account for 19 and 6 percent respectively (Wahutu 2018a). One may expect roughly similar patterns in South Africa, since [Table 1](#) points to it having a similar profile to Kenya in selection of sources.

Table 1: Sources Quoted in News Coverage on Darfur by National Media in Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda

	Sudanese	Kenyan	South African	Rwandan	American	English
Kenya	35.4%	.9%	.9%	.9%	16.2%	3.7%
South Africa	31.1%	.4%	4%	.8%	14.5%	3.7%
Rwanda	12.5%	1.1%	.5%	52.7%	4.1%	1.6%
	31.9%	.9%	1.4%	7.2%	14.6%	3.4%

Note: These numbers are based on the number of times sources were quoted in all three countries, out of a total of 1,516 sources. American and English sources are quoted with the most regularity in all three countries.

Journalists explain the significant presence of Sudanese state actors as a by-product of the Sudanese government providing journalist junkets to far-flung places in Darfur: “Take [a] trip where the government says these are the people we are rehabilitating so you can speak to them. In most cases they [those in camps] will be tutored, they will be told this is what you can say. So that is one of the difficulties of covering these regions when you don’t have resources” (interview with a journalist, Kenya 2015).

Journalists also explain it as a function of the Sudanese embassy being media savvy enough to provide constant media briefings to them on a regular basis: “I used to have a lot of contacts of the Sudan embassy. So I had a lot of documents from them and they included me in their mailing system so anything happening in South Sudan or in Khartoum

administration I used to get. They send the information and the write up, I critically analyze, have a look at them, and I go back to them. Then, in case it is something that needs an interview, I sit with the relevant person. In this case they had a press attaché” (interview with a journalist, Kenya 2015).

This reliance on Sudanese state actors shows that, as a practical matter, African voices played a significant role in influencing the narrative on Darfur. It signals the need for a shift in critiques, from focusing on a silencing of African voices to a closer analysis of the *types* of African voices heard and not heard.

Further, although journalists in the national media subfields were quick to rebuke the reliance on wire services, when it came to choosing who to quote as an alternative to the Sudanese state actors accused of perpetrating the atrocities, they consistently favoured non-African sources. They all gravitated toward American and British voices, the same voices they were quick to denounce as not understanding African realities and contexts. These American and British sources were anointed as being capable of making Darfur understandable for an African audience by the national media subfield. This is particularly interesting in light of findings by Nothias (2016, 12–13) that journalists in France and the United Kingdom, over a five-year period, quoted as many or even more African state actors than French and English state actors respectively.

THE FRAMING OF DARFUR

In a 2017 article for *African Affairs* (Wahutu 2017b), I found that the press in Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda framed the atrocities in Darfur in largely similar ways. This particular finding is not surprising in and of itself, because journalists have to contend with narrative genres that are limited and which work to constrict not only the types of frames but also the levels of innovation in narrative construction (Savelsberg and King 2007). My more recent work (Wahutu 2018a) on how both subfields framed Darfur points nonetheless to some unusual patterns in constructing knowledge about atrocities in these three countries. Perhaps one of the more surprising findings is that the national media subfields consistently

framed Darfur as primarily a crime, in much the same way that media fields in the Global North did, as analyzed by Savelsberg (2015, 236), whereas the cosmopolitan media subfield framed it as a civil war. In fact, despite protestations by both journalists and observers of African representations, national media subfields more resembled media fields in the Global North in their choice of primary frame than did the cosmopolitan media subfield.

All three countries — Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda — used the ethnic conflict frame to discuss the atrocities in Darfur. The protagonists in the conflicts were invariably referred to as either “black African” or “Arab/Muslim.” A focus on byline accreditation reveals that national media subfields often employed this frame in much the same way as did the cosmopolitan media subfields in each of the three countries. Within Kenya, this frame was the fourth-most used frame by journalists in both subfields; in South Africa, this frame was the third-most cited frame by both; and in Rwanda it was the second-most cited frame by journalists in the national media subfield and the first cited frame by the cosmopolitan media subfield (Wahutu 2018a).

This ethnic conflict frame performs three functions when used by African journalists. The first is that it works to domesticate the conflict by relying on already sedimented knowledge among African audiences about identity formation. This domestication is supported by the premise that for an event to be understood as newsworthy, as Michael Gurevitch, Mark Levy, and Itzhak Roeh (1991) remind us, it has to fit within a framework that is recognizable to the audience. Thus, a reliance on ethnicity to talk about the atrocities — and the protagonists involved — is situated within an understanding of identity and identity formation in African societies (see Albaugh 2016).

The second function of this frame is based on knowing that the national media subfields in the three countries have a nuanced understanding of ethnic identities. When asked about the role of ethnicity in Darfur, a Nigerian journalist responded, “It’s a factor, religion is a factor as well. Religion shapes ethnicity” (interview with a journalist, Nigeria 2015). This approach alerts us that, as far as African journalists are concerned,

ethnicity does not always have a path-deterministic relationship with violence, as some journalists in the Global North have sometimes suggested (Wahutu 2017b, 16-17).

The third point is that this ethnic conflict frame works to create a sense of shared affinity between the victims and the audience in Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda while othering those framed as Arab/Muslim as being radically different. This explanation is one that was more present during my interviews with journalists. In both Kenya and South Africa, journalists often viewed Sudan as not “real Africa.” A Kenyan journalist went as far as to describe the Sudanese state in Khartoum as “brown colonizers.” In this regard, the use of this frame in these three countries is a conscious political project rooted in who is considered African and who is not (see Wahutu 2017b). Black African and Arab/Muslim thus become exclusive and fossilized identities rather than maintaining their fluidity and porous boundaries as has historically been the case (Prunier 2008; Mamdani 2010). Moreover, framing the Janjaweed as “Arab militia” implicitly connects them to the “global war on terror” discourse while tapping into already present misgivings and prejudices against Arabs and Muslims both outside and within Africa.

DISCUSSION

To this chapter’s motivating question — who tells the story of African atrocities to African audiences? — the answer is, simply, not Africans. [Table 1](#) points to a preference for American and English sources while [Figure 1](#) points to the marginal role played by the national media subfield in constructing knowledge about Darfur for African audiences. It would be easy to read the results in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#) and the sentiments highlighted by journalists quoted here as signalling a failure. This critique would not be far off the mark considering the results in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#). [Table 1](#) points to a distinctly individual failure, since decisions as to who to quote are largely made by individual journalists, making this particular failure one that rests on the shoulders of African journalists. [Figure 1](#) points to more organizational failures, brought about by the bifurcation of the media fields into two subfields, and where the

cosmopolitan media subfield plays what is perhaps an outsized role in the knowledge construction process.

I, however, want to push back against this reading of the results as markers of “failure” in the normative sense. I suggest that the coverage of Darfur in the countries analyzed here is at the intersection of seemingly restrictive “rules of the game” and the following of these rules by journalists. This latter process solidifies these rules and renders them stable. One effect of the rules of the game is the convergence toward global normative approaches in deciding who is a credible source when constructing knowledge about an event. Both subfields heavily favoured state actors as their primary sources, with Sudanese state actors playing a pivotal role in shaping how the narrative on Darfur was constructed by the media fields in each country. By being the group most quoted, Sudanese state actors presented the atrocities as an internal matter and one that did not call for foreign intervention. The result of this is the civil war frame being the dominant frame used by the cosmopolitan media subfield, which, due to its outsized role (see [Figure 1](#)), affects how Darfur was framed at the aggregate level.

It is evident, however, that this preference for state actors as sources has also led to the marginalization of non-Sudanese African voices in the knowledge construction process. Journalists in the various national media subfields analyzed here all do have a choice in who they chose as a source. Journalists in the national media subfields have played an active role in relegating African narratives about atrocity in Africa to the periphery and in reproducing Western narratives about events such as Darfur. In this sense, the Kenyan journalist’s lament is correct, and yet it is incomplete in its articulation of failing. Although the journalist is right in summing up the role of editors in deciding to publish narratives lifted from the cosmopolitan media subfield, as highlighted in [Figure 1](#), he misses the point that local journalists have also played a part in the marginalization process. This chapter has shown that, at the individual level, journalists in the national media subfield are active participants in marginalizing African voices when they chose to quote others as alternative voices to the Sudanese state actors. The presence of American voices continues to subliminally reinforce the idea of a Western saviour, normalizing a

stereotype of Africans as needing to be saved, and whose pain can be explained only by non-African voices.

This chapter has demonstrated that national media fields in African countries do not differ much from media fields in the Global North. This convergence appears both in who is used as a source and in how they framed Darfur (Wahutu 2017b, 2018b). Furthermore, it has shown the extent to which the construction of knowledge about atrocity in Africa is an uneven playing field and highlighted the central role played by actors from the Global North, none more influential than Reuters, in shaping our understanding about Darfur. This chapter has also challenged current understandings of media scholarship that suggest that factors such as “affinity” — in this case, a shared “African” identity — regionalism and national interests are related to high news flows (see Skurnik 1981; Meyer 1989; Atwood 1985; Benson 2013). [Figure 1](#) and my ongoing work (Wahutu 2018b) point to this not being the case in African nations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a comparative approach to understanding the knowledge construction process occurring within African media organizations about mass atrocity. Building on prior and ongoing work in the field of media, genocide and mass atrocity in Africa, it points to the contours within which the knowledge construction process occurs. The findings show the challenges faced by African journalists in their pursuit to maintain control of narratives about atrocity in Africa, while pointing out the role played by African journalists in marginalizing African voices in this construction process.

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- 1 The few exceptions are Alozie (2005, 2007), Mody (2010), Ray (2009), Savelsberg and Siguru (2017), and Wahutu (2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018b).
 - 2 In line with Institutional Review Board standards, all interviews were confidential and interviewee names are withheld by mutual agreement.



11

JOURNALISM ON DARFUR BETWEEN SOCIAL FIELDS: GLOBAL AND NATIONAL FORCES

JOACHIM J. SAVELSBERG

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and provides preliminary explanations on patterns of media representations of the violent conflict that unfolded in the Darfur region of Sudan in the first decade of the twenty-first century. I draw first on the Darfur media data set, created with my research team and based on content analysis of 3,387 articles and editorials from leading newspapers in eight European and North American countries (see Savelsberg 2015, 21–27). These data tell us when newspapers began reporting about Darfur and how the number of reports, the depiction of suffering and the framing of violence changed over time. They also speak to the effect of interventions by actors from surrounding social fields. Clearly, outside pressures to which the journalistic field is exposed are substantial. They include media markets, agendas of political actors, and information

dependency on judicial, humanitarian and diplomatic fields. Patterns reveal similarities and differences across countries. Interviews with Africa correspondents, other journalists and actors in surrounding fields, the second source of data, help make sense of these patterns (ibid., 19–21, 205–221).

Findings speak to the position of journalism in fields of power (Bourdieu 1998; Benson 1998; 2006; Revers 2014), and they add to past research and journalistic self-reflections on reporting about mass violence in Africa (Allen and Eaton 1999; Crilly 2010; McNulty 1999; Mody 2010; Ray 2009; Thompson ed. 2011).

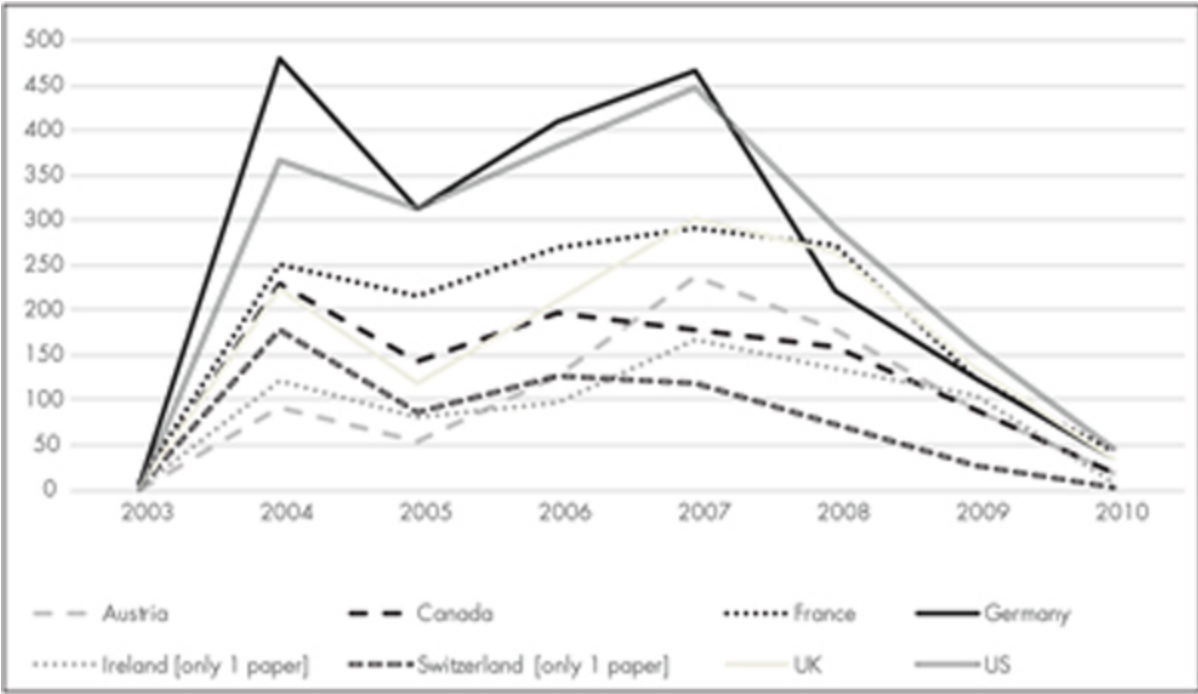
INTENSITY OF REPORTING: THE JOURNALISTIC VIS-À-VIS THE POLITICAL FIELD AND MEDIA MARKETS

How much attention did media in different countries pay to the mass violence in Darfur, and how did the intensity of reporting change over time? [Figure 1](#) depicts the number of media reports over time by years of the conflict and by country. Numbers in this figure reflect the entire population of articles about Darfur that my research team identified in 14 leading newspapers and from which we drew a sample of 3,387 articles for detailed analysis. The different graph lines distinguish trends by country. It is instructive to follow these lines year by year.

Note first that shifts in the intensity of reporting developed in almost perfect unison. Years with peaks in the number of articles in one country experience the same peaks in the other countries. This is in line with factors in Africa journalism that also generated homogeneity in other respects, such as descriptions of suffering. Such factors include the concentration of correspondents in only a few African locations, Nairobi and Johannesburg prominently among them, the resulting network structures, a reliance on information provided by international organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and the attention paid to leading media with substantial resources such as the BBC, CNN and *The New York Times*.

Yet the intensity of reporting varies considerably across countries. The lines for Germany and the United States by far exceed those of the other countries. For the United States, this is consistent with the massive civil society movement surrounding the Darfur issue, paralleled by the particularly outspoken engagement of government actors. For Germany, the higher level of reporting corresponds with that country’s articulation of special historical responsibility.¹ The frequency of reporting in US and German newspapers is followed by papers in the United Kingdom and France, the former colonial powers over Sudan and neighbouring Chad respectively. Given that only one newspaper was analyzed for Ireland, the Irish intensity of reporting also stands out, in line with the substantial humanitarian engagement of Irish aid NGOs and the Irish government in Darfur.²

Figure 1: Number of Articles on Darfur Appearing in 14 Northern Newspapers by Country Over Time



Beyond the overall volume of reporting, the specific cycles of media reports about Darfur across periods pose puzzles. Virtually no reports appeared in 2003 even though the first massive wave of killings and displacements unfolded between the months of April and September of

that year. (For similar media silence in the case of Rwanda, see Chaon 2007.)

The second wave of killings took place between December 2003 and April 2004. Media then began to take notice and, later in 2004, the intensity of reporting reaches high levels.³ Significantly, this time the violence was accompanied by highly visible civil society and political responses. In December 2003, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special envoy Tom Eric Vraalsen reported that the government of Sudan denied humanitarian access to Darfur. In January 2004, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum issued a "genocide alert" for Darfur. In February, *The Washington Post* published an op-ed piece by scholar-activist Eric Reeves (2004) on the violence in Darfur, and one month later *The New York Times* followed with an op-ed by Nicholas Kristof (2004).⁴ Only one month after Kristof's op-ed, Kofi Annan delivered a speech before the UN General Assembly on the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. By late summer of 2004, the George W. Bush administration began using the term genocide and, in September 2004, the UN Security Council (UNSC) charged the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (ICID) to report about the violence.

Some journalist interviewees revealed that the political field generally, the United Nations specifically and human rights NGOs indeed played a central role in sparking journalistic engagement. A distinguished Africa correspondent told me: "When first messages about a new war in Sudan appeared in 2003, I initially did not take that so seriously. Yet when the commemorative events unfolded on the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and Kofi Annan and others said, 'We will no longer tolerate this,' then I also decided to take this conflict seriously, and I travelled there" (translation).⁵

In another case, communication between a paper's foreign editor and a high-ranking politician with access to a repressed UN report had opened the path for front-page reporting. My interviewee from that paper received permission to travel to Chad to investigate, and contributions soon

appeared at a rapid pace. Such intensification of reporting contributed to the flood of journalistic interest in Darfur in 2004 (see [Figure 1](#)).

After a slight drop in 2005, reporting increased again to reach a second peak in 2006 in six of the eight countries. What may have motivated this intensification in reporting about Darfur? Public health researchers inform us that, between the middle of 2006 and late 2007, “because of insecurity, the number of internally displaced people increased by about 40 per cent (from 1,717,092 to 2,387,594); concomitantly, and partly as a result of reduced funding, the number of humanitarian aid workers decreased from 14,751 to 12,112 by July, 2007 (i.e., 29 aid workers for every 100,000 people affected)” (Degomme and Guha-Sapir 2010, 296). Insecurity intensified especially when, in May 2006, the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed but failed. This setback was followed by a new offensive by the Sudanese military in August 2006. This time, events on the ground were accompanied by political and civil society actions.

In the United States, in October 2006, President George W. Bush signed into law the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (H.R. 3127/S. 1462). The act confirmed the government’s position that the violence in Darfur constituted genocide. It also instructed the government to assist the International Criminal Court (ICC) in its pursuit of the responsible actors — despite the United States’ continued refusal to ratify the Rome Statute. This signing into law was preceded by a massive Save Darfur demonstration in Washington in April 2006. While these domestic US events may have contributed to an increasing volume of American media reports, it is unlikely that they would have equally raised the number of reports in the other countries. Instead, global interventions are more likely to have intensified attention across countries. Such interventions included the February 2007 application for and the April issuing of an arrest warrant against Ahmed Harun and Ali Kushayb at the ICC and UNSC Resolution 1769 of July 2007, authorizing the establishment of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur, the UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping mission for Darfur.

[Figure 1](#) shows further that the final peak in the intensity of reporting, registered in 2007, is followed by a massive and steady decline in each of

the subsequent three years. By 2010, the number of reports is barely above the minimal level of 2003. This decline occurs despite continuing suffering in Darfur (Degomme and Guha-Sapir 2010, 296) and the ICC's decision to file charges against President Omar al-Bashir.

Interview materials suggest several potential explanations for the decline in reporting. Consider journalism's political environment, especially impediments imposed increasingly by the Sudanese government. A German Africa correspondent speaks to difficulties in obtaining visas for Sudan from his seat in Nairobi. A British journalist reports about his May-June 2004 visit to Sudan and the extended period of waiting in Khartoum ("much of the month") before receiving travel permits to Darfur. The same journalist decided later to travel to Chad to spare the political-bureaucratic hurdles set up by the government of Sudan. Another British journalist similarly reported about being stuck in expensive Khartoum for "a couple" of weeks before receiving a permit to travel to Darfur.

This quote from an insider's book, authored by Rob Crilly (2010, 7–9), a British Africa correspondent, provides a lively illustration:

It felt good to be in Khartoum at last. For a year, I had potted back and forth to the Sudanese embassy in Nairobi enquiring as politely as I could whether my visa was ready for collection.... But arriving in Khartoum was just the start of the journey to Darfur. Each foreigner has to first register with the Police Department of Aliens....After the Department of Aliens came the Department of Foreign Correspondents and Journalists.... Now came the tricky part of obtaining permission to work as a journalist — filling in the "Purpose of Visit" section on my application for a press permit for Darfur....But how to phrase "reporting on genocide" in a way that would be acceptable to the very regime responsible?

None of these bureaucratic hurdles was easy to take. In addition, once journalists succeeded in accessing the field, their mobility was further inhibited.⁶ These challenges to journalistic work prevailed throughout the

reporting period. Yet, after 2007, Khartoum imposed further restrictive policies toward foreign journalists, thus likely contributing to the massive decline in reporting. In the words of a Swiss interviewee: “Today Khartoum barely allows any journalists to go there” (translation).

However, not only direct access to the field worsened. Other sources of information also dried up. Some aid agencies, including three sections of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders), had been evicted after the indictment of al-Bashir. In addition, aid agencies became ever more cautious in light of the risk of being denied access to the populations in need. After all, the evictions were partly based on claims by the Government of Sudan that aid agencies had abandoned their commitment to neutrality norms, instead supplying the ICC with information on which charges could be based.⁷

Market forces added to political impediments. It was not favourable for journalistic attention that, after 2007, the situation on the ground in Darfur showed no major change, nor that the international community was partially deadlocked. Demands by consumers of news media obviously matter, especially among market-driven media, and this pattern is not unique to reporting about violent conflicts.

Political pressures thus coincided with the economic forces of the media market. The common cycle of news reporting, with its focus on that which is new and dramatic, added to the decline in media attention about the ongoing suffering in Darfur. It is likely that the decline would have been even more abrupt without interventions by the ICC. This provokes the question of how, specifically, juridical forces affected the journalistic field. If they could not prevent the decline of attention, could they affect the substance of reporting? What were their opportunities and constraints? What cultural receptivity did they encounter?

THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD, THE JUDICIAL FIELD AND THE LEGAL COLOURING OF REPORTS

Some scholars and practitioners stress the effect of the legal sphere on journalistic reporting. For example, Michael Kearny, at the 2011 Asser

Institute conference on war journalism in The Hague, showed how war reporting is increasingly permeated by the language of human rights and international law, often at the expense of political analysis. This trajectory from political to legal categories leads through diverse mechanisms, among them NGO informants, who — in Kearny’s words — “hijack the language of law” or seek to “mainstream the language of human rights.” (Quotations from notes taken at conference.)⁸ Several interviewees, especially diplomats and NGO specialists with political science backgrounds, supported this assessment. In a historical case study, Devin O. Pendas’ (2006) analysis of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial shows how rules of the journalistic game, especially the objectivity rule, contributed to a literal transmission of courtroom events through media reporting to a broad public. The focus of trials was reflected in media reporting. It was on individuals and their criminal intent rather than on structural forces and bureaucratic processes, and on atrocities driven by malicious intent rather than on routinized killing machines (see also Marrus 2008; Savelsberg and King 2011).

Both interviews and patterns displayed by the Darfur media data set (Savelsberg 2015, 21–27) speak to the relationship between journalism and the judicial field, displaying a complex picture. On the one hand, Africa correspondents generally report a substantial disconnect from the court. A German interviewee from Nairobi tells me that he has never been to The Hague. Similarly, a British respondent claims not to receive any information directly from the ICC. He learns about special events such as indictments only from other sources. An Irish journalist similarly confesses that he knows about the ICC and its actions primarily as a newspaper reader. One interviewee tells me that wire reports inform him about big events at the ICC.

Some journalists who do report interactions with the court experience conditions of the judicial field that are not compatible with their journalistic habitus. One journalist, when asked “Is the ICC a source of information for you in any way?” responded in the negative.

In no way at all. And I really find that rather regrettable. I had occasional contacts with ICC investigators, but that was

in the context of the Congo, East Congo, and the DFLR [Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda], those Rwandan militias, and how they acquire funding. These people wanted information from me. I am a journalist. I told them, “One hand washes the other. You can get something from me, give me something of yours, and then we can talk reasonably in what way that can be published at all without endangering your work.” I never heard from them again. Yet, it would be interesting to learn how often the term International Criminal Court is now being used in media reporting. Very often. At the same time, we know that those who report about it know nothing about this criminal court, because this court shuts itself off. That is a pity (translation).

This quotation illustrates how communication is impeded not just by geographic distance between Africa correspondents and the ICC, but also by a different habitus and contrasting rules of the game. The journalist’s tit-for-tat practice does not work in interactions with others who are bound by judicial rules. Another interviewee, an Africa correspondent who works out of the capital city of his European country, reports about additional communicative hurdles: “I’ve been there [ICC in The Hague] once. And it was useless in fact... Their time is not our time. It is not the same... It is years.” This journalist contrasts the slow progress of judicial proceedings with the fast pace of journalistic work. Additional problems include the need to explain to domestic readers the institutional particularities of an international court: “We have the problem that the judicial system used in The Hague is not the French one. So we have to explain to people how it works.”

In short, Africa correspondents have little interaction with the ICC, and the interaction they do have is marred by problems. They are not the only contributors to journalistic work about Darfur, however. A German Africa correspondent referred me to a colleague who works from his paper’s headquarters; while not specialized in Africa, he does visit the courts. Similarly, a US journalist speaks about her paper’s specialist for institutions such as the ICC who occasionally supplies her with relevant

information. One interviewee who covers international organizations from her European capital city speaks about an upcoming trip to The Hague. Finally, a British correspondent reports, and his foreign editor confirms, that the paper will send someone to The Hague “for the big day.” And such “big days” indeed find many journalists gathered in the ICC’s press room.

Given the ICC’s ambivalent role in its relationship with journalists, how do judicial interventions affect media representations of Darfur? Our data demonstrate that several intervention points — but not all — are intensely reflected in journalistic reporting. [Figure 2](#) displays the percentage of articles about Darfur per period that cite the crime frame (depiction of the violence as a form of criminal violence) compared to three competing frames. The graph shows that increases in the crime frame follow the release of the *Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General* (ICID 2004), the application for an arrest warrant related to Darfur by the ICC prosecutor (against Harun and Kushayb), the application for an arrest warrant against Bashir and finally a first court appearance. It loses ground during periods that are marked by UNSC Resolution 1564 (establishing the ICID) and the UNSC’s referral of the Darfur situation to the ICC. The latter action, significantly, was followed by a major diplomatic event — the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, also known as the Abuja Agreement — the preparation and echo of which appear to have overwhelmed uses of the crime frame. Articles favoured instead the use of the civil war or armed conflict frame during this period as the respective lines indicate. Another, but this time surprising and unexplained, drop in the use of the crime frame occurs after the ICC issued the first major arrest warrants (against Harun and Kushayb).

Figure 2: Percentage of Newspaper Documents on Darfur, Using the Crime, Civil War, Humanitarian Emergency and Aggressive-state Frames, by Time Period

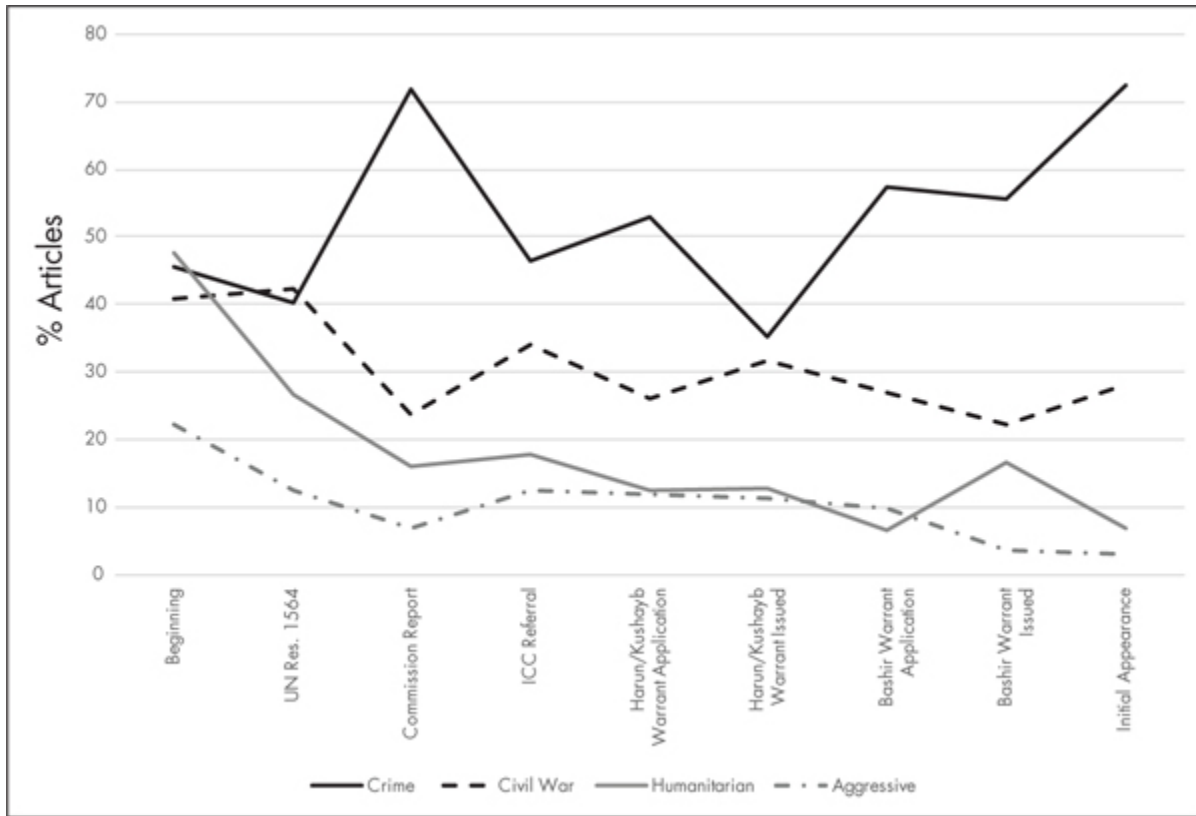
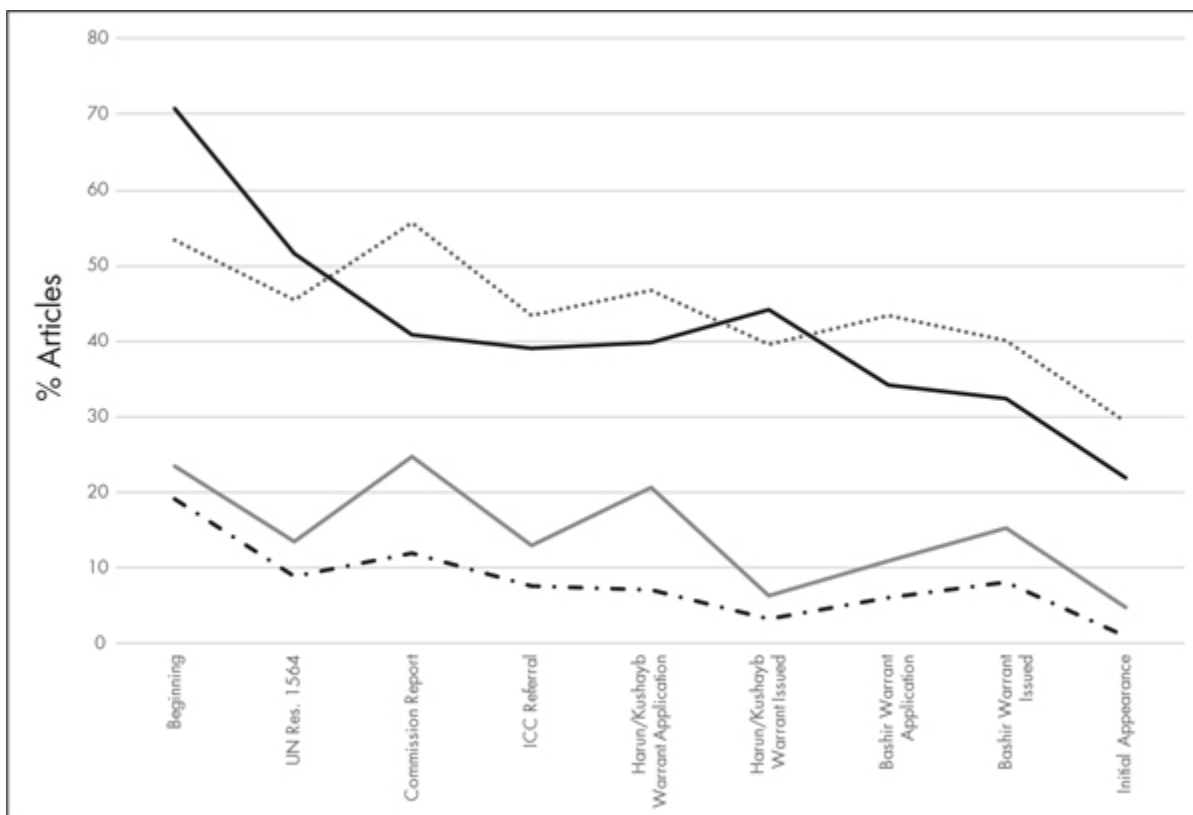


Figure 3 shows similarly that references to particular types of violence peak at similar stages as does the use of the crime frame. Specifically, reporting about killings and rapes peaks when use of the crime frame also reaches its highest levels. The reporting of destruction of livelihood and displacements, on the other hand, declines steadily, barely interrupted by judicial interventions.

What exactly does the changing intensity of reporting the crime frame and specific types of victimization mean? How can it be explained? Figure 2 shows that the first major peak in citations of the crime frame follows the release of the ICID report in January 2005, paralleled by a peak in intensity of reporting about killings and rapes (Figure 3). This may not be surprising, as the commission had diagnosed instances of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Not only did all papers intensify reporting about Darfur after February 1, 2005, the day of the report’s release to the public, they also now stressed the crime frame and reminded readers of the suffering of the population. The following quote from an article written by Warren Hoge of *The New York Times* illustrates how a US paper communicated the ICID report to its readers: “A United Nations

commission investigating violence in the Darfur region of Sudan reports Monday that it had found a pattern of mass killings and forced displacements of civilians that did not constitute genocide but that represented crimes of similar gravity that should be sent to the International Criminal Court for prosecution” (Hoge 2005).

Figure 3: Percentage of Newspaper Documents Referencing Different Types of Suffering and Victimization, by Time Period



The article is followed, on February 2, 2005, by an op-ed by Nicholas Kristof (2005) entitled “Why Should We Shield the Killers?,” critiquing the initial inclination of the Bush administration to challenge a UNSC referral of the Darfur situation to the ICC. Also on February 2, 2005, Lydia Polgreen of *The New York Times* writes on how “Both Sides of Conflict in Darfur Dispute Findings in U.N. Report” (Polgreen 2005). Later, Warren Hoge reports again, this time about Sudanese attempts to prevent international prosecution. On February 10, 2005, Samantha Power, then a “lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard,” uses an op-ed in *The New York Times* supporting the ICC as a “Court of First Resort” and

arguing for a referral of Darfur to the court (Power 2005). More than a dozen articles and editorials follow in the remainder of February 2005, supplemented by numerous letters to the editor.

The New York Times is not alone. The German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* features — on February 2, 2005 — an article by Arne Perras about the ICID report. It is entitled: “Crimes in Darfur: The United Nations charge the Sudanese power holders and demand they be punished” and “The Masters of the Death Riders,” with a summary sentence: “A UN report proves that the government in Khartoum positioned the militias in West Sudan” (Perras 2005, translation). Another dozen articles follow in February alone. Opinions clearly support a referral of the situation to the ICC. In France, on February 2, 2005, *Le Monde* reprints segments of the commission report under the headline: “‘Action is a matter of urgency.’ The UN does not determine genocide but denounces crimes against humanity in Darfur” (Cassese 2005, translation). On the same day, correspondent Corine Lesne contributes a lengthy report on the Commission’s conclusions. Some 10 articles follow still in February.

In the United Kingdom, *The Guardian*’s February 1, 2005, report by “diplomatic editor” Ewen MacAskill (2005a) is entitled “Sudan’s Darfur crimes not genocide, says UN report.” Yet MacAskill (2005b) follows up on February 2, 2005, with a piece headlined “Sudan risks sanctions as UN lists atrocities.” He opens the editorial thus: “The Sudanese government could be hit by UN sanctions after the publication yesterday of a 244-page report on the Darfur crisis which detailed horrific and widespread crimes against humanity, including the systematic use of rape as a weapon of terror.” The number of subsequent articles is smaller than in the other papers, while several reviews of the film *Hotel Rwanda* build analogical bridges between the Rwandan genocide and events in Darfur. On February 16, 2005, for example, Africa correspondent Jeevan Vasagar, writing from Kigali, quoted Paul Rusesabagina, the past manager of Hotel Mille Collines (the real-life model for *Hotel Rwanda*) at the time of the genocide: “What happened in Rwanda is now happening in Darfur, in the Congo, in all of these places they are butchering innocent civilians” (Vasagar 2005).⁹

In short, despite communication barriers between the judicial field and the world of journalism, the legal frame is prominent in media reporting about Darfur. Its dominance, in fact, increases over time. Why do potentially competing frames not do as well?

THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD, THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD AND THE COLOURING OF REPORTS

Journalists frequently report about their contacts with humanitarian NGOs. For instance, both German interviewees list aid organizations as important sources of information. Three British journalists refer to either aid agency reports, humanitarian organizations on the ground or just INGOs as crucial sources of information. One French journalist tells about NGOs based in Chad whose representatives served him as crucial informants. Another French correspondent explicitly refers to MSF, not accidentally, when she stresses her paper's avoidance of the term "genocide," in line with MSF policies. Here the policy and framing of an aid organization corresponds with journalistic vocabulary and possibly inspired it.¹⁰

Yet, despite the centrality of aid NGOs as sources of information, citations of the humanitarian emergency frame, as depicted in [Figure 2](#), fade compared to uses of the crime frame. While they start at the same high levels, references to the humanitarian frame drop to below 30 percent in the second period and to between 10 and 20 percent in the later periods.

Evidence suggests that again media markets and political forces are causal contributors. We know that the government of Sudan evicted humanitarian NGOs from Darfur, including three sections of MSF, as early as 2007 and as late as 2014. Those who remained grew cautious in statements toward the news media. Actions of the Sudanese state are thus a likely contributor to declining uses of the humanitarian frame in media reports. In addition, a humanitarian emergency is a state more than an event. It lingers. It is news for a brief period, after which it becomes old information, of little value in media markets.

Yet some newsworthy events do occur in the humanitarian realm. Consider the release of spectacular reports by INGOs such as a much-cited Amnesty

International report on rape (Amnesty International 2004) and two MSF reports, entitled “Emergency in Darfur, Sudan: No Relief in Sight” (MSF 2004) and “The Crushing Burden of Rape: Sexual Violence in Darfur” (MSF 2005). The release of “No Relief in Sight” coincided with an extraordinary opportunity to reach a world audience. In the words of one MSF interviewee:

I was the crisis communications manager, in June and July in Khartoum, Darfur, and Paris. And this was right at the moment when we released epidemiological data....The actual press release, that I helped write in the field with the president of MSF France and the head of mission was called No Relief in Sight. And it accompanied an epidemiological report. And the basic premise of that was to say “without a massive humanitarian response lots of lives would be lost.” ... And Colin Powell came to visit Khartoum... [I was in Mornei refugee camp in West Darfur] and there was a big scramble to get me back to Khartoum because there was going to be the entire press corps, following Colin Powell. And I remember coming into the press room, just walking from one person to the other and handing out our press release, the “No Relief in Sight.” And I believe it was quoted in a lot of those initial stories.

Is the MSF staffer right with his perception of the effect of the news release? The document is dated June 21, 2004, and the opportunity to distribute it to the press corps in pursuit of US Secretary of State Colin Powell offered itself on Wednesday, June 30. A look at our newspapers does speak to intense media attention to Darfur around these dates. On July 1, 2004, *The New York Times* featured a front-page article on the situation in Darfur (*The New York Times* 2004). Already on June 24, 2004, the Swiss *Neue Züricher Zeitung* reported about a visit of the Swiss foreign minister to Sudan, including its refugee camps. The paper, in portraying the violence, cites the MSF report: “No one knows exactly how many civilians were killed by the Janjawiid. One probably has to assume several ten thousands of dead as a minimum. This conclusion is suggested by a survey that MSF had conducted in the refugee camps of Mornei and

Zalingei in West Darfur — the most comprehensive study of this kind thus far” (translation). Information about the methodology of the survey leads the journalist to conclude: “Should this percentage be representative for the entire rural population of Darfur, then we would calculate a number of far above 120,000 dead. To be added to those are the persons who now perish in the refugee camps, because the government restricts the delivery of urgently needed aid” (translation). For the remainder of June, I found one more reference to MSF, but not to the report itself.

In the United Kingdom, *The Times* of London featured Secretary Powell’s visit in a July 1, 2004, article. The report recaptures the history of violence and suffering in Darfur without citing the MSF release (Clayton 2004). *The Times’* left-liberal competitor, *The Guardian*, however, featured on June 25 an extensive article authored by Jeevan Vasagar (2004), entitled “There is no hunger says Sudan as children die.” It reports from Khartoum and from the Mornei refugee camp, from which my interviewee was to rush to Powell’s press conference, just a couple of days later. From within the camp, Vasagar reports about an MSF feeding centre, and he cites MSF president Jean-Hervé Bradol with grave accusations against the government in Khartoum for impeding the delivery of aid.

In France, *Le Figaro* featured an 804-word article on the violence in Darfur on June 25, 2004 (Oberle 2004). The report is entitled “Darfur under the pain of Hunger and ‘Arab Cavalries’ [cavaliers arabes].” The article does cite MSF without, however, mentioning the specific report. No other *Figaro* piece in June returns to any MSF source. *Le Figaro’s* left-liberal competitor, *Le Monde*, pays closer attention. On June 25, it features a detailed report by its staff reporter Jean-Philippe Rémy. The article’s title is a quotation of MSF’s Jean-Hervé Bradol: “Khartoum has maintained a ferocious repression on Darfur” (Rémy 2004, translation). Another piece of June 25, published under the same title, summarizes the events and provides a count of those killed and displaced. Almost half a dozen articles follow in the final days of June and at least one, a June 30 article on Colin Powell’s visit, cites again patterns described by MSF.

Other papers too report about Darfur on the days following the report’s release and the visit of Colin Powell, and several cite the MSF study.

Clearly, the INGO's campaign was reflected in the world press. Reports like "No Relief in Sight" in all likelihood contributed to the substantial media attention in the middle of 2004. They helped advance the humanitarian emergency frame in the early stages of reporting. Yet they neither prevented the subsequent decline in reporting nor did they secure the application of the humanitarian emergency frame in the long run. This finding is all the more remarkable as the MSF press release was part of a flood of pronouncements during the summer of 2004. Colin Powell, as well as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, visited Sudan and Darfur and addressed the humanitarian catastrophe. Many other aid organizations were active and spoke up as well. A report from the German Evangelical Press Service, published on the front page of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on June 28, 2004, and supplemented by a page six-report by Thomas Scheen, the paper's Africa correspondent, makes this point quite clear: "The Assistant Foreign Minister [Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt] Kerstin Müller (Green Party) has reproached the Sudanese government that it continues to impede the delivery of humanitarian aid for the Darfur region. Organizations such as the Technische Hilfswerk or the Malteser Hilfsdienst attempt in vain to transport goods into the region, reports Müller at the end of an Africa journey in Nairobi. Also, the truce in the West of Sudan was not respected, against statements to the opposite from Khartoum, she added" (Scheen 2004, translation).

In short, humanitarian emergencies are news for a short period. Relatively close contacts between aid workers and journalists help bring them to the attention of newspaper readers in the early stages of a crisis. In long-lasting emergencies, however, news media lose interest. Repression by the Sudanese state against media and against aid organizations further contributes to the decline of the humanitarian frame in reporting. Although the criminal court process also drags out over a long haul, humanitarians do not produce spectacular events along the way such as an indictment against a country's president. Media do report the occasional release of NGO reports, but such releases do not produce the same cascade of articles and editorials that an ICC decision evokes.

More than humanitarian aid, representations of mass violence produced in the diplomatic field fare prominently in media reporting about Darfur.

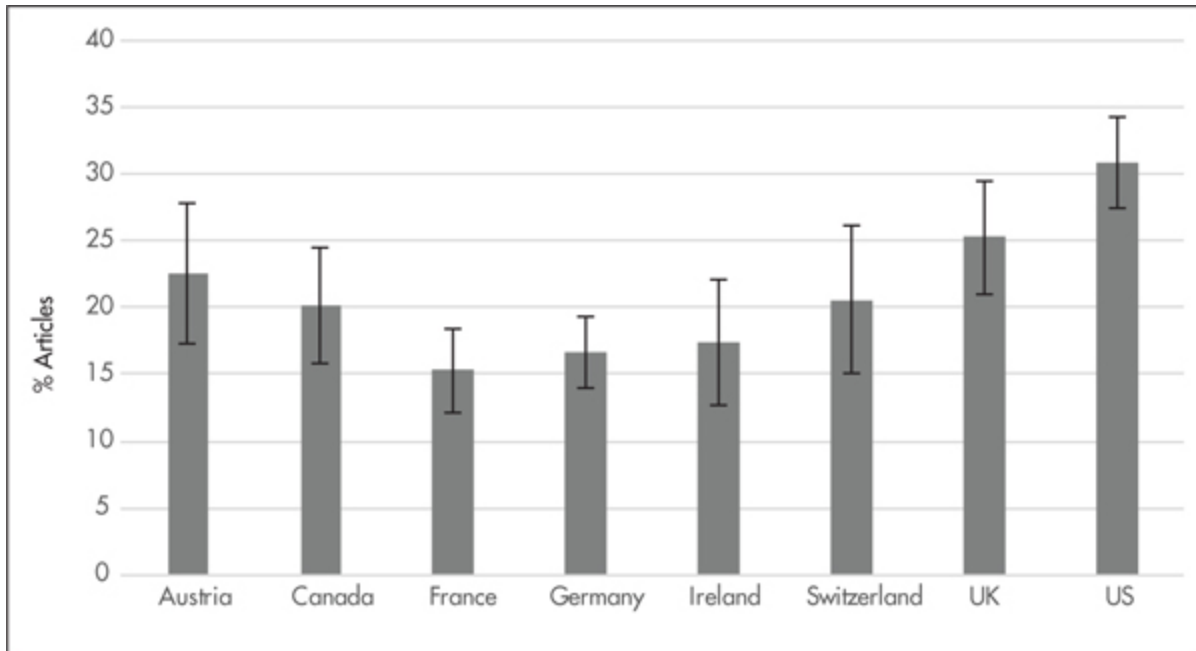
Such diplomatic media presence, reflected in the initial prominence of an armed conflict frame, is partly a result of journalists' routine encounters with diplomats as informants, relatively rare but noteworthy events produced in the diplomatic field and the high public visibility of some actors in the diplomatic field. The latter two conditions appear to secure the diplomatic field's better representation in the news media than is granted the humanitarian field. Finally, the fact that the crime frame increases when the armed conflict frame declines (and vice versa) indicates conflicts between the criminal justice and diplomacy fields and their opposing institutional logics. Yet, for reasons cited above, the crime frame prevails in the end.

COUNTRY CONTEXTS AND REPORTING

Despite the strong reflection of the judicial field's representation in media reporting, we also find variations of receptivity, moderately along ideological lines (in early stages), stronger along lines of journalist gender (for rape reporting) (Savelsberg and Nyseth-Brehm 2015), but more pronounced across national contexts of news outlets. Use of the crime frame, for example, varies noticeably across countries, as does the use of the term genocide (see [below](#)).

Cross-national differences are attributable to three types of national forces. First, journalists are exposed to broad structural and cultural distinctions between countries, including varying policy focuses on military intervention, justice or humanitarian aid. These forces are supplemented by country-specific features of fields and the prominence of fields that supply media with information (for example, the International Committee of the Red Cross's presence in Switzerland). Finally, media fields take different shape in different countries (with varying strength of public media), and journalistic styles vary (Benson 2006, 197; 2013). As a comparative analysis of the uses of the term genocide illustrates, topical choices, framing and styles of reporting about genocide are affected (Savelsberg 2015).

Figure 4: Percentage of Newspaper Documents Using the Term “Genocide” for Darfur, by Country



The use of the genocide label is an especially prominent feature of reporting about Darfur in US media. This pattern corresponds closely with the centrality of the genocide theme in American civil society, its massive “Save Darfur” campaign, and the use of the term by high-ranking government actors. A French journalist stationed in the United States speaks to this difference:

In the US, you had Colin Powell who said that [word “genocide”]. If you have an official using that term then the media will pretty much follow it....But then, in France nobody did that. And the media then started to wonder about it. So, the UN is the umpire of this, arbiter of this. So, the UN didn’t do it....And then I remember Doctors Without Borders not using it.

Figure 4 shows that this journalist’s assessment is reflected in the statistical patterns emerging from analyses of our Darfur media data set. Indeed, we find the United States and France to be the outliers at both ends of the distribution.¹¹

While it is likely that social movements, leading politicians and news media reinforced each other’s preferred terminology, the causal arrow

from civil society to the media in the United States is likely to be strengthened by the competitiveness of the American media market. Broader cultural sensitivities matter as well. In Germany, a journalist talked about his reluctance to subsume both Darfur and the Holocaust under the same genocide category. Normative constraints among German respondents indicate the standing of the Shoah as a “sacred evil” (Alexander 2004). Consider also Ireland, where a humanitarian complex is firmly established, propelled by that country’s foreign policy and collective memory of famine and poverty. The resulting support for humanitarian assistance has contributed to a general caution against using strong vocabularies to describe the Sudanese state. Again, general national cultural characteristics are at work. In Ireland, they are supported by the strength of the humanitarian field as a source of information.

In short, country-specific uses of the term genocide confirm what an examination of Darfur reporting in news media shows more generally. The journalistic field overlaps with national conditions, pertaining to a country’s larger structural and cultural characteristics, nation-specific strengths, that is, resources, power and prestige, of fields that supply media with information and particularities of national media fields themselves (Benson 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

In presenting some of the findings from an analysis of 3,387 media reports and from interviews with Africa correspondents and other journalists from eight countries, this chapter provides several insights on patterns of media representations of the conflict in Darfur. After initial neglect, peaks in reporting followed political initiatives, especially Kofi Annan’s analogical bridging from the Rwandan genocide to Darfur, and the ICC interventions. Judicial interventions increased reporting and citations of the crime frame. While the humanitarian emergency frame featured prominently in early stages, its use declined quickly as continued suffering was no longer news and as the government of Sudan cut off sources of information. Diplomatic representations also declined over time. Patterns of reporting follow similar paths in all countries, but they do so at different levels of intensity. In addition, receptivity to the crime frame and use of the

genocide label vary across countries. The causal factors of such variation are country-specific policy preferences and cultural sensitivities, distinct characteristics of media fields and varying strengths, that is, resources, power and prestige, of social fields that surround journalism.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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- 1 This is confirmed by Smith's (2010) comparative analysis of genocide discourse in the political systems of large European countries.
 - 2 On the correlation between Western coverage of African conflicts and the scale of involvement by Western countries, see also McNulty (1999, 269). On Irish reporting and effects of the country's humanitarian policy-orientation, see [Chapter 5](#) in Savelsberg (2015).
 - 3 Mody (2010) confirms this peak in her analysis of a different set of news media.
 - 4 See Murphy (2007) on frequent editorials on Darfur in April through September 2004.
 - 5 All interview quotes in this chapter are from interviews conducted by the author, but — in line with Institutional Review Board requirements — respondents were promised anonymity. Interviewee names are thus withheld. Where quotes are translated, translations are by the author.
 - 6 Generally, military conflicts alone cause restrictions on journalistic work, as described by commentators at an Asser Institute conference, "On the Frontline of Accountability: War Reporting and Related Contemporary Issues in International and Humanitarian Law," held in January 2011 in The Hague.
 - 7 Reports on the risk of journalists being instrumentalized at the 2011 Asser Institute conference of war correspondents included addressing "military censorship" (Geoffrey Robertson, former Special Court for Sierra Leone judge), "weaponization of information" (Julia Hoffmann, Amsterdam) and "information warfare" (Robert Heinsch, Leiden). Risks are enhanced by the dangers correspondents face, especially local ones (Blake Evans Pritchard, The Hague).

- 8 Human rights talk may, in the alternative, be denounced as a “tool of intellectual combat” in the hands of enemies of democracy (Gordon 2014).
- 9 Interestingly, Vasagar’s source for this quote is the American edition of *People Magazine*.
- 10 Close relationships do not protect from mistrust, though. One German correspondent warns that NGO victim counts are inflated, as high numbers enhance the organizations’ appeals to potential donors.
- 11 An analysis of confidence intervals shows that outliers overlap somewhat with countries in the middle field of the distribution. There is, however, no overlap between low-end outliers and the high-end outlier.



12

COMMITMENT AMID CONFLICT: THE EXPERIENCE OF CENTRAL AFRICAN JOURNALISTS COVERING THEIR COUNTRY'S WAR

MICHELLE BETZ

INTRODUCTION

Every day around the world, journalists report on events involving human suffering, conflict and atrocity. But what if you are a journalist and you live in the country experiencing all of these? What if your own home has been destroyed and you find yourself among hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in your own country? What if radio stations are pillaged and burned down so there is no longer access to independent news and information? How do you report? How do you survive? How do you cope?

Since 2013, this has been the case for scores of journalists in the Central African Republic (CAR), a small, landlocked country with a population of

4.5 million and bordered by fragile states including Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Congo-Brazzaville. It is not often that we hear the stories of these journalists and the challenges they face: how to be witness and victim at the same time, and how to continue working in extreme circumstances.

These journalists are generally the first responders sounding the alarm to impending crises in their own countries, only later working closely with international counterparts to ensure the rest of the world hears these stories. Yet unlike their international colleagues, as both witness and victim, they have no escape from the traumatic environment. Local resources for mental health support are likely to be scarce or non-existent. Cultural barriers and a lack of education regarding normal responses to psychological trauma and its aftermath complicate matters. Despite awareness of these issues, there has been little work done in this area.

This chapter seeks to put a human face on the challenges local reporters face in covering the conflicts in their own community. It highlights the reality that journalists frequently experience both short- and long-term psychological effects from vicariously experienced psychological trauma (Beighley 2017). In the CAR, journalists have experienced first-hand trauma as both witness and victim of psychologically traumatizing events that directly affected them. The dangers they face are enormous, yet, for the most part, they cannot escape those dangers as their international colleagues do. As the pressures and the threats continue, it is not often we hear their stories of how to be both witness and victim at the same time and how they continue reporting in extreme circumstances.

In interviews with some of these journalists it becomes clear that there is another narrative, other than that of victim. Theirs are stories of overcoming, and of commitment, professionalism and heroism. It may be that maintaining their role as journalists in these circumstances provides some comfort and renewed commitment to their profession in the face of these traumas. This chapter seeks to examine the impact of the war in the CAR on the journalists who are both living it and covering it.

THE BACKDROP

The CAR has a population of about 4.7 million, is the world's poorest country (Gregson 2017) and is the lowest-ranked country on the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme. Christians comprise 80 percent and Muslims 15 percent of the population, with the latter mostly concentrated in the far northeast. Sango and French are the official languages, although many ex-Séléka fighters are Muslim and speak Arabic. "Séléka" means coalition or alliance in the Sango language and refers to an alliance of predominantly Muslim rebel groups from the CAR's marginalized northeast.

The CAR's geographic placement is also significant, since it is where the chronic conflict zones of Africa's Great Lakes (DRC, Rwanda and Burundi) and Eastern Sahel (Chad, Sudan and South Sudan) converge (Reeve 2013). "The northern savannah regions of the CAR geographically and culturally have much in common with southern Chad [the oil-producing region] and have been destabilised since the 1970s by civil wars in Chad and, latterly, Darfur" (ibid., 2). In the past two decades no country has experienced more military "peace support" interventions than CAR (Reeve, 1). The country's southeast borders South Sudan and the DRC and is subject to frequent incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army, and during the rainy season is virtually isolated, as the roads are washed out. Borders are not secure. The east is an area rich in minerals and has seen pastoralists come with their cattle, creating new reasons for conflict over land use.

The country has experienced numerous crises since independence from France in 1960. The latest crisis began in December 2012 when the Séléka began a military campaign against the government of President François Bozizé. The crisis developed into full-scale civil war. On March 24, 2013, Séléka rebels from the CAR, Chad and Sudan took control of the capital, Bangui, and ousted Bozizé.

Michel Djotodia, one of the Séléka leaders, "suspended the constitution, and installed himself as interim president — a role to which he was subsequently appointed by the transitional government" (Human Rights Watch 2013, 11). In September 2013, Djotodia disbanded Séléka, an action that resulted in "a wave of widespread violence with no effective national

army in place to stop it” (Arbour 2013). Nominally integrated into the national army, ex-Séléka continued to exert their power through violence in much of the country, terrorizing local populations. They were increasingly opposed by predominantly Christian militias known as *anti-balaka* (“anti-machete” in Sango).

Although the current crisis officially began in December 2012, its origins are older and more complex, going back to times of colonization. Most recently there has been a change in how the current crisis in the CAR is both perceived and covered, particularly regionally and internationally, where it has increasingly been depicted along religious lines — Muslims versus Christians. The local media, including faith-based radio stations, have not been immune to this and have increasingly been put at risk under this divide.

“Since the presidential election that ended President Catherine Samba-Panza’s transitional government in March 2016, the security situation has worsened steadily in the CAR and fighting between armed groups has resumed throughout almost the entire county” (Reporters without Borders 2017). The UN peacekeeping mission, Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (known as MINUSCA), was expanded by some 900 personnel, and the mission extended through to the end of November 2018 from just before its initial end date of November 2017.

As of October 2017, there were some 600,000 IDPs in the CAR and nearly 500,000 Central African refugees, most of them in neighbouring countries and in Europe.

THE MEDIA

Providers of information are a powerful force during conflict, including in the CAR. “The media are often manipulated but, at the same time, they make a positive contribution by promoting citizenship and good governance, encouraging respect between communities and preparing public opinion for peace. The media’s strategic importance is therefore undeniable” (Reporters without Borders 2014).

Today, media houses are still rebuilding after many were pillaged and destroyed in 2013-2014. Of the 29 radio stations that existed in the country before the conflict, less than half were operational by the end of 2014, six of them in Bangui (Internews 2014). By 2016, there were 37 stations, 15 in the provinces, with seven being confessional stations, 23 community, two commercial, one state and four international broadcasters.

The crisis of 2013-2014 resulted in both self-censorship and politicization of information. At the time, Bangui was commonly referred to as “the city of rumours.” In many cases, there were issues with journalists and a lack of professionalism, on the print side in particular. Yet in other cases, journalists were taking greater care in how reporting was conducted. For example, at one meeting in Yaoundé that brought together Central African media professionals, there was discussion of the word “genocide.” Central African journalists were quick to note that use of the term had the potential to inflame and could result in deadly consequences and reinforce the risk of an actual genocide (International Media Support 2014).

Meanwhile, the Séléka saw the media as a threat. Local radio stations were often the first target, with many cases of looting and some stations completely destroyed.

Reporters without Borders provided much of the information pertaining to the situation of the media at that time.

As physical attacks and threats to media and journalists increased during 2013, many newspapers radicalized their discourse and failed to maintain journalistic objectivity. In an attempt to prop up Bozizé’s crumbling regime, Radio Centrafrique and other state-owned media at first targeted the Séléka rebels with divisive messages and hate messages. Radio Centrafrique subsequently concentrated on broadcasting details of Séléka actions.

Christophe Gazam Betty, the communication minister appointed after the Séléka takeover, banned the media from talking about Séléka’s actions, notifying them that every report needed authorization by his office and reminding the state media that they were required to support government policy under an existing decree.

The print media's behaviour has been dominated by financial interests, with the main newspapers, such as *Le Citoyen*, *Le Confident* and *Hirondelle*, allying themselves with the politicians who offer them the most money.

Radio Ndeke Luka, a radio station supported by Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss non-governmental organization, and by international donors, is the only news outlet to have remained relatively neutral during this period, limiting itself to reporting atrocities without comment (Reporters without Borders 2013).

Ultimately, many reporters resorted to self-censorship, as it was assumed that any act of reporting constituted taking a political position, or simply did no reporting at all. But even this didn't spare them. Over the course of three months ending May 31, 2014, Central African journalists were exposed to the following challenges:

- two journalists fatally attacked in unclear circumstances;
- one journalist killed in connection with her work;
- 24 journalists subjected to various forms of harassment;
- seven journalists threatened by telephone;
- three journalists subjected to physical violence;
- four journalists forced to flee the country because of threats;
- five journalists summoned by judicial authorities; and
- three journalists arrested. (Reporters without Borders 2014)

Violence subsided toward the end of 2014 and into 2015, with the notable exception of the Muslim community radio station Voix de la Paix, which was attacked and ransacked in September 2015 (Freedom House 2016). Since the 2016 elections, violence has increased again and journalists are feeling renewed pressures. In late 2016, the building that housed the umbrella organization for journalists in Bangui, the Maison de la Presse et

des Journalistes (MPJ), was seized by family members of a former president who had donated it to the media community. There is still no new location to house the MPJ.

In October 2017, the main source of local news and information in the southeastern town of Bangassou and the surrounding region, Radio Mbari, was closed due to continued threats from rival armed groups which accused it of “not broadcasting their messages with sufficient readiness” (Reporters without Borders 2017).

So what has it been like for the journalists to work under these circumstances? The next section highlights some of their stories.

THE JOURNALISTS: THEIR STORIES

“L’information en temps de crise doit être considérée au même titre que l’eau et la nourriture [Information during a time of crisis must be considered as important as water or food]” (International Media Support 2015, 11)

— Thierry Khonde, Central African journalist

Journalists in CAR almost universally report dealing with some kind of traumatic event — the loss of a loved one, being forced to flee, living in an IDP camp, being separated from family, being threatened with death or simply bearing witness to the conflict. Most were targets of some sort of threat, intimidation or attack (ibid.). Three journalists have been killed. Several still live in exile and won’t return until they can be assured they are not going to be targeted.

Most Central African journalists have been threatened, and the threats have come from all sides.

For Albert Mbaya, director of the daily *L’Agora*, staying safe meant changing locations almost every night for several weeks. Another journalist, Cyrus Emmanuel Sandy, said that although the threats were only verbal, they served to demotivate the staff at his newspaper (ibid.).

Sylvie Panika, director of Radio Ndeke Luka, one of the most respected radio stations in the country, reported that her own stress was compounded by having to deal with the stress of her colleagues. While they were initially threatened by cadres of President Bozizé as the Séléka got closer to Bangui, relations with the new Séléka-backed power were no better. In addition to threats against the station, at least five members of her staff were personally threatened.

Radio France Internationale's correspondent in Bangui, Hippolyte Donossio, witnessed abuses carried out by both sides. He was forced to flee his home on January 6, 2014, after facing violent threats from both Séléka and anti-Balaka over his reporting of the human rights situation. "Armed men came to my house and I have received death threats. My colleagues have been attacked and beaten in their homes, and my house has been looted twice. It's not safe for me to go back" (Shackle 2014). He still lives in exile.

Maka Gbossokotto, director of *Le Citoyen* and a stalwart fixture of the Central African media community, worked hard to cover the notoriety of KM5 (the main Muslim quarter of Bangui) and to debunk it. His story, headlined "Two hours in KM5 without having seen the devil," featured the main Muslim neighbourhood of Bangui. For his efforts to shine a light on a neighbourhood that has seen most of its population flee, he was taken to task by his readers and today faces the temptations of "envelope" journalism to survive.

For some, the memories remain. Geoffroy Hyacinthe Dotté Babot, director of the publication *Dernière Minute*, says that despite the change in regime he still relives his memories of being threatened and kidnapped.

The threats continue. Mathurin Momet began his newspaper, *Le Confident*, in 2001. He says the threats are always there — by phone, by internet and even via satellite phones. "We receive death threats daily...the rebels have their own sources throughout the city who inform back about what the media are reporting" (email communication with author, November 2017). In March 2013, Momet was forced to flee when rebels came looking for him.

He survived in the countryside living on wild fruit, while back in Bangui his newspaper was being destroyed. He has since rebuilt, but it has been difficult. Government subsidies haven't materialized and the advertising market is essentially dead, as most of the businesses in Bangui were destroyed during the war.

Momet said the way journalists operate has also changed. Since journalists Desiré Sayenga and René Padou were killed in April 2014, there has not yet been any investigation into their murders and the safety of journalists is still not assured. Certain areas of the country are controlled by armed groups and not accessible to outsiders, so journalists rely on so-called "correspondents," humanitarian actors and religious leaders to gather information. The use of mobile phones is a costly means of communication, "but at least this method has the advantage of guaranteeing the reliability of the information." He said he finishes up by 5:00 p.m., so he's home before dark.

Fridolin Ngoulou said almost every journalist has been subjected to threats. He has received threats on social media but, he added, these come from fanatics of armed groups and not rebel leaders. "I've taken numerous risks," he said, "and have met and discussed directly with some of those who've threatened me. Afterwards they've gone back and say that what they had thought wasn't reality, that Fridolin is in fact professional and has solid information" (email communication with author, November 2017).

Others haven't been so lucky. In January 2016, Davy Kpenouwen, director of the daily newspaper *Le Pays*, was heading home for the night when the headlights of an oncoming motorbike caught his attention. "Without hesitating," he recalled, "I ran behind a house and hid in the WC. One of the riders screamed out in Sango: 'Davy! Davy! We will get you!' Then they fired several shots in the air before disappearing." That episode followed two anonymous calls received the evening before, in which Kpenouwen was threatened and told to make sure he sorted out his editorial line. He sent his wife and children to Congo-Brazzaville and then he himself left a week later. He has not returned home.

Most Central African journalists recognize that they have chosen a risky profession, during times of conflict in particular. Samuel Bogoto said,

“You really need to be professional and continue to be responsible especially at times like this when the need for information is enormous.” He had no reason to be discouraged, he asserted, because he has always embraced his profession with passion. “The country needs journalists to provide a platform for debate to continue about the right to inform and to be informed” (International Media Support 2015, 26).

Yet difficulties can motivate journalists to be even more determined. “We are committed and focused and we will stay the course,” said Ferdinand Samba, editor of the daily *Le Démocrate*. Momet of the daily *Le Confident* said, “These threats only push me harder to pursue this noble but difficult mission to inform [my community], to double my vigilance so that I don’t fall into the hands of criminals.”

Even in exile, Kpenouwen said he never considered giving up his profession. “Even threats and living in exile will never force me to give up my work as a journalist. I chose this profession and I will continue doing it.”

Ngoulou said that his career as a journalist was formed during the country’s conflict and, rather than stop, he wants to share his experience with others:

I can tell you that my career was started by the crisis and continues in the crisis. It has made me strong, confident and objective. I never for a second considered stopping my work as a journalist. It is my profession. I was trained as a journalist and I will continue working as a journalist because my country today needs professionals and there are not many of us abiding [by] the ethics of journalism. But I would like to learn more and pass on my knowledge with young people who aspire to become journalists. The experience I have gained of managing information during crisis must be shared with others or even with journalists in other countries that are experiencing conflict. If the situation here stabilizes it is because Central African journalists contributed to that. Unlike the Western

journalists, we never reported our conflict as religious. If we had taken that position, then our country would have experienced a genocide or a religious war.

These anecdotes provide a counter-narrative to the idea of the local journalist as victim. They are stories of renewed commitment and of journalists finding a sense of purpose in conducting their work in what they describe as “their noble profession.” Their sense of commitment to their work is astounding, as is their belief that what they do as journalists is of paramount importance, particularly during the conflict. They will not quit. Nor will they be cowed. And that, say some experts, is possibly what keeps them going and keeps them mentally healthy.¹

LOCAL JOURNALISTS: TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE

For nearly two decades, trauma experts, journalists and journalism educators have examined the intersection of their professions (Ochberg n.d.). Researchers, including Canadian psychiatrist Dr. Anthony Feinstein, have shown how journalists, war correspondents in particular, are affected by the work they do (Feinstein, Owen and Blair 2002). “Near constant exposure to people in trauma coupled with long or irregular work routine, deadline pressure, and lack of social support make journalists a prime candidate for secondary traumatic stress, burnout and compassion fatigue” (Dworznik 2008, 71).

Most of the research on trauma and journalists has focused almost exclusively on international war correspondents, or “parachute journalists” — those who go in for a short period to cover a conflict and then return to their home base. There is a paucity of research looking specifically at the psychological functioning and support of local journalists covering their country’s conflict or disaster, or at local fixers who work with international media and who might be kidnapped, threatened or worse. Feinstein (2012, 480–83) recently considered Mexican journalists who covered drug cartels, while other researchers, including Carmen Long (2013), conducted research on local journalists covering traumatic events such as accidents in their countries.

An understanding of trauma and resilience as it relates to journalists is important because trauma influences working performance. It is not unusual for journalists on traumatic assignments to experience “sharp irritability, distrust of others, fixation on limited dimensions of the story, or lapses in concentration and memory, all of which can lead to poor decision making and errors in news judgement” (Rees 2013, 421). Trauma affects not only the journalist, but also what that the journalist produces; in volatile or challenging environments this may have not only dangerous but deadly consequences.

In addition, there has been very little examination of the importance of resilience in enabling journalists to cover stories of atrocity effectively and professionally. It has been demonstrated that those who are able to retain a sense of optimism and hope tend to have better psychological outcomes (Carver and Scheier 1998).

A recent study into the resilience of journalists found that although journalists are subject to a range of pressures at work and home, the meaning and purpose they attribute to their work helps them remain mentally resilient (Swart 2017). This study was conducted with journalists in the United Kingdom, so it is unclear how its findings may apply to local journalists covering and experiencing traumatic situations.

Local journalists involved in covering traumatic events in their own countries present an underrepresented population in research. Supporting them will require a sophisticated appreciation of the many obstacles and differences between them and their colleagues who come from resource-rich environments (Beighley 2017, 415). According to Paul Beighley (2017, 414):

[Some] factors that promote psychological adaptation in the event of a traumatic event are self-and-community efficacy, connectedness, and hope. Journalists have the potential to be involved in an active fashion in response to a traumatic event transforming their experience from that of victim to one of altruistically serving a higher call. Being efficacious in their work — providing information that is published and

seen by others, can be tremendously empowering. Any tools that improve their ability to function professionally will therefore likely have the dual benefit of helping them cope psychologically. One caveat that external actors need to keep in mind, in their efforts to help local journalists if there are unrealistic expectations without adequate resources to follow, [is that] the end result can be demoralizing.

“One of the most important things to remember throughout it all though is that the work being done to get information out to the community and the world in such difficult circumstances is the highest calling for the journalist; journalism is a deeply meaningful profession and worthy of some sacrifices” (Beighley, interview with author, November 2017).

CONCLUSION

The trend in international newsgathering is to greater reliance on local journalists and fixers to provide crucial information to a global audience. At the same time, these local journalists are themselves becoming targets of violence. Increasingly, local journalists are being killed in the line of fire. Their deaths create stress for their colleagues, families and communities.

It remains a challenge to discern areas in which the global community can provide support to journalists in these circumstances. As long as we continue to rely on fixers and local journalists for news and information from hot spots around the world, we must also provide them with adequate support to mitigate risk, including to their mental health. Local journalists, such as those in the CAR, are one of the most likely groups of journalists to experience psychological trauma, thanks to the implicit risks of their work, combined with public pressure to provide news from these situations. What support can be provided to these journalists and how can it best meet the specific needs of such a community? Can we promote resiliency?

The first step is to acknowledge the dearth of relevant research on mental health and psychosocial support for local journalists in conflict or emergency settings. There is a need for research on the kinds of trauma (and resilience) that journalists experience and their causes, including impacts on the individual and colleagues and impacts on the work. Much of this will likely need to be field-based research. There are various initiatives for local journalists that seek to address psychosocial needs of local journalists. What is lacking, however, is a comprehensive mapping of both the initiatives and the resources that exist in conflict, post-conflict and disaster zones. Also needed is a clear identification of local leaders in the field.

Second, “little has been done to develop treatments based on local coping styles, culture-specific idioms of distress, and culturally appropriate helping methods” (de Jong 2017, 209). When formulating support for local journalists, it is crucial to ensure local input. This, for example, could be through brainstorming sessions to ascertain how the journalists are thinking and what their attitudes might be to receiving possible support. Regardless of what shape it takes, local analysis and research must be front and centre. It should identify lessons learned and best practices from other front-line and human rights defenders and women’s groups and contextualize to media communities.

Third, any training efforts of journalists should be accompanied with mental health and psychosocial support. The resilience that Central African journalists have already demonstrated can be further supported by continued work to professionalize the media sector, be it in the CAR and other conflict-affected countries.

Finally, the United Nations has adopted the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This may at least give some wider symbolic support to journalists who are victims of traumatic attacks. Ultimately, there must be a recognition that the mental health of the journalist can have an impact on their reporting — something that is particularly critical in conflict environments.

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1 See, for example, Beighley (2017) and Swart (2017).



13

“MORE IMPORTANT THAN JIHAD OF THE SWORD”: THE ISLAMIC STATE’S MEDIA STRATEGY AND THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

MICHAEL PETROU

It was 2005 and, as insurgency and civil war burned through Iraq, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the drab and uncharismatic deputy to al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, wrote to an upstart jihadist colleague in Iraq. The letter’s recipient was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of an insurgent group that the previous year had pledged loyalty to bin Laden and joined al-Qaeda. Zarqawi’s outfit, Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq and eventually renamed the Islamic State of Iraq, was responsible for spectacular terror attacks throughout the country against government soldiers, Shia mosques, American and other international troops and the United Nations. It captured and murdered Western hostages, frequently filming their beheadings.

Zarqawi, a one-time drug dealer and high-school dropout from Jordan, sometimes carried out the beheadings himself. He was fast becoming the

most notorious face of the insurgency in Iraq, and of global Islamist terror more broadly. Despite Zarqawi's oath of loyalty to bin Laden, his group was somewhat autonomous and seemed to be eclipsing al-Qaeda Central, whose leaders were holed up somewhere in Afghanistan or Pakistan and made comparatively little noise. Zawahiri's weak position was implicitly acknowledged in the letter. A surgeon from a well-respected Egyptian family, Zawahiri far surpassed Zarqawi in age, education and years devoted to jihad. But his tone was laudatory and humble.

“Dear brother, God Almighty knows how much I miss meeting with you, how much I long to join you in your historic battle against the greatest of criminals and apostates in the heart of the Islamic world, the field where epic and major battles in the history of Islam were fought,” Zawahiri wrote (Bergen 2006, 365). “I think that if I could find a way to you, I would not delay a day, God willing.”

But Zawahiri also beseeched Zarqawi to scale back his terror. Shoot hostages instead of beheading them, he suggested. And maybe stop attacking Shia mosques. His advice wasn't born of mercy, but of concerns about public relations. “Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable — also — are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages,” he wrote. “You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the sheikh of the slaughterers, etc. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular by the favour and blessing of God.”

Zawahiri revealed he had “tasted the bitterness of American brutality” when his favourite wife, a son and a daughter were killed in an airstrike. “However, despite all of this, I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Ummah.”

A little over a decade later, after Zarqawi's Islamic State of Iraq had split from Zawahiri's al-Qaeda, expanded into Syria and declared the rebirth of a global caliphate — which was reflected in its new name of “Islamic

State” — the group circulated a document titled “Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too.”

In its pages, Zawahiri’s exhortation — “we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media” — is repeated. Zawahiri, however, is not named as its author. And the actual advice he gives in the letter — to refrain from filming gratuitous gore and wantonly targeting Shia Muslims in terror campaigns — is similarly obscured (Winter 2017, 11).

The Islamic State had by now grasped Zawahiri’s message about media’s importance. But, crucially, it had also forged its own new and bloody path regarding how media should be used — one that had no room for the restraint Zawahiri suggested.

The Islamic State’s media strategy and production are not just different from the propaganda and media operations of al-Qaeda, but also from those of any Islamist jihadist group that preceded it. The Islamic State’s media productions are slick, professionally crafted and intimately violent, a combination of tabloid-like populism and high-minded appeals to religious texts and Islamic history. The volume of media products it creates is also unprecedented. It released hundreds of photographs, feature-length films, radio bulletins, short videos and other media products every month in 2015 — numbers that shrank as the Islamic State’s loss of territory impeded its ability to produce media.

An underlying message in all of the Islamic State’s media outputs is relentless religious supremacism and a denigration and even dehumanization of all those who are not Sunni Muslims subscribing to the Islamic State’s extreme interpretation of the faith. This narrative accompanies the mass atrocities the Islamic State commits; it also helps make them possible. Just as Nazi propaganda depicting Jews as rats or that of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines in Rwanda calling Tutsis cockroaches prepared the ground for genocide, so, too, has the Islamic State’s scorn for “filthy Rafida” (a pejorative term for Shia Muslims), “cursed Jews,” “wretched Druze” and “belligerent Christians” smoothed the road to slaughter and slavery.

There is no religious shield that can protect someone living under the Islamic State's control from its murderous cruelty. Sunni Muslims have been killed by the hundreds, as have Shias. But the atrocities suffered by one group in particular, the Yazidis of Iraq, were unique.

The Yazidis, who number perhaps one million worldwide, are a religious minority in Iraq whose faith mixes elements of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. They are monotheistic but also worship seven angels. Chief among them is *Malek Taus*, known in English as the Peacock Angel, who temporarily fell from God's grace when he refused to bow to Adam, but was ultimately forgiven.

Because of perceived similarities between stories about *Malek Taus* and those of Satan, or *Iblīs*, his Islamic equivalent, Yazidis have been widely and falsely described as devil worshippers. "Their creed is so deviant from the truth that even cross-worshipping Christians for ages considered them devil worshippers and Satanists, as is recorded in accounts of Westerners and Orientalists who encountered or studied them," reads an article in an Islamic State magazine (*Dabiq* 2014, 14).

Long derided and misunderstood, Iraq's Yazidis have shunned living in major cities, seeking shelter instead in towns and villages lying in shadow of Mount Sinjar in the northwest of the country. But they have never really been safe. Yazidis have been the target of pogroms and persecution for centuries. The Islamic State nevertheless crafted a unique media narrative to justify its barbarism against them.

The Islamic State's worldview is infused with Muslim apocalyptic prophecies about the "end times," which its followers eagerly anticipate.¹

This is reflected in the group's obsession with a small town in northern Syria named Dabiq. Of no strategic importance, it was nevertheless a military priority for the group because there is a prophecy predicting a pre-apocalyptic confrontation between the armies of the Muslims and those of the infidels there.

Mohammed Emwazi, a British member of the Islamic State who was dubbed Jihadi John because of his murder of Western hostages, once posed

in an Islamic State video with Dabiq behind him and the severed head of the American aid worker and former US Ranger Abdul-Rahman Kassig, born Peter Kassig, on the ground at his feet. “Here we are, burying the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive,” he said.

For a time, before losing the town to Turkish-backed rebels, the Islamic State named its online magazine *Dabiq*. Every issue opened with a quote from Zarqawi, who died in 2006, long before the Islamic State captured Dabiq or indeed controlled territory anywhere in Syria: “The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify — by Allah’s permission — until it burns the crusader armies in Dābiq.”

It was in *Dabiq* that the Islamic State confirmed and celebrated its mass sexual enslavement of thousands of Yazidis. Its written justification for doing so was detailed and, the group claimed, based on conclusions reached by scholars of sharia, or Islamic law.

“Upon conquering the region of Sinjar in Wilāyat Nīnawā, the Islamic State faced a population of Yazidis, a pagan minority existent for ages in regions of Iraq and Shām. Their continual existence to this day is a matter that Muslims should question as they will be asked about it on Judgment Day,” explained the article, published in October 2014. “Sham” refers to the region roughly corresponding to modern-day Syria.

The article’s author said Islamic law students were tasked with researching the Yazidi religion to determine whether Yazidis were once Muslims who became apostates, or if they belonged to an original *mushrik* religion, meaning idolaters or polytheists, and concluded the latter.

“Accordingly, the Islamic State dealt with this group as the majority of fuqahā’ [Islamic jurists] have indicated how mushrikīn should be dealt with,” the author continued.

“Unlike the Jews and Christians, there was no room for jizyah [protection] payment. Also, their women could be enslaved unlike female apostates who the majority of the fuqahā’ say cannot be enslaved and can only be given an ultimatum to repent or face the sword. After capture, the Yazidi

women and children were then divided according to the Sharī'ah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's authority to be divided as khums [tax taken from war spoils].”

This explanation is based on a rigid interpretation of sharia that most modern Islamic scholars would reject as illegitimate. But the article's author also reached for prophetic justification, citing a Hadith, or a saying attributed to the prophet Muhammad, in which Muhammed reportedly said one of the signs of “the Hour,” meaning the end times, would be when “the slave girl gives birth to her master.”

The meaning of that particular Hadith has been debated for centuries, and there is no consensus among commentators (Bletcher 2017, 186-87). The *Dabiq* article's author acknowledged differing interpretations of the text, including metaphorical ones, but concluded those were more prevalent at a time when slavery was common and scholars therefore “found it hard to understand it as referring to actual slavery.” Considered at a time when slavery has been abandoned and then revived, the author said, a literal interpretation becomes more plausible. And one interpretation is that the enslavement of infidels could result in a concubine giving birth to a child who would then be free like his or her Muslim father. Such an outcome, the author suggested, might be a sign of the imminent apocalypse. The mass enslavement of the Yazidis, in other words, is not just permitted; it may in fact be a sign of the awaited end times (*Dabiq* 2014, 14–17).

The Yazidis of Iraq were hit by a series of coordinated car bombings near Mosul in 2007 that killed more than 400. No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, but about a month later the United States claimed to have killed in an airstrike the mastermind of al-Qaeda in Iraq, whom they identified as Abu Mohammad al-Afri. A military spokesperson, Rear Admiral Mark Fox, said Afri was al-Qaeda's emir of the region and an associate of Abu Ayyab al-Masri, then leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the organization that became the Islamic State.

Despite this, the Yazidis did not much feature in the Islamic State's propaganda before the group's conquest of Sinjar in 2014. It is noteworthy that the October 2014 article in *Dabiq* reveals the Islamic State found it

necessary to study the Yazidi religion *after* conquering their territory. And yet the Islamic State's media propaganda about Shias, and about Sunni Muslims it considered deviant, also enabled the hate it levelled against Yazidis.

At the heart of Islamic State ideology is the concept of *takfir*, which means to excommunicate. It is, notes author and journalist Graeme Wood, theologically perilous. A man who accuses another of apostasy is condemning him to death. If the accusation is false, the accuser himself is guilty of apostasy and should likewise be killed. For this reason, accusations of *takfir* have historically been made cautiously — if someone denied the holiness of the Qur'an, for example. But Zarqawi expanded supposed crimes that fit the definition of apostasy, which would therefore warrant a death sentence, to include voting in an election, or being one of the roughly 200 million Shias in the world (Wood 2015).

This is a distinction in Islamic State's strategy that distances it from al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is also a Sunni supremacist organization, but recall that Zawahiri counselled Zarqawi to show restraint regarding Shias. "And can the mujahedeen kill all of the Shias in Iraq? Has any Islamic state in history ever tried that?" he asked in his 2005 letter. "And why kill ordinary Shias, considering that they are forgiven because of their ignorance?"

The Islamic State allows for no such mercy or practical considerations. Its claimed right to excommunicate and slaughter Muslims it deems to be apostates is reflected in its media. A typical *Dabiq* photograph of an Islamic State fighter brandishing a knife above some seated prisoners is accompanied by the caption, "Islamic State soldier humiliates the Nusayriyyah," a pejorative term for Alawite Muslims (*Dabiq* 2014, 6). Shias are described as "the Jews of this Ummah," in another article, which concludes: "Thus, the Rāfidah are mushrik apostates who must be killed wherever they are to be found, until no Rāfidī walks on the face of earth, even if the jihād claimants despise such and even if the jihād claimants defend the Rāfidah with their words day and night" (*Dabiq* 2016, 33).

The Islamic State's *takfir* ideology does not directly relate to Yazidis — at least once the group's scholars decided Yazidis were not apostates who strayed from Islam, but followers of an original *mushrik* religion. But

takfir is part of a larger Islamic State worldview that rejects any tolerance for pluralism that might have shielded Yazidis from the fates they suffered. And the Islamic State's media inculcated an acceptance of this worldview among its supporters.

When Polish resistance agent Jan Karski presented his report on the extermination of Jews in German-occupied Poland to US Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter in 1943, the judge replied: "I am unable to believe what you told me."

A Polish diplomat intervened to protest. He told Frankfurter that Karski spoke with the authority of the Polish government in exile behind him and that Frankfurter could not tell Karski he was lying.

"I didn't say this young man is lying," Frankfurter replied. "I said I am unable to believe what he told me" (Frankfurter 1943).

There was a similar reluctance from some quarters to accept early reports about the Islamic State's atrocities against the Yazidis: specifically, mass murder and the group's enslavement of Yazidi women and girls. But while the Nazis and other genocidal groups throughout history made efforts to hide the extent of their crimes, planting trees where gas chambers once stood, the Islamic State has gloried in it.

In a May 2015 *Dabiq* article, a woman author calling herself Umm Sumayyah al-Muhājirah lamented that some Muslims had tried to defend the Islamic State by denying that its members were slavers.

But what really alarmed me was that some of the Islamic State supporters (may Allah forgive them) rushed to defend the Islamic State — may its honor persist and may Allah expand its territory — after the *kāfir* media touched upon the State's capture of the Yazīdī women. So, the supporters started denying the matter as if the soldiers of the Khilāfah had committed a mistake or evil.

I write this while the letters drip of pride. Yes, O religions of kufr altogether, we have indeed raided and captured the

kāfirah women, and drove them like sheep by the edge of the sword. [“Kufr,” “kafirah” and variants generally refer to those who deny or conceal the truth — in this case, the truth of Islam.]

I further increase the spiteful ones in anger by saying that I and those with me at home prostrated to Allah in gratitude on the day the first slave-girl entered our home. Yes, we thanked our Lord for having let us live to the day we saw kufr humiliated and its banner destroyed. Here we are today, and after centuries, reviving a prophetic Sunnah, which both the Arab and non-Arab enemies of Allah had buried. By Allah, we brought it back by the edge of the sword, and we did not do so through pacifism, negotiations, democracy, or elections. We established it according to the prophetic way, with blood-red swords, not with fingers for voting or tweeting. (*Dabiq* 2015, 46-47)

There can now be little doubt of the full nature of the crimes the Islamic State visited on Iraq’s Yazidis, even without the group’s own admissions. Following the Islamic State’s conquest of the Yazidis’ traditional homeland of Sinjar in northern Iraq, it murdered captured Yazidi men and boys who did not convert to Islam, kidnapped and converted Yazidi children, and sexually enslaved Yazidi women and girls. Men and boys who were forcibly converted to Islam may also have been killed at a later date. A UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) commission of inquiry and the US Holocaust Museum both concluded the Islamic State committed genocide (UNHRC 2016; Kikoler 2015).

Articles in *Dabiq*, and in *Rumiyah*, meaning Rome, the more recent name for the Islamic State’s online magazine, which now appears to be discontinued, are carefully crafted. The magazine as a whole is of very high quality. The writing is generally vivid and crisp, and free of grammatical mistakes. Some photographs are pornographically violent. Throats are slit; a woman is stoned to death for adultery. Others are professionally composed and shot. In one, an Islamic State fighter appears to sleep peacefully in a field of soft light. In another, a fighter pushes rifle

cartridges into a magazine, every scuff and crease on his fingers captured in the close-up frame.

But one of the successes of the Islamic State's media strategy has also been harnessing the amplifying effects of supporters on social media. The importance it places on this dual approach is reflected in its efforts to empower its journalists and propagandists, as well as supporters living outside the caliphate who might nevertheless serve its cause on the Internet. The Islamic State's document "Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too" informs operatives that "the media jihad against the enemy is no less important than the material fight against it," adding that sometimes "verbal jihad is more important than jihad of the sword."

"Have you not seen the photographer, how he carries a camera instead of a Kalashnikov and races before the soldiers in raids, welcoming bullets in his chest with open arms?! Have you not seen the brigades that disseminate videos and pamphlets? How they enter into the most dangerous and fortified areas to circulate the mujahidin's productions in the heart of the hypocrites' den? Have you not seen how dedicated the media operative is in gathering intelligence on the enemy's movements and following the work of the brothers as they monitor the news of the enemy?" (quoted in Winter 2017, 13-14).

According to a report by Quilliam, a London-based "counter-extremism" think tank, the Islamic State's media narrative focuses on six main themes. The first is brutality, of which depictions of murder are the most common. The second, mercy, is often paired with brutality. This message is geared in large part toward opponents and offers them a path to safety through repentance. They are given a choice: "resist, and be killed, or willingly submit, recant past beliefs and be rewarded with mercy."

A third theme, victimhood, is sometimes also entwined with brutality. Before footage of Jordanian pilot Moaz al-Kasasbeh is shown on a propaganda video, for example, the viewer sees images of dead or dying child victims of coalition airstrikes. Here, the message is one of just retribution. Other times, the deadly effects of airstrikes are shown without subsequent revenge.

War, a fourth theme, involves footage and reports from the front line and is meant to convey strength and momentum. A fifth theme, belonging, depicts brotherhood and camaraderie. “This idea is one of Islamic State’s most powerful draws to new recruits, particularly from Western states,” writes the report’s author, Charlie Winter (2015, 22–31), a senior fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. The final theme, utopianism, specifically apocalyptic utopianism, is arguably the broadest and most important, Winter says, and is cumulatively supported by the other narratives.

To these we might add an additional and related theme of legitimacy, or statehood. One of the strategic differences that divided al-Qaeda from the Islamic State centred on whether to declare a caliphate now or at some future date when it could be sustained. For a time, the Islamic State’s decision to declare a caliphate paid off. It earned credibility in the eyes of jihadists and Islamist fellow travellers because it appeared to have built a genuine state that was, in Islamic State’s own parlance, “lasting and expanding.” A subtext of much of the Islamic State’s media production has been aimed at bolstering this narrative by showing a functioning society with social welfare services, security and a thriving economy.

The Islamic State’s media regarding the Yazidis combines several of these themes. In the October 2014 *Dabiq* article, Yazidi men are shown supposedly embracing Islam. Here is the mercy available to those who repent. The enslavement of the Yazidis is also depicted as a consequence of conquest. They are war booty, proof of the caliphate’s military success. Finally, as discussed above, the Islamic State has portrayed the “revival” of slavery as an indication of the coming apocalypse, and the Yazidis’ enslavement thereby fits with the utopian narrative that the Islamic State treats as paramount.

It is notable that several of Islamic State’s stock media narratives have become difficult to sustain due to its recent loss of huge chunks of land. It is now near impossible to depict the Islamic State’s rapidly shrinking territory as a utopia of brotherhood and normalcy in which children play and the elderly are cared for. The Islamic State, in the sense of conquered territory, is currently neither lasting nor expanding. This will surely force

a sort of jihadist rebranding as its media operatives craft new stories about the group.

There is one element of the Islamic State's media strategy, related to the theme of brutality, that is especially worth highlighting for journalists. In the *Media Operative* booklet, readers are reminded: "Anyone who knows the Crusaders of today and keeps track of that which infuriates them understands how they are angered and terrorized by jihadi media. They — the curse of Allah the Almighty be on them — know its importance, impact and significance more than any others!" (quoted in Winter 2017, 17).

It is clear that the Islamic State's snuff videos and other staged executions are aimed not only at its supporters and potential supporters; they are also meant to enrage and terrorize its non-Muslim "Crusader" enemies. How, then, should journalists report on the Islamic State's atrocities?

A journalist should not distort or soften the Islamic State's message, however unpalatable it might be. But just as press gallery reporters must be aware of the efforts of politicians to spin and use them, so should reporters covering the Islamic State know that they might be similarly manipulated, with potentially grave consequences.

Mainstream journalists, says Charlie Winter (2017, 20), should recognize that the Islamic State "weaponizes" media coverage. "Whether they consist of video executions or vague statements in the wake of terrorist operations, the Islamic State's media 'projectiles' enable it to dictate its own story, quite literally in its own words, to a captive audience of millions....Hence, it is of the utmost importance that media organizations resist the inherent 'clickability' of the group's propaganda and take none of its messaging at its word, let alone broadcast its contents without accompanying them with nuanced analysis."

Images of an Islamic State fighter brandishing a knife before beheading a hostage in an orange jumpsuit are memorable and arresting but serve little public good. Publishing such photos simply makes more powerful the media the Islamic State has weaponized. And while it is unlikely that choosing not to publish photos of beheadings will result in the Islamic

State curtailing the practice, it is also probable that doing so encourages the group's lurid brutality.

It is likewise difficult to see any news value in the Fox News decision to air uncut footage of the Islamic State burning to death the Jordanian pilot Kasasbeh. A host for the network said they broadcast the footage to show viewers "the reality of Islamic terrorism," but surely the horror of burning someone alive can be readily imagined without being seen.

A large number of Yazidi women and children have now escaped Islamic State captivity. Some of the women have willingly described their experiences, showing courage as they recount in details the abuses they suffered. Journalists are hungry for these stories and have, on occasion, aggressively sought them out without paying much heed to the additional trauma that may be caused by asking women to describe the enslavement and rape they suffered. This sort of reporting is vital to gather testimonies and document the victim's suffering, but must be undertaken with compassion and sensitivity.

Regarding the media narratives espoused by the Islamic State, there is a tendency among mainstream journalists to repeat the mantra that there is nothing Islamic about the Islamic State. For Muslims who reject everything for which the Islamic State stands, this accusation is understandable. It is also trite and misleading, and journalists reporting it should include explanatory analysis.

The Islamic State's ideology is, in fact, deeply rooted in an interpretation — a majority of Muslims would say a misinterpretation — of Islam. Its media propaganda provides copious evidence drawn from the Qur'an and Hadiths to support its doctrine and actions, from slavery to burning prisoners. It is able to do this because Islamic texts are voluminous, varied and open to differing interpretations. Islam is not unique in this regard. The Old Testament also contains instructions regarding slavery. Most Jews and Christians today, like most Muslims, do not condone the practice. Islamic State scholars and media operatives pick and choose from Islamic texts to find narratives that bolster their worldview. But these same examples can also be used to subvert the Islamic State's messaging.

An article in the fifth issue of *Rumiyah* (2017, 11), for example, decries the partisanship of *jahiliyyah*, a term referring to the state of ignorance that prevailed before the advent of Islam, and cites a Qur'anic verse that reads in part: "We made you peoples and tribes for you to recognize one another." The Islamic State cites the verse to argue for unity among Muslims. It might also be understood as praise for pluralism. The same group of prophecies predicting an apocalyptic confrontation between Muslim and infidel armies at Dabiq also speaks of a temporary peace and even partnership between "Rome" and the Muslims, suggesting constant and unending conflict is not inevitable.²

The Islamic State also seeks legitimacy by looking back to earlier caliphates. But here, too, it manipulates history as it sees fits. Harun al-Rashid ruled the powerful Abbasid Caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries, a golden age in Islamic history. He is famous in Arabic and Western folklore because he features in *One Thousand and One Nights*. He is admired by the Islamic State today.

"But Harun governed in ways and did things that are anathema to Islamic State," notes William McCants, a scholar of Islam and the Islamic State. "He drank wine. He may have had male lovers. He allowed musical instruments in his court. He made truces with the Christian empires of the day" (quoted in Petrou 2016). A fuller picture of Rashid, so venerated by Islamic State propagandists, might in fact undermine their ideology. Instead of dismissing or ignoring the Islamic State's claimed connection to Islam and Islamic history, journalists should seek out and reflect a broader picture of what those texts, and that history, might mean.

In that sense, reporting on the Islamic State and the mass atrocities it commits is no different than most other good journalism. It requires skepticism and curiosity, extensive research, a commitment to finding diverse and legitimate sources, and a desire to inform and serve the public rather than simply capture its attention for a moment or two. Given the subject matter and the lives affected, it is important to get this right.

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1 For a more detailed discussion, see William McCants (2016).

2 A Muslim-Christian partnership is discussed in Abu Dawood's Hadith collections. See also Petrou (2016).



14

HATE SPEECH IN BURMA

ALAN DAVIS

Was the hate speech targeting the Rohingya community in Myanmar engineered or was it largely the result of a confluence of unavoidable facts and forces? In seeking to answer that question, we should also examine whether the international community could and should have been better prepared and intervened sooner to reduce the impact of this hate media — an impact that is very much ongoing.

This chapter is my personal analysis of facts, events and trends as witnessed before, during and after my work in designing and leading a two-and-a-half-year media monitoring and reporting project on hate speech in Myanmar for the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR). The project involved working with a small group of Buddhist journalists from the Bamar ethnic and religious majority trained to publicly monitor and report on hate speech. Our work ended in July 2017, just one month before the exodus and mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya. The Rohingya are the people of the Muslim community in Rakhine State, who have hugely suffered as a consequence of never having

been recognized by Myanmar's leaders as a legitimate ethnic group or member of the Myanmar Union.

My own understanding, interpretation and personal analysis of what happened in Myanmar — as well as the likely longer-term consequences — was also informed by the rise and impact of hate speech in the former Yugoslavia more than a generation ago. In the early 1990s, I witnessed, reported and documented how the Serbian and pro-Yugoslav National Army media in Belgrade sought to demonize their Croatian opponents in September 1991 (Davis 2000, 4–5). It was clear for those reporting from inside the besieged town of Vukovar that hate speech was being used to prepare, justify and wage a brutal campaign of conflict against former neighbours and high school friends. So, too, it soon became very clear within a few weeks of launching our anti-hate speech project in Yangon that we were heading down a slippery slope to a point where the destructive and insidious power of hate speech would ultimately dominate and determine future discourse. What subsequently happened in Vukovar is very well recorded — not least by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. What ultimately happens and results in Myanmar remains to be seen. And yet, as we flagged and warned from the outset of our project there, the historical lesson is that those who seek to exploit and benefit from hate speech ultimately end up among its victims. Just as Serbia rejected and retreated from international opprobrium and suffered in the 1990s, so is Myanmar suffering today. The historical lesson is that, just like Serbian politicians in the 1990s and the Nazis before them, those who seek to use hate speech end up being destroyed by it.

Finally, my understanding, analysis and interpretation of what has happened these past few years in Myanmar has also been informed by my interest in and successive visits to the country, beginning in early 1991 when I first went there as a reporter on assignment for the *London Observer*. I was exposed simultaneously to the hugely enthralling magic and the deep despair and psychosis that was then Burma under its self-imposed isolation and fear of the outside world. Those sentiments quite possibly continue to shape attitudes and impact thinking in the majority Buddhist Bamar society today.

Back then, in the drive from Mingaladon Airport into what was still Rangoon, huge red and white billboards urged visitors in both Burmese and English to “love the Motherland.” Closer to town, others warned that “anybody who is unruly is the enemy.” Today, what is now Yangon is physically transformed from what it looked like then, when a room at the world-famous Strand Hotel could be had for US\$25, the entire city shut down at nine every evening, and the country’s local currency, the kyat, was available only in 9-, 18-, 45- or 90-note denominations because the then military ruler believed nine to be his lucky number.

As all visitors to Sule Pagoda in downtown Yangon will know, a strong belief in mysticism and pseudoscience remains, evidenced by the number of fortune tellers and palm-readers who still tout there for business. But what today’s visitors won’t see, unless they stumble off the beaten tourist track, are the handmade apartheid-style signs that have gone up in eight villages, in four regions and three states (Shan, Mo and Kayin), threatening Muslim visitors and urging them to stay away. At least one of those signs was posted by a Buddhist monk, while another carried written orders from local officials warning Muslims away. During our monitoring project, we also found similar warning signs in a bus company terminal as well as on a ferryboat. These signs and public announcements — and the fact that they were being shared and applauded so widely on Facebook in Myanmar, yet not reported on by the local media — led us to question out loud, via our own project Facebook page, exactly how deep the transition toward democracy in Myanmar really was.

Rightly or not, the international community and donors seek to measure success with singular events and major milestones. So the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in 2010 was widely celebrated, as was the more recent electoral success of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 2015 general election. It is perhaps more accurate, but also more difficult, to measure and test the real level and speed of democratic transition through many more modest indicators.

The June 2012 riots in Rakhine State’s Maungdaw Township, which left 200 dead and thousands displaced, came just three months after censorship began to be relaxed and a year after the military junta was officially

dissolved. This should have signalled that the road to democratic transition would in actual fact be much longer and harder than the international community imagined.

The 2012 riots were followed by attacks on Muslim communities in Meiktila, Okkan, Lashio, Kantbalu and Thandwe, in the centre of Myanmar, from March to October 2013. Each of these attacks was ostensibly caused by isolated incidents involving individual Buddhist and Muslim citizens that quickly escalated out of control. Inter-communal tensions already present as a result of the initial violence in Rakhine State were considerably worsened by the behaviour of the local Myanmar media, which often reported rumour over fact.

The 2014 riots in Mandalay — which left two dead, 20 injured and the city rocked by violence over a two-day period in early July — was later shown to have been triggered by rumours, widely reported in the local media, of a rape of a Buddhist woman by two Muslim tea-shop owners. The reports were subsequently found to be false. The woman admitted to police that she had been paid to make up the claim because of a personal dispute between the two Muslims. To its credit, the state-run newspaper, *New Light of Myanmar*, reported the arrest of three suspects on fabricated evidence, on July 22 (*Myanmar Times* 2014). But by that time the damage had already been done and relations between the two communities left badly damaged.

Whereas media freedom may be gained with the stroke of a pen, or won overnight by revolution, media professionalism has to be built up slowly after the end of censorship. Thus, it was only to be expected that after the end of the military regime in Myanmar and the start of the transition process, the local media would make some poor choices and bad mistakes. One very bad mistake was to publish the face of the dead Buddhist girl who had been allegedly raped and killed by three Muslim youths in Rakhine State. This clearly inflamed passions and precipitated further violence on all sides. The motive for publishing such a photo may never be confirmed. While it is possible editors chose to run the photo precisely to inflame tensions, they could have run it simply to titillate readers and drive up circulation. Anybody with even limited experience of domestic

media in some South Asian and Southeast Asian countries will have been confronted by the bodies of murder and accident victims, filmed and broadcast by local sensationalist TV stations without any sense of decency or consideration.

Because of IWPR's extensive experience elsewhere working to help build media professionalism in countries undergoing transition — and because of our particular appreciation of the dangers caused to multi-ethnic societies by a strictly controlled media sector that suddenly found itself open and free — we started approaching would-be donors in Myanmar in 2013 and 2014 to discuss skills development. Most media development was focused on the basics — media law, regulation, launching new independent media and the provision of 101-style reporting. Issues of ethics, sensitivity and conflict-sensitive reporting were not much prioritized.

Our approach in Myanmar was similar to that of our work a generation earlier in Yugoslavia and, more recently, in Kenya in 2007-2008, when local radio stations exploited post electoral violence to incite ethnic hatred and conflict. Our argument to prospective donors in Myanmar was that media has the ability to promote ethnic tension and conflict, whether intended or not.

At the same time, we were especially aware of the revolution in telecommunications that was taking place in Myanmar. This was very much linked to the transition and the process of economic liberalization. Up until 2012 or even later, I had been accustomed to flying into Yangon and forsaking my cellphone for the duration of my trip. International roaming ended around the Thai border, and until about 2012 a locally bought SIM card cost in excess of \$2,000 (Frenkel 2016). Returning for a media conference in late 2014, I found that my cellphone had a signal when landing at Mingaladon and that you could buy a cellphone in a shop opposite Bogyoke Aun Sann Market for 10,000 kyats (about US\$11). A SIM card and enough credit for 100-plus local texts cost just a few dollars more. What was more remarkable was that my new phone came with Facebook preloaded.

As Elaine Weidman-Grunewald, vice president of sustainability and corporate responsibility at Ericsson, told *BuzzFeed* journalist Sheera Frenkel (2016): “In 2011, our subscribers were in the thousands. Now, we are at 35 million in a country of 50 million.” Frenkel was one of several international journalists who became alert to the rise of hate speech relatively early. I spoke with her in Yangon around the same time as she wrote her piece, “This Is What Happens When Millions of People Suddenly Get the Internet.”

The title of her article rightly suggests the sudden access to the internet in Myanmar was a pivotal moment. Yet it was not simply access to the internet that was unfolding. Several other factors have been key contributors to where we find ourselves. The first was the telecommunications revolution that saw international companies competing intensely for the virgin territory that was Myanmar. The Norwegian Telenor Group won one of two major contracts worth billions in 2013. (The other winner was the Qatari company Ooredoo.) And almost overnight, thanks in part to some astute marketing, the Telenor brand was ubiquitous in Myanmar. Not only did they start building thousands of masts to cover the country, but they also hired the best available people to work for them. A young award-winning and Reuters-trained journalist colleague quit the media sector after almost 10 years and a master’s in international journalism to join the Telenor Group. The cheapest of Chinese handsets flooded in, and now it seems as if every second shop in towns across Myanmar is a phone shop. The cheapest of phones has the basic one-inch LED screen — although these are rapidly being supplanted by smarter and more costly phones with bigger screens and better imagery.

The second contributory factor, as mentioned above, and also related to the technical side of things, was the availability of Facebook on even the cheapest of phones. As the internet exploded in Myanmar, so did the availability and use of cheap cellphones and access to Facebook. For the vast majority of Myanmar citizens and probably near enough all of Myanmar youth, Facebook *is* the internet — and the internet is Facebook. People do not have the time, or the eyes, to visit websites — not when you have to squeeze a website so it looks good on a one-inch square screen. Facebook and social media therefore started to become the dominant

factor in Myanmar communication. Traditional media began to suffer, even as it was beginning to improve in quality as a result of increased attention and training on issues of ethics. As we have seen happen elsewhere around the world, traditional media began to lose its audience share in Myanmar, and traditional media groups started broadcasting to audiences through their own Facebook pages as a way of trying to keep their audiences. Video, however, takes up a lot of bandwidth and few people in Myanmar use their phones to watch video news.

Is it coincidental that we can chart the explosion of hate speech in Myanmar alongside the same general time of the rise in cellphone ownership and use of Facebook, around 2014? Most probably not. To be clear, hate speech in the country predated the rise of the mobile phone and social media. As mentioned above, the old billboards put up by the former military junta were very explicit in their threats to those they saw as “destructive elements.” Then — as now — the military, the feared Tatmadaw, is dominated by Buddhist Barmars. In the old schoolbooks used during colonial and post-colonial times, there are examples of racism and hate speech directed at others. As leading and exiled activist Maung Zarni (2012) put it as far back as September 2012, in the wake of the Rakhine riots: “Like millions of my fellow Buddhist Burmese, I grew up as a proud racist. For much of my life, growing up in the heartland of Burma, Mandalay, I mistook what I came to understand years later to be racism to be the patriotism of Burmese Buddhists. Our leading and most powerful institutions, schools, media, Buddhist church, and, most importantly, the military, have succeeded in turning the bulk of us into proud racists.”

Thus Myanmar, or Burma as it used to be called, is no stranger to inter-communal violence. The country has an unenviable history of internecine conflict. Culturally and traditionally, the Bamar majority blamed the British for invading and annexing Upper Burma in the first place (not to mention deposing the king) — and treating the country like a mere extension to India. This, then, saw many hundreds of thousands of Indians — both Hindus and Muslims — being settled to work in the country by the British administration. Hostility to the British occupation has thus long been combined with hostility toward those it helped settle in Burma. Riots in 1930 and 1938 were both anti-imperial and anti-Indian in sentiment.

Subsequently and following independence and the rise of dictator General Ne Win in 1962 and the country's self-imposed isolation, there was an intense "Burmanisation" process. This had the effect of "Buddhisizing" many hundreds of thousands of Indian Hindus, but had little effect on the Indian Muslims. Thus, with the British sent packing and the Hindus mostly integrated, sentiment against the "outsider" in Burma gradually evolved into anti-Muslim sentiment.

It is a little-known truth that the military junta actively encouraged Islamophobia over recent decades. There were many anti-Muslim riots before Rakhine State in 2012, most notably in Pyay and Taunggyi (1988); Mandalay Division, Yangon Division, Sagaing Division and Kayin State (1997); Sittwe (February 2001); Taungoo (May 2001); Pyay (October 2001) and Bago (October 2001). These events also saw lives and property destroyed.

The infamous monk Ashin Wirathu, leader of the ultra-nationalist Ma Ba Tha movement, was sentenced to 25 years in jail in 2003 for his part in instigating anti-Muslim riots near his hometown of Mandalay. By the time of the Rakhine State riots in 2012, Wirathu was already a free man, released under a 2011 prisoner amnesty.

Many observers claim Wirathu and his followers have played a critical role in promoting hate speech and inciting ethnic conflict. Our own monitoring extensively documented his unapologetic and hugely distasteful position and statements, in particular as they refer to Muslims and the Rohingya. Many have also wondered out loud to what extent Wirathu and his groups have acted independently — or instead been encouraged by, supported and even directed by shadowy groups allied to the coalition government or within the military seeking to promote conflict and instability for their own ends. Some commentators believe the NLD and leader Suu Kyi are as much the intended targets as Muslims themselves. This question continues to be hotly debated, but is unlikely easily or quickly answered to anybody's real satisfaction. Most probably there is an element of truth in all the accusations.

What is known, however, is that Wirathu and the Ma Ba Tha have been very successful in seeing their policies of religious and racial protection

(read “purity”) largely adopted by the mainstream. The group was largely responsible for ensuring the August 2015 enactment into law of four discriminatory race and religion bills. First, they claimed that the bills, especially the interfaith marriage bill, were a defensive response to the customary laws of the other three religions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Second, they argued Buddhist women suffer from human rights violations because they are forced to convert to the religion of their non-Buddhist husbands. And third, they argued the polygamous nature of Islam will result in a demographic swamping of Buddhist Myanmar by Muslims over time.

These claims are very prevalent in the hate speech in Myanmar today, as we found out in our baseline study of hate speech carried out in 2015: “The principal rhetorical strategy the 969 and *Ma-Ba-Tha* monks, most prominently Ashin Wirathu, have adopted is incessant and militant bombardment of their message through a nationwide dissemination of their anti-Muslim message. The channels of communication they have employed so far include sermons by Buddhist monks, talks by laypeople together with photo shows, weekly and bi-weekly journals, pamphlets, statements, pictures, songs, conferences, stories, books, movies, and social media (mainly Facebook).”¹

It is important to note that by 2015, the topic of hate speech was already hugely sensitive and problematic. Our donors, when we finally found them, insisted on not being identified — and the presence of the office IWPR opened up in Yangon could also not be publicized. While this may have been good for reasons of safety and security, it was less than ideal given the ultimate aim and objectives of our finalized project, which were to publicly monitor, report on and subsequently engage in the issue of hate speech so as to promote education, dialogue, debate and, we hoped, help build mutual respect and tolerance.

This task was much easier said than done, especially when we could not engage in the way we wanted to. To be fair, though, all of the 18 expert interviewees we spoke to as part of our baseline assessment requested anonymity. By 2015, very few people wanted to make a stand and speak out — except for a very small group of committed local civil society

activists and journalists, up to and including the 19 local journalists we recruited from Yangon and Mandalay to train and work as part-time monitors. All 19 were Bamar Buddhists — as was our project manager and our first project editor — and all are to be complimented for the excellence of and commitment to their work.

The international definition of hate speech was not as easily understood in Myanmar as one might imagine. From both our baseline interviews and extensive discussions with our 19 trainee monitors, it was clear that the issue of hate speech was deemed a problem that “all groups engaged in” and hate speech was never identified as being something that is based on certain ascriptive characteristics and is deliberately used to target and attack a minority at risk.

From the outset, we insisted to our 19 trainees — along with anybody else who might listen — that, in our view, not all hate speech is deliberate, and that much is accidental and can be reduced through basic awareness-building and education. We soon concluded that a lot of hate speech can simply be attributed to the tradition and ways people in Myanmar have engaged with and communicated with people of different ethnicity. Given this history, combined with the many decades of isolation and cruel military leadership the country suffered, as well as a pitiful education system and little to no economic development or outside investment, it became much easier to understand that on the whole Myanmar society has had precious little experience of civil discourse of any kind.

While the Buddhist Bamar may be the biggest ethnic group in the union and, as a result, dominate all the country’s major military, political and cultural institutions, we could not pretend that the Bamar were not also victims of hate speech in the Myanmar context. We found plenty of examples of anti-Bamar sentiment during the course of our project.

Ultimately, we decided to characterize and start monitoring and reporting on nine different types of hate speech. These included attacks directed at the Rohingya, other Muslims (non-Rohingya Muslims), Karen, Bamar, Mon and Chin. To this list we added gender-based hate speech, of which there is far too much still in Myanmar, and also hate speech that targeted the NLD. The NLD is obviously a political party that comprises a

multitude of people of different ethnicities and gender identities — and yet early on there seemed to be clear attempts to undermine and ridicule the party as a whole and particularly its leader, Suu Kyi. Given the context — our project launch largely coincided with the 2015 general elections and their immediate aftermath — it made sense to watch and report on what detractors were saying about the new government, especially when they made administrative appointments from among non-Bamar groups.

So, while the most common target by far of hate speech were the Rohingya, closely followed by Muslims, we also found a great deal of vitriol exchanged between Karen and Bamar — and between Christians and Buddhists. At the same time there was a good deal of targeting of women, and the NLD and Suu Kyi in particular. It is ironic that as Suu Kyi has been criticized by the international community (quite fairly, in my view) for her extended periods of silence on the Rohingya and wider Muslim “issue,” she has also been accused of “selling out Myanmar” and being pro-Muslim by Buddhist nationalists on Facebook. Critics on the social media service even attacked the way she wore a shawl on a state visit to New Delhi and called her a Kalar-lover — “Kalar” being a pejorative term in Myanmar for anybody with dark skin. It’s hard to “win” in Myanmar.

By the time our monitors were engaged and ready, the November 2015 national elections had been and gone. In our first bulletin, we found precious little hate speech in the traditional media. Most was found on Facebook. In the space of just a few days, we saw no fewer than 43,000 “Likes” of a post about an unidentified man driving in his car and speaking into his cellphone and claiming to know of an Islamic State (ISIS) plot to blow up Shwedagon Pagoda. Certainly, as we reported in that first issue, the first ISIS-inspired bombings in Paris and San Bernardino had an impact on thinking and drove conversations and fears in Myanmar across social media. They were also, of course, exploited by ultra-nationalists and followers of Ma Ba Tha. We found claims that the black flags of ISIS were seen flying from mosques in Yangon, when in fact — and as we explained in our bulletin — the flags had nothing to do with ISIS, but were actually historical commemorations of Arba’een, a Shia religious festival. That same issue, we also reported heavy criticism by a

hugely popular Mon social media commentator (with 56,000 followers) of a Christian Mon girl who had married a Buddhist Bamar man. The girl was accused of marrying “a foreigner” (that is, a Bamar). Most of the 600 comments were critical of the girl, and only a few wondered why the poster was seeking to “create mischief” and why personal relations were being politicized and used to divide people. Muslim commentators, too, were highly insulting of Bamars on occasion, we found.

Our experience of hate speech in Myanmar was that all groups were guilty of using it.

Our essential conclusion was that Facebook was facilitating free expression in a way that had not been possible before in Myanmar. Under military rule and censorship, people were dissuaded from voicing their opinions and fears. Not any longer. The popularity of Facebook, combined with ubiquitous access to cheap cellphones and fees — and the lack of any real tradition of civic discourse and tempered debate in the country — should have made it obvious to all that hate speech would flourish and become an increasing problem.

Consider these factors combined with the reality that Myanmar is a union of more than 135 different ethnicities, which continues to struggle with armed conflict in various states, and, moreover, is rejected as a state by many people who live within it. It is almost as if the country is a perfect petri dish within which hate speech can thrive. Add to this the real spectre of ISIS and Islamist fundamentalism, the fact that Buddhism was indeed historically present in Afghanistan and Indonesia, but rolled back by Islam over the years, the history of the British invasion and the Bamar sense of insularity and fear of the outsider. In this perfect storm, the issue of hate speech is entwined with the concept of identity — and even survival.

At the same time as we started to see hate speech against Muslims, and Rohingya in particular, become more focused, creative and insulting — and linked to the identity and future of the Myanmar state and the Bamar identity — we also saw it becoming more organized. Whether deliberate or not, we saw the same kind of messaging coming from a few dozen accounts, many of which were based overseas. We saw increasing attacks on Muslims and on the Rohingya, as well as increasing claims that

Muslim insurgents were responsible for efforts and plots to attack, terrorize and destabilize the country. We publicly warned our 30,000 Facebook followers — and privately warned our donors — that hate speech was becoming militaristic (with, for example, allegations of arms being stored in Yangon mosques), and that, left unchecked, hate speech could easily end up creating realities out of myth and rumour. The Rohingya Salvation Army may not have been created by hate speech, but it most certainly gained a terrific boost and shot in the arm from it.

Perhaps most important, as all this was happening — as signs were posted warning against Muslims being allowed to stay overnight in villages, Facebook posts told Buddhists to boycott Muslim shops, and comments claimed Muslims were dogs and vermin — we did not see any kind of pushback or condemnation of hate speech by the authorities — up to and including the NLD leadership.

One of the most tragic and disappointing moments was the assassination of U Ko Ni, the NLD's Muslim lawyer, at Mingaladon Airport on January 29, 2017. Our monitoring had found and recorded increasing attacks on him and his religion in the months leading up to his shooting. As the country's top constitutional lawyer, he was seen by many ultra-nationalists as seeking to change the balance of power and reduce the influence of the army and the Bamar majority. What was so disappointing — as we reported at the time — was the lack of any statement or condemnation by Suu Kyi in the days immediately following his slaying.

In the absence of political leadership and condemnation, hate speech was allowed to thrive. This conscious decision not to take any action against hate speech has allowed hate speech and notions of Bamar identity and “protection” to intertwine, thrive and take root, with devastating consequences for the Rohingya.

It is as yet impossible to say with full confidence that hate speech was engineered in Myanmar — but it is equally impossible to say it was not encouraged by some for political ends. What is wholly clear, however, is that citizens see the international community's “preoccupation” with hate speech and the issue of the so-called Bengalis (Rohingya) as an attack on Myanmar itself. It is also evident that an unhappy confluence of factors —

the country's history and culture, its fragile democratic transition, the telecom revolution, Facebook, a moral vacuum and the threat of ISIS and Islamic militancy — all helped bring us to the point where we are now.

In 1991, when I first visited Myanmar, the country was hugely insular and quite xenophobic. In the wake of Myanmar's democratic transition and all the huge developments that have gone on inside the country, one is left wondering what has really changed? But is it fair to assign all the blame to Bamar society? Or should we equally blame the international community for expecting too much, too soon?

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IWPR's No Hate Speech Project in Myanmar published a total of 380 reports in Burmese and English after monitoring and assessing 2,453 hate speech posts and published stories over the course of an 18-month period until June 2017. To read more about the project and see individual posts, visit www.facebook.com/NoHateSpeechProject/.

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- 1 Our project baseline report was commissioned by a Myanmar expert on hate speech whose identity has been kept confidential for reasons of safety and security.



15

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN: A LEXICON OF HATE SPEECH TERMS

THEO DOLAN AND WILL FERROGGIARO

Since the outbreak of violence in the world's newest country in December 2013, South Sudanese have called attention to how hate speech has inflamed further violent conflict.¹ While in Rwanda we saw radio being used to propagate hate speech, in South Sudan hate speech is occurring mostly in social media. And, in fact, most hate speech is coming from the diaspora communities, in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Kenya and even Canada. Although internet access is still relatively low in South Sudan, rumours, misinformation and hate speech can travel at warp speed through mobile phone communication and word of mouth.

Indeed, online hate speech was a concern even before the onset of hostilities in December 2013.² Diaspora communities around the world have increasingly voiced their grievances through social media, often

using inflammatory language and images (USIP 2014; Crawford and Omaka 2015). But what's the connection between online hate narratives and violence on the ground in South Sudan? How do we begin to understand those connections? And could there be any preventive function in identifying online hate speech in contexts where violence and mass atrocity are a risk?

PeaceTech Lab set out in 2016 to address a clear practical and methodological gap that exists in current efforts to tackle hate speech and its effects on communities in conflict zones — namely, how do we identify and contextualize the particular kind of language that's likely to cause violence? PeaceTech Lab is a recent spinoff from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), in Washington, DC, and works to reduce violent conflict using media, technology and data to accelerate and scale peacebuilding efforts.

Many individuals and organizations have sought to monitor and counter online hate speech, but what has been missing is a common understanding of what hate language actually looks like. To better understand the language of hate online in South Sudan, PeaceTech Lab conducted research to analyze and monitor hate speech on various social media platforms.

An online survey was conducted over a period of several weeks in 2016. Respondents were asked to name a word or phrase they had seen online that they considered offensive and inflammatory and likely to contribute to violence. They were asked what language was used, to provide an English translation and an explanation for why they considered the word or phrase to be offensive and inflammatory. Respondents were also asked to specify where they saw the word or phrase in use (for example, on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp) and, if possible, to provide a link. Respondents were also asked to provide an alternative word or phrase that could be used in each instance and to suggest some issues or topics most likely to trigger hate speech.

Given the topic's sensitivity, as well as the desire for thorough and reflective responses, the project team decided not to make the survey open and publicly available online to any person. Rather, the team assembled a list of potential respondents based on extended networks within South

Sudan and internationally. The team believed this reliance on personal networks would produce quality responses even if the respondents weren't randomly selected.

The project team drafted the survey, but before the survey was finalized it was reviewed by a wide range of experts working on South Sudan, hate speech and freedom of expression and survey design, among other issues. Consideration was given to aligning the questions with other initiatives focused on monitoring or countering hate speech, such as iHub Research's Umati Project in Kenya, the Mechachal initiative on online speech and elections in Ethiopia, and related work by Search for Common Ground in South Sudan. The Umati Project incorporates scholar Susan Benesch's "dangerous speech" framework. However, the team decided to use the more common phrase "offensive and inflammatory" in framing the survey questions.

The survey's primary goal was to have respondents identify specific terms that could inflame conflict, rather than evaluate the variables of a particular framework. With this basic threshold, the project team also intended to avoid prejudging or prequalifying the associations and dynamics that the respondents assigned to the terms. "Offensive and inflammatory" is a more readily understood threshold that reflects hate speech's core meaning as conveying offence, as well as possible incitement to action or discrimination. If a term were seen merely as offensive, it wouldn't rise to the threshold of inclusion; it needed also to be inflammatory.

The survey was hosted on a Google Forms platform because of the widespread familiarity with Google products, as well as Google's security features. The survey was disseminated to more than 300 potential respondents via an email invitation in which the survey and project were introduced and in which a click-through button linked directly to the survey itself. Unfortunately, after the initial invitation, the number of completed surveys didn't meet expectations. Consequently, the team spent significant time and effort reaching out individually to potential "hubs" of respondents, such as church groups serving diaspora communities, in order to expand the pool of online respondents. Additionally, the project team

conducted three separate face-to-face sessions, including discussion groups in the United States and Kenya, as well as in South Sudan. Not only did these sessions greatly enhance data collection, but they also enabled more in-depth discussion about the terms, context and emotive topics (or “triggers”) that could cause violence. Ultimately, more than 80 surveys were collected, providing a rich body of quantitative and qualitative information.

Before plunging into the lexicon itself, it is important to examine in more detail the context in South Sudan. Sudan and South Sudan have known war for nearly their entire post-independence history. The First Sudanese Civil War, which began before independence in 1956, ended when Sudanese President Jaafar Nimeiri agreed to a measure of autonomy for the country’s south in 1972. When Nimeiri ended that autonomy in 1983, the south took up arms. This Second Sudanese Civil War ended only after four years of formal talks that culminated in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In more than 20 years of war, some two million people died, and more than four million were displaced.³ The CPA included a provision for a referendum that allowed the south to vote to separate from Sudan. In January 2011, South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly to do so, and in July 2011, South Sudan became the world’s newest state.

Yet self-determination brought a host of issues that the CPA didn’t address. When subsequent negotiations between Sudan and the new state eroded in 2012, Sudan seized oil shipments; in return, South Sudan shut down its oil production, sending the new state’s oil-dependent economy into a tailspin. This incident exacerbated long-term issues of underdevelopment, a war-shattered economy and society, a low-level economic and political conflict with Sudan, and competition for resources among South Sudanese and within the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM).

Additionally, existing political divisions within the SPLM, formed during the long conflict with Khartoum, continued to grow. Upon independence, these splits resurfaced at the national level as well as more locally, especially as governance came to be seen as a way to reward allies and loyalists. The divisions came to a head in 2013 over who would lead the

SPLM in South Sudan's first post-independence elections. Riek Machar — a Nuer leader who led a bloody split from the SPLM in the 1990s, but who became first vice president under the CPA — and SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum publicly challenged how President Salva Kiir, a Dinka, was leading the SPLM and the government. In July 2013, President Kiir dismissed Machar. Relations had worsened by December, and Kiir declared Machar guilty of treason and of organizing a coup. In Juba, Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces massacred Nuer and arrested senior SPLM members, including Amum (African Union [AU] Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan 2014). Machar, Nuer leaders, and a few other tribes formed the SPLM-IO (In Opposition) to take up arms against what they saw as a Dinka-dominated government. The conflict spread to Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states and has featured horrific atrocities and killings of civilians based on their tribe or community. More than 50,000 people have been killed, 2.3 million have been displaced, and five million face severe food shortages (Copeland 2016). Under the threat of international sanctions, the two sides grudgingly signed a peace agreement in August 2015, and a transitional government of national unity, including both Kiir and Machar, was established in April 2016 (Bloom, Mackenzie and Hunt 2016; Copeland 2016).

However, this peace didn't last. In early July 2016, an SPLM-IO officer was shot and killed in Juba. Five days later, a shootout between SPLA forces and SPLM-IO forces left five SPLA personnel dead. While Machar and Kiir were meeting about these incidents in the presidential palace, SPLA forces attacked Machar's Juba stronghold, sparking a bloody round of violence that led to the deaths of an estimated 300 people and the displacement of tens of thousands. The United Nations Panel of Experts on South Sudan found that "the fighting was directed by the highest levels of the SPLA command structure" (UNSC 2016; Associated Press 2016; Landry 2016). Following Machar's departure from the country, SPLM-IO members remaining in Juba chose Taban Deng as chairman, and Kiir installed him as first vice president — actions Machar and others consider in violation of the peace agreement and the SPLM-IO charter (International Crisis Group [ICG] 2016a). The peace process increasingly appears in jeopardy, with Machar and others threatening to return to war (Aglionby 2016; Radio Tamazuj 2016b) and the government responding

that there was “no place” for them in South Sudan’s politics (Aglionby 2016).

In August, both Kiir’s government and the SPLM-IO rejected a UN Security Council (UNSC)-approved initiative by South Sudan’s neighbours, the AU and the international community to deploy an additional 4,000 international troops with a robust mandate (ICG 2016a; Radio Tamazuj 2016c). Subsequently, Machar indicated that his return would be predicated on the deployment of the new force, while the government signalled that it would accept international forces on different terms (ICG 2016b). Such statements notwithstanding, no progress on actual deployment of the force had been made as of mid-December 2016. Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights 2016a) warned of the existence of hate speech and incitement to violence, the UN Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention reported that the country is “ripe for the commission of mass atrocities” and genocide (UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide 2016) and a special UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan has found “a steady process of ethnic cleansing underway” (UN Human Rights 2016b).

A LEXICON OF HATE SPEECH TERMS

Survey respondents identified the following terms and provided contextual information. The terms are listed here in order of frequency of appearance. For each term, the “Definition” section contains information that respondents provided in survey questions about the term’s origins, general meaning and related information. The “Why it’s offensive/inflammatory” section discusses information that respondents provided in the survey question about why they believed the term was offensive and inflamed the conflict, including past usages, historical references to past conflict, and other context. Finally, the “Alternative words that could be used” section lists terms provided by respondents that they thought could be used in place of the offensive and inflammatory terms, or to mitigate or counter those terms. Additional contextual analysis provided by a small, but diverse, group of South Sudanese advisers supplemented survey data.

NYAGAT

Other spellings and related references: *anyagat, nyigaat, nyagaat, nyegat, nyigad, nyigat*; rebel, renegade, militia; *Mutameridin*; Marry a Nuer and you'll have rebel children.

Definition: The word may have origins in Amharic from Ethiopia, as it may have first been used by Ethiopians interacting with the SPLA based in their country in the early 1980s. The term is used broadly across South Sudan's communities, with minor variations in spelling and pronunciation, and is even used by politicians on television to criticize the opposition. The most common definitions that respondents provided were traitor, defector, sellout and rebel. An early use of the term referred to people who did business with Khartoum, opposed the liberation effort or otherwise didn't follow Dr. John Garang. Most people identified it as a derogatory Dinka word for rebels and, in the context of the conflict started in 2013, a word for Riek Machar and the Nuer people generally. Even more so, anyone from Kiir's side who joined Machar's SPLM-IO was considered a sellout. Conversely, anyone from Machar's community who supported Kiir was a sellout. A separate phrase, *Nuer weu*, emerged to describe Nuer who supported Kiir's government.

Why it's offensive/inflammatory: It's used against critics or civilians who oppose the government, but who aren't necessarily members of the armed opposition, and in doing so ignores legitimate grievances. Those who use it are suggesting that the targeted persons — mainly Nuer, according to respondents — don't love their country and will sell it out. One respondent traced the term's origins to the split in strategy in the 1980s civil war, specifically "during the conflict between the SPLA/SPLM, a Dinka-dominated movement with a mission of United Sudan, and Anya Anya 2, a movement whose mission was to fight for the independence of South Sudan." Another respondent viewed the term as illustrating a betrayal, as it "described a group of individuals or a person who didn't support or abandoned SPLM/A and joined or left for Khartoum. Fast-forwarding to today, [it describes] those who betrayed the people of South Sudan or the government of South Sudan." Another participant argued that the Nuer "are the 'perpetual *nyagats*' in history," according to his interpretation of their role in South Sudan's history. However, labelling the Nuer or any other tribe in this way demeans

individuals based on tribal affiliation rather than criticizing an individual or individuals based on their actions.

Alternative words that could be used: Opposition, anti-government, activist, non-loyalists, non-sympathizers, South Sudanese; member of SPLM-IO; Anyanya or Gurelia.

JENGE

Other spellings and related references: *jienge, jiaang, arian jenge, Aryan jeinge, arian janke, jange, jeng, jengi*; government of Dinkas, — of *Jienges*, — of bush persons; *jonkos*.

Definition: This term is used by Nuer, or those in Equatoria, to refer to Dinkas. There are many variations, including in Arabic, Juba Arabic, Murle and Bari. However, Dinkas also use the traditional term *Jieng* (“the people”) to describe themselves; the term may have neutral cultural and historical roots related to the pastoralist backgrounds of many Dinkas. *Arianjenge* was a term developed in Juba in the 1970s that differentiated naked, pastoralist Dinkas from naked Mundari pastoralists. People in Juba used the terms “government of Dinkas” and “government of bush persons” after the CPA came into effect and many South Sudanese descended upon Juba; the South Sudanese, in particular SPLA soldiers, grabbed all manner of resources. The terms are now often used by people critical of Kiir and his government or by people who want to disassociate themselves from the Kiir government.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: The term degrades Dinkas by associating them with cattle, characterizing the targeted person or group as illiterate, primitive or barbaric. Specifically, it scapegoats the Dinka people generally for the behaviour of government officials or soldiers.

Alternative words that could be used: South Sudanese from (state or region).

NYAM NYAM

Other spellings and related references: *yam yam*.

Definition: Both Dinkas and Nuer are reported to use this term to refer to Equatorians. A broad range of definitions were identified in this context: weak, in reference to Equatorian fighting skills; stupid; and donkey. In addition, the term is used to describe an Equatorian as “someone who’s very short and eats everything” or, if given something worthwhile, “would sell you out.” There was a belief among pastoralists that Azande people in Western Equatoria practised cannibalism; the pastoralists labelled them *nyam nyam*. It isn’t clear whether the term is always viewed as offensive, since many South Sudanese apparently believe that other tribes, and even their own, practice cannibalism. So the term is used broadly. At least one respondent indicated that Dinkas use the term to describe non-Dinkas.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: In general, using this term aims to demean Equatorians and establish the speaker’s superiority by assigning Equatorians negative traits, appearances or habits.

Alternative words that could be used: Equatorians; people of (Yambio, Maridi, Aweil, Tonj, Bor, etc.).

COW

Other spellings and related references: *Sup Re bagar* or *Aklak zeta bargar*; *baggara*; cattle keepers.

Definition: Equating people or their behaviour to a cow was reported to be common in many languages, including English, Arabic, Dinka, Chollo (Shilluk) and Nuer. It was usually intended for Dinkas, but also Nuer and other cattle-keeping people, most likely because of the chronic conflict between pastoralists and agriculturalists over land.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: According to several respondents, the speaker uses the term to establish his or her superiority and the inferiority of the other. In particular, it’s meant to describe someone as unruly, unethical and unfriendly and as one who abuses favours and hospitality, disrespects the feelings of others and doesn’t respect the privacy or customs that govern the cultures of non-pastoralists or host communities. It’s used mostly to refer to Dinkas, who are cattle keepers historically. As

the respondents noted, cows are good only for slaughter, and it's offensive to compare animals with humans, who have the capacity for reason.

Alternative words that could be used: Brothers or sisters from Bor, Malakal, Bentiu or Lakes state, et cetera; cattle keepers.

MTN

Definition: According to some respondents, Equatorians use this relatively new term to describe Dinkas; others indicate that it's used widely to create fear about Dinkas' encroachment on other communities' traditional lands and annihilation of those communities. It's based on the slogan for the MTN mobile service provider: MTN is "everywhere you go." According to one person, it's "used to target Dinkas who are found all over the country, like MTN service. It targets Dinkas who have abandoned their lands and scattered all over other lands — and especially against Dinkas when they're travelling. Vehicles are stopped, and drivers are asked whether MTN are in the cars." This has reportedly happened to public transport on the Juba–Yei road. In the more recent conflict in 2016, the term has evolved to mean the coordination of operations against the Dinkas.

Why it's offensive/inflammatory: It stirs fear by exaggerating the number and location of Dinkas within South Sudan, suggesting an increasing presence and pervasive (negative) influence throughout the country, specifically in competition for land, access to water, government services and jobs. It's a coded, action-oriented word: an MTN with "no service available" may mean a Dinka who's unarmed and therefore may be attacked.

Alternative words that could be used: Dinka; largest tribe or major tribe; neighbours.

KOKORA

Definition: This term means "division" in Bari. It originated in the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement at the end of the First Sudanese Civil War, which called for reorganization of three southern provinces — Bahr el Ghazal,

Equatoria and Upper Nile — into one southern region. Equatorians subsequently agitated for autonomy, while the other provinces preferred unification. In 1983, Nimeiri responded with a decree that disbanded union in favour of three provinces and ordered non-Equatorians back to their regions. Consequently, non-Equatorians use this term to disparage Equatorians as not liking people from other regions. Respondents identified usages that mean “to divide” or refer to division generally. Bari-speaking Equatorians use this term to describe Dinkas as land-grabbers, or to refer to land-grabbing grievances more generally.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: The historical lesson of Kokora for many was that redivision left the southern region weak against Khartoum, the greater enemy. The term has gained current resonance with President Kiir’s October 2015 decree to divide South Sudan’s 10 states into 28 states (Willems and Deng 2015). More concretely, based on claims for land, as one respondent put it, “This is used to target non-Equatorians, especially Jieng/ Dinka. It’s used to initiate violence against non-Bari-speaking people. It’s a term that can be used to turn Equatorians against people in Bahr el Ghazal or Upper Nile.”

Alternative words that could be used: Federal, federalism.

COWARDS

Other spellings and related references: *ariooce*.

Definition: While the first term is recognizable to English speakers, respondents said that Dinkas use both terms to refer to people of Equatoria. Combatants of Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk communities, among others, believe Equatorians didn’t participate in the 20-year Second Sudanese Civil War, which liberated the south from Arab rule. Currently, the term may more generally refer to those who don’t take the government’s side in the recent conflict. It’s also used to justify the rowdy behaviour of non-Equatorian people.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: In reference to the 20-year conflict, it labels an individual or tribe as unpatriotic. One respondent noted the unintended consequences of using such speech: “It attacks an entire

community [for] being cowards and could create an urge [for proof of the opposite] from the other.” Indeed, some of those in Equatoria have taken arms against their accusers.

Alternative words that could be used: Peaceful people, peaceful Equatorian or peaceful citizen; *Shaab Muslim* or *Nas ta Salaam* (in Arabic).

DOR

Other spellings and related references: *duor, doro.*

Definition: This Dinka term refers to any of the Equatorian tribes or any non-Dinka or non-Nilotic in any corner of the country. According to one respondent, the term’s origins are historic, dating back to the days of the slave trade, when Arab slave masters controlled their captives with whips and shouted “Dor!” (“Move!”). Current meanings include passive, stubborn and big-headed; these are possibly used to provoke Equatorian peoples who disagree with how both Dinkas and Nuer handle their affairs and therefore refrain from taking sides.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: It’s offensive to command a person in this way; the term implies that the person it’s directed toward is subservient and vulnerable, like those historically susceptible to slave traders. The user intends to label the targeted person as weak, compared with warrior pastoral tribes (Nuer, Dinka, Murle), and perhaps provoke Equatorians into taking a side in the conflict.

Alternative words that could be used: Equatorians; citizens; *Shaab ta Equatoria* (in Arabic).

MONYI JANG

Other spellings and related references: We fought; We liberated you; therefore, this land belongs to us; South Sudan exists thanks to the Dinkas; *monyi dru*; born to rule for life, born to rule.

Definition: This Dinka phrase, meaning “strong (*monyi*) people (*Jang*),” originally had a positive, if self-praising, meaning; Dinkas used it to refer to themselves. As with other terms, it has attained negative, chauvinistic attributes in the recent conflict. Some Dinkas in the SPLM use the phrase and its English equivalents to assert that they should enjoy privileges relative to Equatorian tribes. As one person described it, elites in the ruling party and army use the terms to justify their mismanagement of resources and power or other wrongdoing, based on their belief that they played a greater role and made greater sacrifices than others in the fight for South Sudan’s independence. Another respondent explained the belief: “We liberated this country, and we have full right to control the resources; what have you done, Equatorians?” The terms, when used to mean “born to rule/born to serve,” convey an entitlement for Dinkas and, consequently, a subservient role for Equatorians.

Why it’s offensive/inflammatory: It attempts to assert authority of one tribe over another by attributing liberation’s success to one group — an insult to the many communities who contributed to the effort. It not only attempts to belittle a community’s contributions to liberation, but also belittles their suffering. More generally, the phrases seek to establish ethnic superiority despite the fact that South Sudan is a diverse state with 64 tribes. But, as one person noted, the terms are “intended to justify ethnic domination of South Sudanese politics by the Dinka ethnic group” — and head off criticism of that rule. However, in the current context, it attributes government actions to a particular people, the Dinkas, even though not every Dinka supports these actions.

Alternative words that could be used: Dinka; South Sudanese; fellow citizen; compatriot; freedom fighter; *Shaab Junub Thudan* (in Arabic).

1991

Other spellings and related references: Riek Machar 1991 genocide.

Definition: The term refers to what’s also commonly known as the 1991 Bor massacre of Dinka civilians by Nuer forces (SPLM-Nasir faction) who opposed Dr. John Garang. The genocidal killing was one of many brutal episodes of atrocities committed by factions in the SPLM’s internal

conflicts during the Second Sudanese Civil War. It has also come to mean a split between allies, revenge and loyalty to tribal leadership, with the added resonance of the split within the SPLM affecting the larger historic struggle for independence from Khartoum.

Why it's offensive/inflammatory: Dinka leaders have used this reference to massacres of Dinka civilians in Bor to incite the Bor Dinka against the Nuer and to demonize Machar by reminding them that Machar is power hungry and has been responsible for massacres in the past. Indeed, one respondent indicated that reference to the massacres has been made on national television by President Kiir himself. One intent for its use may be to mobilize Dinka for pre-emptive action. Yet the term also provokes other reactions. Since it is normally used to refer to the killing of Dinka, the term angers people of Nuer and other communities who also lost family and friends in the massacres. Finally, while the post-2013 conflict has been different because it has happened during self-rule, the 1991 (and even 1985) fighting has never been fully investigated or addressed. Thus, the internal divisions and the damage they cause are perpetuated.

Alternative words that could be used: Nasir Faction; misunderstanding between SPLM separatists; 1991 coup against Dr. Garang; 1991 SPLM power struggle.

ONLINE SOURCES OF WORDS AND PHRASES THAT ARE OFFENSIVE AND INFLAMMATORY

In response to survey question 5, respondents identified online platforms of global brands, such as Facebook and YouTube (discussion groups), and social media sites such as WhatsApp and Twitter, as containing offensive and inflammatory speech. Websites that focused on South Sudan, where respondents found this speech, included the following:

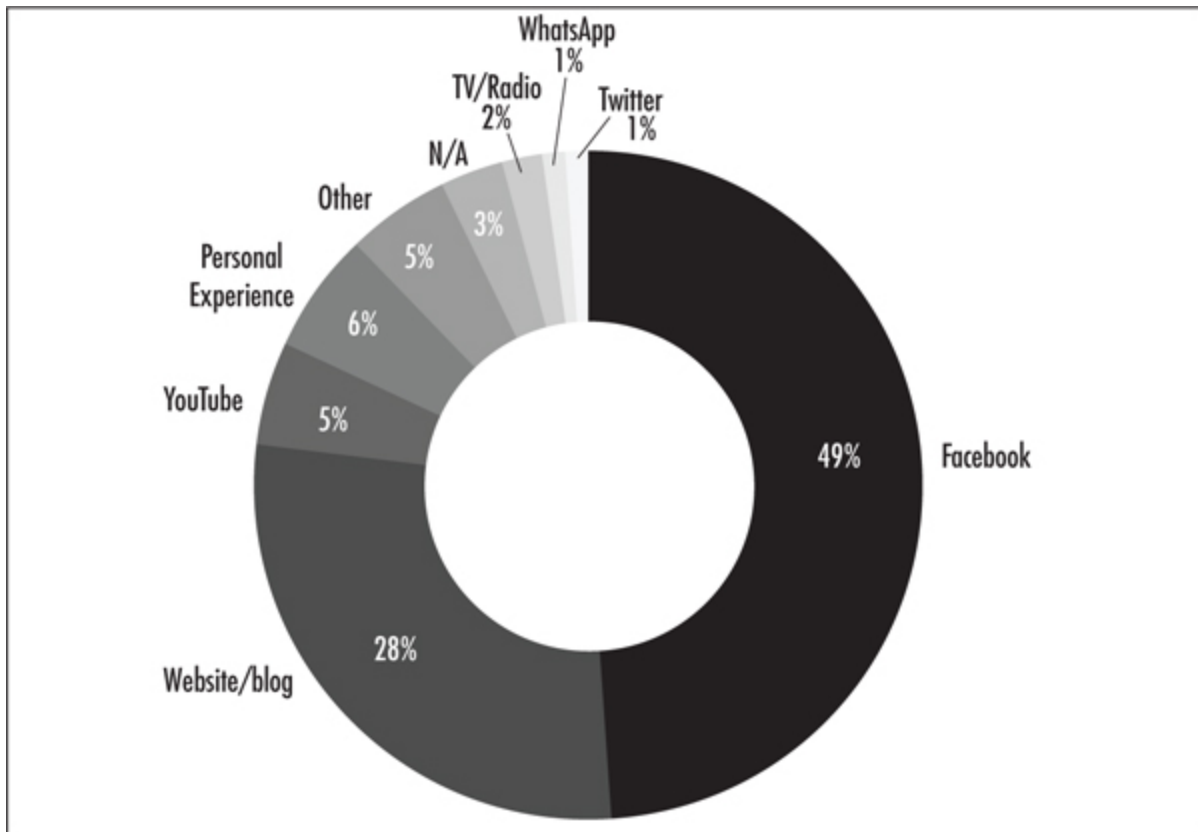
- Nyamilepedia website: www.nyamile.com;
- *Sudan Tribune* website article comment sections: www.sudantribune.com;
- www.SouthSudanNation.com;

- South Sudanese bloggers website: www.paanluelwel.com; and
- www.africanspress.org/.

Finally, respondents observed such speech on traditional media, such as South Sudan TV and SBS-Dinka Language Radio in Australia.

As **Figure 1** shows, almost half of all offensive and inflammatory terms that survey respondents provided existed on Facebook. News websites and blogs were also a common source of inflammatory words.

Figure 1: Source of Offensive/Inflammatory Words



Source: PeaceTech Lab.

PUTTING THE LEXICON TO USE

Based on data from the lexicon, we began monitoring hate speech using human monitors and social media analytic tools to identify examples of hate speech surrounding the conflict, and relevant trends on this content.

And to validate the findings, we conducted dialogues with South Sudan diaspora communities and shared our findings through regular reporting to interested stakeholders. In a final step, we began working with local hate speech countering initiatives, including #defyhatenow, and Ana taban, which is an artist collaborative for peace in South Sudan.

We also tried to go further, to explore the impact of use of some of the terms we identified through the survey research. And we incorporated those terms into the monitoring. For example, consider the term MTN, inspired by the name of a mobile operator from South Africa that has become the largest network in South Sudan. The MTN slogan is “everywhere you go.” But MTN has also become a derogatory reference for the Dinka, implying that they are everywhere you go in South Sudan. This is referencing alleged land grabbing, and their disproportionate use of power in marginalizing other communities.

The term has been used both online and offline to call for attacks on Dinka. For example, in late 2016, in the October-November time period, cars were stopped on major roadways, and drivers were asked, “Do you have any MTN in your vehicle?” There are documented reports of these people being pulled out of the vehicles and shot. Now, there is an important disclaimer here. As in any language, use of these terms is highly nuanced, and requires a strong understanding of the context in which they’re being used to determine the links to conflict dynamics. To that end, we used several different human monitors from South Sudan and in different diaspora communities to try to provide more nuance around the context.

Based on its reporting, PeaceTech Lab was able to develop a range of findings and visualizations from its analysis, including key themes that emerge in these conversations. [Figure 2](#) features word clouds showing conversations identified as hate speech on the left, and counter hate speech on the right. This displays the volume of hate speech and use of particular words and terms that we identified in our lexicon. This shows how particular words are used, and allows researchers to analyze the fluctuations and how terminology is used alongside reports of violence against groups in the country.

Another figure shows networks of individuals engaging in hate speech and related conversations. There are different nodes that connect perpetrators to their influence networks. Their networks may or may not include people engaging in hate speech. They could be people trying to counter the hate speech, but these are the influence networks that we can show through a particular software tool. And in terms of geography, we can show where in the diaspora the hate speech is coming from or, on the positive side, where people are engaging with countering campaigns.

Figure 2: Hate Speech in South Sudan: Outputs from Social Media Monitoring and Analysis



Source: PeaceTech Lab.

Using these outputs, PeaceTech Lab developed monitoring reports that came out twice per month to share relevant information on recent events and findings on hate speech, with partners working in South Sudan. PeaceTech Lab also made a data portal on its website to share live visualizations from this monitoring work along with resources for other groups who want to become engaged in countering efforts.

In 2017, PeaceTech Lab focused a lot more on working with partners in South Sudan to provide data and resources to assist local initiatives in countering hate speech. And this involved a number of activities, including continuing to refine social media monitoring processes and updating the lexicon with new hate speech terms. There have also been attempts to note where terms are evolving, because language is fluid.

The lab continued to enhance its reporting with new data and visualizations. For example, we have used a new software tool to look at specific perpetrators of hate speech and analyze their networks to see if we can provide some accountability through some of the countering initiatives done by our local partners. PeaceTech also developed a series of online video training modules to help South Sudanese social media users check sources, verify information and report instances of hate speech on various social media platforms. Few people in South Sudan use Facebook to flag a case of hate speech on the platform. Many are unaware this can be done, or are fearful that it's not anonymous reporting. PeaceTech Lab's training has focused on creating awareness on how to use these platforms to flag hate speech.

Finally, PeaceTech Lab has developed predictive analytics capabilities in hopes of developing early warning data — as close to real time as possible — to assist peace-building and humanitarian response groups by issuing warnings about likely outbreaks of violence based on the online use of hate speech. The hope is to combine research and practice in a context where it is rare for quantitative and qualitative research to directly inform local efforts to combat hate speech. In some preliminary work, the predictive analytics model used in 2017 forecast future violent incidents in South Sudan with greater than 70 percent accuracy, although not in real time. PeaceTech Lab continues to draw from additional data sources to further refine the model to get as close to real-time predictions as possible. That kind of predictive capability could be groundbreaking for prevention of violent conflict. If we were able to map patterns and online narratives to violent incidents on the ground, in close to real-time with high accuracy, perhaps we could inform early responders on the ground to prevent violent conflict.

Let's return to the example of the use of the term MTN. PeaceTech Lab identified the term at the beginning of 2016 in its research. Later in the year, some six months later, it was used as coded language to specifically target Dinkas in these roadside attacks. Just imagine if it had been possible, in the intervening six months, to provide information to local response groups and the United Nations. There is potential there for conflict prevention.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase have you seen online that's offensive and inflammatory and could contribute to violence? Please provide the complete phrase. (For example, in Argentina in the 1970s and Rwanda in the 1990s, political and military leaders referred to people they disliked as "insects" and "cockroaches" to be exterminated.)
2. What's the language of this word or phrase? (Choices are English, Arabic, Dinka, Nuer and Other. If "Other," please identify which language.)
3. What's the English translation of this word or phrase? (If the original language is English, please ignore and go to the next question.)
4. Why do you think this word or phrase is offensive and inflammatory? (Please provide a brief explanation. For example, "Group X's website uses the term to stir up verbal attacks or riots against Y people.")
5. Where did you see this word or phrase online? (Choices are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, News website [for example, opinion section or article comments section], and Other.)
6. If possible, please provide a link or URL to the word or phrase.
7. For the word or phrase you identified, what's a different — but less offensive and inflammatory — term that people can use to express their grievances? (For example, in Burma, many Burmese describe a minority group as "Bengali" to deny them full rights, but they're accurately known as Rohingya.)
8. What specific issues or topics are most likely to trigger online speech that's offensive and inflammatory? (For example: corruption, displaced people on other people's land, or the implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement.)
9. Please use this space to provide any other comments or information about online speech that's offensive and inflammatory.

10. Do you have another example of online speech that's offensive and inflammatory? (Choices are Yes and No.)

The "Other" option allowed respondents to input their own choice. Questions 3, 6 and 9 were optional. Question 10 allowed respondents to repeat the same questions if they had additional terms.

Once the respondent finished providing terms and information about them, they were then asked to complete the following biographical questions, which would remain confidential.

1. What's your full name?
2. What's your age? (Choices are ranges in years: 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, 46–55 and 56 or older.)
3. What's your gender? (Choices are Male, Female and Other.)
4. What's your primary language? (Choices are Dinka, Nuer, Arabic, English and Other.)
5. Where do you currently live? (Please provide the name of the city or country.)
6. What's your email address?

Finally, the project assembled an expert advisory board that comprised South Sudanese representing different communities, genders and professions. The advisers provided additional analysis and insights on a draft of the lexicon; they also helped to interpret context that included the use of different local languages.

AUTHORS' NOTE

This chapter draws upon material from a PeaceTech Lab publication of the same name, as well as reflections on the hate speech lexicon research compiled by Theo Dolan for the 2017 CIGI round table Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond.

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- 1 For example, see Radio Tamazuj (2016a) and Robert Ruwo (2016).
 - 2 Warnings about the existence of online hate speech before December 2013 include those from the United Nations (UN 2012) and International Alert (2012).
 - 3 The advocacy group Enough Project (2011) concludes that 2.5 million were killed and four million displaced; BBC News (2018) “South Sudan country profile” records 1.5 million killed and four million displaced.



**JOURNALISM
AND MASS
ATROCITY**



16

THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH WAR

PAUL WATSON

Early in 1994, trapped in a toxic love affair with war, I was restlessly looking north from my post in Johannesburg. The United States had called off its mission to arrest Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid, wanted on a UN warrant for the massacre of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers. The disastrous battle of October 3-4, 1993, had awoken Americans to the horrors of urban warfare in a country without a functioning government. Now the US military was in a phased retreat from the Horn of Africa, which would end that spring when the last US Marine off a beach white as sugar ducked down into his amphibious vehicle, closed the hatch watertight and disappeared into the Indian Ocean, trailing an oily black cloud of diesel exhaust. I needed a new, manageable conflict to cover.

I was addicted to conflict. Running exhausted on an endless treadmill of violence. Burundi seemed the perfect tonic. A few months earlier, on October 21, 1993, Tutsi assassins had executed the country's first democratically elected Hutu prime minister, Melchior Ndadaye, with bayonets. The assassination was part of a coup led by minority Tutsis and

set off a new cycle of bloodletting (Associated Press 1993b). The world wasn't showing much interest. Neither was my editor, who shared the prevailing Western view that it was tribal bloodletting, something endemic to the region, which was too repetitive to make for compelling reading. But the violence gave me a good enough reason to visit a country that was on my list.

I could tag on a trip to neighbouring Rwanda's Mount Visoke National Park and do a feature story on the disappearing mountain gorillas, which were even higher on my list. And many of the refugees fleeing Burundi's violence were sheltering in crowded border camps, which meant I could base myself in Kigali, the Rwandan capital, and commute to Burundi's civil war. After the endless cycles of killing that I'd been working through for months, in one country after another, it was the closest I'd come to a break. It sounded almost charming. I booked a room at the five-star Hotel des Mille Collines and looked forward to escaping South Africa for a refreshing break from covering the daily bloodshed in the townships during the dying days of apartheid.

Instead, I was stumbling into the early days of one of the most horrific genocides in a century soaked in the blood of mass killings.

In February 1994, when UN peacekeepers and diplomats still thought they could control extremists and keep Rwanda on a steady course to democracy, I took a room with a view of the pool. From several stories up in the Mille Collines, I also had a panoramic view of eastern Kigali's prefectures. As soon as the sun set on the first night, I noticed a familiar, unsettling sound: hand grenades. Hotel staff, unnerved by my enquiries, whispered that the explosions were coming from the shanties, where Hutu extremists were casually strolling through the darkened streets, tossing grenades into the homes of Tutsis. The killers were also armed with sticks and machetes, just a hint of the grotesque massacres to come. I shrugged it off as the sort of low-grade violence that plagued many poor districts of African cities. Until I ran into a chanting mob of extremists marching through the streets in broad daylight. I watched one terrified shopkeeper after another hurrying to shutter their stores as a crowd of Interahamwe advanced cheerfully through the streets, unobstructed by any security

force, local or foreign. It was obvious to every Rwandan in Kigali, and probably much further afar, that a genocide was coming.

Over the two days I was in Kigali before meeting with Brigadier-General Roméo Dallaire, head of the 2,500-strong UN peacekeeping force, the violence had killed around 40 people and wounded 50 more. Most had been hacked to death with small knives. The Red Cross told me the casualty count was probably low because the simmering unrest had shut down public transportation and other services for two days, forcing people to bring wounded survivors to hospitals on foot, carrying stretchers along the sides of deserted roads (Watson 1994). I asked Dallaire what he was doing to stop the bloodshed. He stressed his faith in negotiations.

“We were very close to an agreement twelve days ago,” he told me. “So, if we were close, we can get close again. I’m an eternal optimist. If I see people still talking, I think there is a chance” (ibid.).

At least two politicians were among the recent dead. Opposing sides had failed four times to set up a multi-party government in advance of scheduled elections. But President Juvénal Habyarimana had called a meeting for the next day to give talks another try.

“Because we’ve got a problem with forming a broad-based transitional government, one should not say all of a sudden the whole place has gone to hell,” Dallaire insisted. “Because the government is stalling, that has only opened up easy avenues for the bad guys and it’s left a vacuum for the good guys” (ibid.).

It struck me as the typical bureaucratic dodge, made many times worse because brazen killers were getting away with murder under the noses of a foreign military force. My tolerance for that sort of thing was very low. The lies that were the footmen of so much death in Africa were weighing heavily on my mind. The Somalia debacle was only one reason I’d lost any trust in the goodwill of military brass, who seemed more beholden to political bosses back home than the unarmed civilians they were sworn to protect. As a reporter witnessing the cruelties of one war after another, it wasn’t the violence that did the most psychological damage, but the lies. That stark truth explains my own sense of guilt and how it shaped my

reaction to the inferno of mass killing that was about to rage through Rwanda. Months earlier I had photographed the desecrated corpse of a single American soldier dragged through the dust-blown streets of Mogadishu. And that only happened because I was determined to correct a lethal lie. In my mind, the world left the génocidaires free to do their dirty work.

The continuum stretches back to 1992, and some 1,500 kilometres northeast on the Horn of Africa, where the regime of Somali dictator Mohamed Siad Barre collapsed, plunging one of the continent's most stable countries into the abyss of civil war and anarchy. Somalia was a one-time client of the Soviets and then a client of the United States in the Cold War because of its strategic position on the Horn of Africa. Journalists use words like "anarchy" a lot and far too loosely. I can say with great confidence, having seen a lot of unrest in my life, there is no anarchy as real as the anarchy in Somalia. Children carried automatic weapons. More than once I had children that were only slightly taller than the rifle they were holding pointing it at my head ordering me to do things, because the only legal authority was delivered from the end of a gun. If a 10-year-old child had a gun, you did what the 10-year-old child told you to. That led to a human-induced famine. Various militia factions saw money in blocking food aid. They demanded tolls of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were trying to save hungry people. The militias either blocked the food, demanding tolls, or they stole the food altogether for themselves, and so on.

It is very hard to be objective in the face of mass death. When you are literally stepping over the corpses of children and their mothers outside of feeding centres each morning, it's hard to do "he said, she said" journalism. You become an activist voice because that is the human thing to do. Your reporting automatically, I think, starts to take a point of view. Among the small group of journalists who were covering the famine at the time, mainly in the small desert town of Baidoa, the point of view was that the foreign military forces should intervene to stop the militias and to make sure the hungry were fed. So that's the story we told. And then that's what happened.

Then-US President George H.W. Bush announced, to the surprise of many people, an American-led military intervention in Somalia. Some scholars, using statistical analysis of column inches and broadcast minutes, have concluded that news coverage of the famine had little or nothing to do with Bush's decision. But commanders-in-chief don't normally mobilize military forces without cold calculation of the risks, which always include getting bogged down in a foreign country of no lasting concern to American voters. Without doubt, the United States had strategic interests in the Horn of Africa that shaped Bush's calculations. But without popular support, there was little to gain from wading into the mire of Somalia. Complicating the decision, Bush was a lame duck who announced a massive military operation with just 47 days left in the Oval Office (Vines 1992, 1). The horror of watching Somali children starve to death while well-fed gunmen blocked food aid and extorted large sums of money to let relief convoys pass provided the humanitarian justification the president needed to order 28,000 troops into action halfway across the world.

"Our mission is humanitarian," Bush said in his announcement, but US forces "will take whatever military action is necessary to save the lives of our troops and the lives of Somalia's people."

"The outlaw elements in Somalia must understand this is serious business," he added. "We will accomplish our mission. We have no intent to remain in Somalia with fighting forces, but we are determined to do it right — to secure an environment that will allow food aid to get to the starving people of Somalia" (ibid.).

Bush was also reacting to international pressure for action, fuelled by foreign news media. He formed a coalition that included Canada, Britain, France, Pakistan and Jordan, with US troops and materiel making up by far the bulk of Operation Restore Hope.

Any military intervention rarely stops where it began. By the time foreign forces arrived, Somalia's famine was fast running out of victims. Like a virus, it killed off the weakest, mainly the young and old, and peaked just as the military airlift was taking shape. The troops did good work, and saved many lives anyway. But inevitably, mission creep set in. It drew foreign forces from the mainly peaceful work of making sure the hungry

were fed into becoming what Somalis soon saw as another political faction in a civil war.

US President Bill Clinton now had responsibility for a US-led mission, under a UN flag, whose toughest job had shifted from assisting relief workers to disarming Somalia's myriad clans and militias. Mohammed Farah Aidid had the most to lose as Mogadishu's most powerful warlord. The former general in Siad Barre's fallen regime saw himself as the natural ruler of Somalia. To the retired US admiral in charge of the UN mission, Jonathan Howe, Aidid was a major obstacle to peace. Somali detractors mocked the UN special envoy as "Animal Howe." Pressures between Aidid's Somali National Army faction and the UN peacekeepers had been building for months when the dam broke on June 5, 1993. Angered by rumours that the UN force was about to seize Aidid's radio station, his supporters battled in the streets with Pakistani peacekeepers. The UN insisted the Pakistanis were ambushed as they carried out routine disarmament operations. The fighting left 24 Pakistani blue helmets, and dozens of Somalis, dead (Associated Press 1993a). It was the bloodiest attack on UN peacekeepers in 30 years.

The UN launched a new mission to arrest Aidid on an international warrant. To induce anyone who might dare try to hand him over, the UN offered a \$25,000 bounty. Backed by American airpower and armour, the UN force stepped out of the traditional constraints of peacekeeping into all-out war on the night of June 12, 1993. An AC-130 H Spectre gunship, a flying armoury fitted with a terrifying array of weapons that included laser-accurate 105-mm Howitzer artillery guns, pounded Aidid's compound and other targets along with Cobra attack helicopters. An armoured ground force, including French, Italian, Pakistani and Moroccan troops, swept through south Mogadishu. Around 130 soldiers from the US Army's 10th Mountain Division scrambled to rescue Moroccans pinned down by Somali militia fighters (Lorch 1993, 1). Officially, Clinton claimed the goal of the heaviest battle since foreign troops arrived "was to undermine the capacity of Aidid to wreak military havoc in Somalia" (Clinton 1993). With the massive firepower brought to bear, it seemed much more like an attempt to kill Aidid. He escaped unharmed and went deeper underground, amid a bloodbath that cost the lives of five

peacekeepers — four Moroccans and a Pakistani. More than 60 Somalis were killed. Clinton declared it a success.

Aidid “murdered 23 U.N. peacekeepers and I would remind you that before the United States and the United Nations showed up he was responsible for the deaths of countless Somalis from starvation, from disease and from killing,” the president told a news conference. “The back — the military back of Aidid has been broken. A warrant has been issued for his arrest” (ibid.).

I was eager to interview the fugitive now known as “The World’s Most Wanted Man.” I joined a couple of British colleagues and signed a letter requesting an interview in hiding. We sent it through a messenger to Aidid’s financier, arms supplier and, some suspected, probable CIA operative. He was Hassan Osman Ali, better known as Osman Ali Ato, “the thin one.” For weeks, US Special Forces units carried out daily missions trying to snatch the slippery warlord. Commanders had sophisticated “eyes in the sky” led by PS Orion Reconnaissance planes that constantly circled the city while helicopters with various listening and observation devices buzzed back and forth. When intelligence teams thought they had picked up Aidid’s trail, or that of someone close to him who could be squeezed for information, assault teams took off in UH-60 Black Hawk choppers. They hovered over buildings and rappelled down heavy ropes in what were supposed to be surprise assaults. But Aidid had a very effective intelligence operation. Often, it seemed he had fled just minutes before US troops arrived. On other occasions, Aidid’s operatives must have fed the UN mission false leads that led to humiliating screw-ups such as a night raid on a compound housing UN aid workers. They were forced to lie on the floor in their pyjamas while US troops threatened to shoot anyone who moved. Three, including a Canadian, were flown to a detention centre and interrogated. Compounding the embarrassment, manhandled foreign aid workers accused the Americans of stealing a gold Rolex watch, sunglasses, a wallet and other personal items (Watson 1993).

Mogadishu was whipsawing from farce to horror. A month after Aidid escaped the aerial bombardment of his home, US attack helicopters pummelled a three-storey villa with missiles, pancaking the building

during a meeting of elders from Aidid's Hebr Gedir clan and Muslim religious leaders. Somalis said the July 12, 1993, assault targeted a conference that was discussing a possible peace overture to the United Nations. It would have made sense for Aidid to be at such a meeting. If he was, he escaped yet again while 73 Somali civilians reportedly were killed. A group of Aidid's militiamen came to the hotel where journalists stayed and urged reporters to cover what they called a massacre. The few foreign journalists there asked for guarantees of protection. They received those guarantees. They entered the walled compound and almost immediately a mob turned on the journalists and killed them in ways that are too horrific to describe here.

Those reporters were the very people that we think about when we think about journalists who want to tell the truth so badly that they will take any risk and make any sacrifice to try to do it. Hansi Krauss, German, was a photographer for the Associated Press. Anthony Macharia, Kenyan, was a TV soundman for Reuters. Hos Maina, Kenyan, was a photographer for Reuters. Dan Eldon, American and British, was a photographer for Reuters. All were killed by a mob that made certain that the story of what I believe to this day to be an American military war crime went virtually unreported. No one had fired from the structure on anyone. They were attacked at a distance by helicopters that could not be seen or heard, and large numbers of people were killed. That, by definition, is a war crime. That story never made it into the international news because the story of the day was the death of four foreign journalists.

The UN peacekeeping mission was consumed by a gunslinger mentality, epitomized in the almost cartoonish figure of a US Marine. Major Mike Collier was a hard-nosed career warrior who had climbed the ranks during the Vietnam War. In Mogadishu, the United Nations made the silver-haired, 46-year-old Marine the liaison officer in charge of relations with aid workers and other NGOs. Not exactly a good fit. Collier's trademark was a large cigar that he chomped like the muscle in a gangster movie. Colleagues liked to call him "Mad Mike," which Collier liked. Somalis, who seemed to have a nickname for all their favourite characters, good or bad, in Mogadishu's increasingly bizarre drama, knew Collier as *Tobaako Weyne*, or "Big Tobacco" (Watson 1993b). He smiled at that one too.

When he wasn't meeting with NGOs, Collier liked to stroll in the street, alone and armed to the teeth, daring Somalis to take their best shot. He struck me as a cross between Rambo and John Wayne, with a bit of a slouch. Two bandoliers, with 240 bullets glinting in the African sun, crisscrossed Collier's chest. He also packed a shotgun with 75 shells, an Israeli-made Galil assault rifle with nine magazines, a 9 mm Beretta pistol with five magazines, an M79 grenade launcher with 36 grenades and three light disposable anti-tank bazookas (ibid.). He seemed to be itching for a fight. The Marine explained that he was just being prudent.

"If you have to carry a gun for a living, it'd be foolish to carry just one," the Marine told me. "Anything mechanical can fail."

Just to be careful, Collier also carried two nine-inch Randall fighting knives. When I spoke to him in September 1993, the shotgun had been Collier's most effective weapon.

"When I point my shotgun at a driver's head, the only sound you hear is knuckles hitting the ceiling," he said.

It was a rare, colourful break from the relentless spiral down into more bloodshed. A British colleague who craved some of the same colour begged me to come along on the interview. But before he could finish writing his story, he was called away to breaking news somewhere else.

"Do me a favour and file your story to my newspaper," he asked.

"Sure, as long as they don't use my byline," I told him.

I soon got a call from the foreign editor of the *Toronto Star*, Paul Warnick, another former US Marine who used to work for *Stars and Stripes* newspaper, who was now the sort of stand-by-his-staff editor that I loved.

"What the fuck is this on the front page of this *London Sunday Times*?" Warnick barked down the satellite phone line. I explained and the foreign editor let me off with a warning.

Later that month, I got another call from Warnick. He seemed more amused this time. An official in the US State Department had phoned him. After Ato's capture, the US military had found the letter I co-signed to Aidid in his lieutenant's pocket.

"Do you know your man in Mogadishu is effectively operating as a propagandist for Aidid, a wanted war criminal?" the American official asked from Washington, DC.

"I told him to fuck off," Warnick assured me. He told me to keep going.

The next day, Somalis accomplished what they had been trying to do for weeks. They shot down their first Black Hawk helicopter with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). The chopper came down near the Green Line, a civil war ceasefire line separating factional strongholds in north and south Mogadishu. Militia fighters rarely crossed it, but that didn't stop the ritual of regular combat. When Aidid's forces weren't mobilized for pitched battles with the peacekeepers, they would sleep late and chew khat, a mildly narcotic plant that the fighters used to get their hearts pumping. To them, it was like downing many cups of strong coffee. Fully wired, they would fight all night. Then they would go to sleep, wake up to some more bundles of khat and do it all again.

We had been watching for days as gunmen fired RPGs up at helicopters, with a great whoosh and smoke, only to miss their targets. The grenades are designed to hit objects on the ground, such as trucks or tanks, and explode on impact. Trying to hit a Black Hawk, whose largest target for ground fire is an armoured belly, with an RPG seemed desperate, even dumb. Maybe too much khat chewing, we joked. That's because we didn't realize the Somalis were getting expert training from foreigners who shared their hatred of what they saw as American invaders. The UN's military spokesman, Major David Stockwell, had dropped hints more than once, but never came out and said publicly what US intelligence secretly knew.

Stockwell was a US Army Ranger. Each afternoon, he changed his beret from Army green to UN blue for the afternoon press briefing. As we peppered him with questions about how the arrest operation was going so

wrong, he would say from time to time: “Why don’t you guys go and investigate these so-called Saudi relief operations, Saudi charities. They’re not really charities.” Stupidly, we didn’t take him up on it. I regret not having taken the bait until after the al-Qaeda attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. I spent a fair bit of time working with a Somali colleague to show that indeed there were phony Saudi charities in Mogadishu in 1993, one of which was operating as a front for a group we now know as al-Qaeda. What al-Qaeda did in Somalia was not start a war or run a war. They offered assistance to Aidid’s militia, an ally fighting the same enemy, namely, the United States (Watson 2007, 21).

By figuring out how to make an RPG an airburst weapon, Somali sources said, fighters didn’t have to aim for the widest part of a Black Hawk. A grenade explosion anywhere near the tail could bring the chopper down by spraying a cloud of hot, sharp shrapnel. A single, small piece of razor-sharp metal could sever a hydraulic line, shutting down the tail rotor and sending the helicopter on a death spiral to the ground. That happened on September 25, 1993, but the world barely took notice.

Because the journalists had been massacred in July, and the US State Department warned of a kidnapping plot targeting foreigners in Aidid’s territory, I was one of fewer than five foreign journalists left in south Mogadishu. I went out with my team of a Somali gunman, interpreter and driver, and found the smouldering American helicopter. A large crowd of Somalis surrounded the wreckage. Some displayed what they said were the scorched remains of Americans, such as teeth and a strip of flesh on a stick. An American corpse, they claimed, had been taken to the dark heart of Aidid’s stronghold, a place called Bakaara Market. It would have been suicide for me to go there, so my Somali fixer volunteered. I trusted him like a brother. I’d worked with him for a long time. A journalist himself, he returned with a detailed account of what he had seen.

I had a deal with Reuters. I could use the satellite phone they left behind if I phoned them with news whenever it occurred. I called the news agency’s Nairobi bureau and I said, “My fixer has gone to Bakaara Market and seen an American corpse, a torso, in a sack. It’s being displayed for Somalis.” Reuters quickly moved a story. CNN called almost immediately. After a

brief chat with CNN President Tom Johnson — during which he asked, “Do you know the implications of what you’re saying?” — a network anchor interviewed me live. The Pentagon swiftly issued a statement denying my report.

“The story has no basis in fact,” Reuters quoted an unidentified Pentagon source. “We have recovered all the remains. We don’t know what they’re allegedly parading.”

I had made this fundamental mistake: I didn’t give my fixer a camera to get photographs of the corpse in the market. No pictures, no proof. The story died a fast death.

Eight days later, the runaway train that was the US-led mission in Mogadishu went completely off the rails. Somali fighters poured streams of RPGs into the air during a 16-hour battle that began on October 3 and raged through the night. They brought down four Black Hawks and damaged others. The whole city blew up as American and allied rescue missions came from different directions trying to rescue the downed air crews. On the morning of October 4, my Somali team arrived at the hotel while sporadic fighting continued in the streets. They told me at least one American had been taken alive and was being paraded through the city, wounded and in a wheelbarrow.

“This isn’t like any other day. You can’t go on the streets,” my fixer insisted. “You’re going to get killed.”

For an hour or more, I argued that we had no choice. “They called us liars once,” I finally said. “We can’t let them do it again.”

That wasn’t a matter of pique. It was a journalist stating the obvious: we knew the truth on September 25. The Pentagon denied it. Now much worse was happening. If we allowed them to deny this one, what the hell was coming next?

They gave in and reluctantly agreed to take me out in the white Toyota Cressida that was a regular vehicle. There was always a gunman in the front passenger seat with a rifle, mostly protecting the car, but this time

the fixer took an assault rifle, and we took an extra guard with another rifle. I don't think either one of them knew how to shoot it accurately, but we were past the hotel security gates and I was happy. We eventually found a mob dragging the nearly naked, bullet-ridden body of Staff Sergeant William David Cleveland by thick ropes. I photographed jubilant Somalis desecrating Cleveland's corpse so there would be no denying the truth this time. Cleveland has haunted me ever since.

The picture appeared on front pages across the United States. Clinton ordered the immediate end to the arrest operation against Aidid, and then very quickly started withdrawing, and over a period of months, removed all US forces from Somalia. To this day, the country is an al-Qaeda base. Osama bin Laden bragged about that victory in the streets of Mogadishu as proof that it took very little to defeat the most powerful military in the world, to make them turn and run. It would be the central excuse for the Clinton administration's refusal to go into Rwanda to stop the genocide months later. The president's feeling of military impotence in the face of Mogadishu's violence sent him into a rage as early reports of casualties came in.

"I believe in killing people who try to hurt you," Clinton, red-faced and pounding his thigh, scolded national security adviser Tony Lake. "I can't believe we're being pushed around by these two-bit pricks."¹

It was both a military and, more crucial to the long-term thinking of a first-term president, a political humiliation that would have serious consequences for Rwanda months later.

Cleveland wasn't the only ghost in the room as I listened, dumbfounded, to Dallaire in February 1994. I'd just left South Africa, where apartheid regime security agencies were running black ops aimed at fomenting civil war, which the white right tried to use as proof that blacks were incapable of governing themselves. A few hours' drive from where I sat across Dallaire's desk, Burundi was unravelling and most of the outside world shrugged it off as "tribal killing." After Somalia, I didn't have a lot of respect for UN peacekeeping. But I still had an open mind. During my brief time in Rwanda, I hadn't seen anything that suggested Dallaire was

up against fighters with anything close to the tenacity and urban warfare skills of the Somalis. It wouldn't be hard, I imagined, to scare off extremists with a show of Western military force.

I pressed Dallaire on his comment that negotiations still had a chance, hoping he would at least hint at some kind of action. The general calmly explained that the peacekeeping mission's UN mandate allowed his troops to kill in order to save someone's life.

"How many people have you killed?" I asked.

"We've only fired warning shots," he replied.

"Well, how many of those?"

"Two."

"Holy shit," I thought to myself.

A full-scale, meticulously organized genocide began some six weeks later after the plane carrying the Hutu presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, Juvénal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down on April 6, 1994. Up to one million people were slaughtered, many beaten and slashed to slow deaths by men armed with machetes and primitive wooden clubs with round heads packed with rusty spikes. Not the sort of enemy a professional soldier would be expected to shy away from. Rwandans had seen it coming, and all outsiders could offer were excuses wrapped up in apologies. "Mad Mike" Collier didn't seem so out of place anymore.

When the génocidaires were running rampant in Rwanda, officials in the Clinton administration were under strict orders not to call the mass murder what it obviously was: genocide. That would have required foreign intervention under widely accepted interpretations of international law. I was back in South Africa, arguing with Warnick, my foreign editor, that I should be in Rwanda. He insisted I stick with coverage of the historic end of apartheid as Nelson Mandela's African National Congress swept to power in the country's first fully democratic elections. Once Mandela's

victory was sealed in early May 1994, Warnick let me move north where I scrambled to make up lost ground on a 100-day genocide that had passed its first month.

I crossed Rwanda's southeastern border with Tanzania to join up with Rwandan Patriotic Front guerrillas, abandoned by the West to battle the génocidaires on their own. In village after village as we advanced across the country, there was no one left but the dead, their fly-blown corpses rotting in banana groves, farmer's fields or wherever else they had been cut down as they tried to hide or were rounded up for execution. In the back room of one small home, a stack of children's bodies lay on a bed, the largest at the top, a single hand of an infant poking out from the bottom of the heap. It looked to me like the oldest had tried to hide the youngest. Shell casings from rifle bullets were scattered around the sun-baked earth just outside the door, along with children's school notebooks, fluttering in the breeze. Further west, at Nayarubuye Church, where up to 10,000 people were slaughtered, the twisted corpses still covered the compound's floors. The dead were crammed shoulder-to-shoulder in a macabre scene fit for a Boschian vision of hell. The corpse of one small boy, dressed in a blood-stained school uniform, is seared in my mind: his head was cleaved in half, lengthwise down the front, by a single machete blow.

I couldn't help but think of Dallaire and his undying faith in negotiations. Several years passed before the full truth came out about how he had warned his bosses at UN headquarters in New York, only to watch foreign governments order most of their troops out of Rwanda soon after the genocide began (*The Washington Post* 1998). Dallaire had suffered terribly. I knew more than most how he was suffering because of my own struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. But another question still burned inside me: he cabled his secret warnings to New York on January 11, 1994. The next month, as the génocidaires brazenly tested the UN's resolve and found nothing to deter their bigger plans, the general assured me that talk could stop the daily killings. With an experienced journalist sitting in front of him, I wondered, why didn't Dallaire confide what he knew and see if public pressure might work where his confidential communications up the chain of command had failed. Why in the world,

instead of being the “loyal soldier,” didn’t he say, “Let’s go off the record for a second: This is what I’m dealing with. If you can persuade me that I can trust you, we can work together to get this out there. Maybe that’s the best weapon I’ve got left.”

Honourable soldiers had done it before. The best modern example I know was John Paul Vann, an American patriot serving in Vietnam who wanted to defeat Communists, but knew his superiors and government were lying about winning the war. The former US Army lieutenant-colonel gave up on trying to get the truth through to decision makers by way of official channels and instead taught a small circle of trusted journalists how to see through the lies and spin of military briefings and press releases. It was the birth in the early 1960s of what became known as “the credibility gap,” when journalists broke the chains of conflict reporting in previous wars and went in search of facts for themselves, often at great risk. Vann, who knew the early stages of the US war in Vietnam intimately as a courageous and highly decorated warrior, went rogue because he thought that is what victory required. He became the teacher in what *New York Times* war correspondent Neil Sheehan, one of the star pupils, called “the Vann school on the war” (Sheehan 1989, 317). Crucially, Vann didn’t see reporters as the enemy, as most armed forces do. He respected them as powerful allies.

“Our youth and inexperience made it possible for us to acquire what critical faculty we were displaying,” Sheehan wrote in *A Bright Shining Lie*. “What we saw and what we were told by the men we most respected and most identified with — the advisers in the field like Vann — contradicted what we were told by higher authority. We were being forced at the beginning of our professional lives to come to grips with a constant disparity between our perception of reality and higher authority’s version of it, the opposite of the experience of the World War II generation of journalists” (ibid., 20).

Sheehan credits Vann’s behind-the-scenes guidance with fostering probably the most influential war reporter of a generation rich with good ones, *The New York Times*’ David Halberstam. He admired Vann as a straight-talking, bull-headed Virginian from a poor Appalachian family,

one of the bravest, most accomplished officers in a war where telling superiors what they wanted to hear was too often the norm.

“Vann was essentially a very simple man, not a man of compromise,” Halberstam wrote in *Esquire* in 1964, when American forces in Vietnam were still officially advisers. “He once told me that the trouble with compromise was that you took a person who was right and one who was wrong and compromised between them until you had something that was neither right nor wrong” (Halberstam 1964).

The military brass knew what Vann was up to and wanted him fired. So did the corrupt president of South Vietnam, who was a central part of the problem. But the US commander backed off, fearing bad publicity. Vann ended up resigning in protest.

I finally got to ask Dallaire the question that had eaten away at me for so long when he spoke to the round table Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond, at Carleton University in early December 2017. That was almost 24 years after my frustrating first interview in Kigali. My gut told me to let it go. Demanding a better answer now would only empower hurtful ghosts. But I realized that choice wasn't mine. Too many people had died, in horrific violence that could have been stopped, for anyone to just move on and get over it. And I thought an important lesson had been missed in all of the hand-wringing over how and why the world failed Rwanda: when a soldier faces the hardest moral choices, their allegiance should not be to a flag or, worse, the self-interested whims of some bureaucrats and politicians far from the battlefield. In those moments that decide life and death, right and wrong, they owe their loyalty to their own humanity.

When journalists are dying for the truth, military commanders should at least be ready to risk their jobs to tell it.

“I have always wondered, when I came to learn the truth of what you knew at the time, why didn't you say, ‘Let's go off the record. Let me tell you what's going on,’” I said to Dallaire, conceding that I may not have seemed the best journalist for a UN commander to take into confidence in

those days. “But why not trust somebody, break the chain of command — secretly, protect yourself — and then let the world public know?”²

Dallaire replied by explaining his orders were not to intervene or engage with the extremists, not even to disrupt the movement of arms or caches as they prepared to launch their mass campaign of murder. His first option, Daillare continued, was to resign on the spot because he knew what was going on and headquarters in New York didn't want to know.

“The other one was to continue, to fight within the system, to get them to see your way,” he said. “I felt that a commander who still had (the) confidence of his troops, but was going to abandon the mission by principle, because he didn't agree with it, might get 15 seconds on CNN, but might not even get that, and that the story would probably not even carry because interest in that mission was not there.”³

Dallaire said he was also up against a separate, political effort to undermine his credibility. And he said it was not “within my construct of command” and would not have been ethical for a commander to challenge officials in New York, Washington and Paris through the news media.

“Going back over my command there, I think that my great failure was that I did not convince the international community of what was going on on the ground. I think that was the failure in my command.”

I hadn't asked Dallaire about resigning, or running a better mission public relations operation, but about exposing the truth, and the superiors obstructing him, by leaking. So I pressed, suggesting that at the very least, leaking Dallaire's secret communications with headquarters and other facts could have pre-empted the Clinton administration, and others, in their successful effort to dismiss genocide as “tribal killing.”

“I think that may be hopeful thinking,” he replied, adding, “We could not get people to understand that this thing was not ending, that it was growing. And that it wasn't tribalism, it was a very deliberate process that was evolving and was going to sustain itself.”

His point was, no one wanted to believe that such horrible atrocities, an actual genocide, was really happening. Or if they admitted that much, they wanted to stay far away from it.

“What you reported in Mogadishu, months before, set the scene for people either not wanting to believe or didn’t want anything to do with it because the fear of casualties had overridden everything.”

I was shaking again, with the rage that just wouldn’t die.

“Media and Mass Atrocity,” I said, pointing to the conference banner behind Dallaire. “We have to reach a point where the military doesn’t see us as pawns, they see us as allies. And if they’re getting blocked, talk to us.”

“There is where I think there is still a failure,” Dallaire replied. “The commanders still need more education on the complexities of conflict... We need a whole new framework of conflict prevention. Generals who know only how to fight are useless in this era. The warrior ethic, and being able to use force, and the threat of use of force, is critical. But there’s a whole bunch of things that we can be engaged in, in prevention, and in engagement and trying to solve the problem, that is not happening.

“And that was not on our radar at all. I remember I was still European-focused, or trying to adapt to what the hell was going on, or peacekeeping, which was never much on anybody’s radar. But getting commanders to understand the multi-disciplinary nature of conflict resolution, let alone engagement and prevention, is still not there. And because of that, the media will not, I don’t think, have that influence enough or — with the command structure anyway — to be able to get the information, or have that depth of trust. And I think that’s a horrific situation that still exists after all these years.”

That is a hard-won lesson we can only hope all military officers will heed when faced with a choice between silence and saving the lives of many people. Maybe then, the promise so often repeated in the wake of mass atrocities — never again — will have real meaning.

In our current age of upheaval, journalists spend a lot of time worrying about technology, how it threatens their jobs, and whether the news media can survive the toxic pollution of fake news. All that really matters, the one thing that should always obsess journalists, is the truth. That requires much more than the endless, often futile, effort to condense facts from a world of noise and distraction. Legions of propagandists and professional liars are flush with money and armed with many more tools and tricks than the average reporter sweating the daily grind. But being on the side of truth bestows a power that cannot be designed or bought. US President Donald Trump may epitomize the dark depths of political deception, but he is by no means the first to practise it. He isn't even the most slippery of practitioners. Decades ago, long before the internet or the 24-hour news cycle, I.F. Stone was telling journalists all they needed to know to uncover official lies as consistently as he did. The investigative reporter who worked from his kitchen table said: "The first thing is, every government is run by liars, and nothing they say should be believed. That's a prima facie assumption."⁴ After long experience, I would expand that to include all militaries, whether uniformed or irregular.

Perhaps Stone's greatest legacy, based largely on official, public documents that few other reporters bothered to read, was his reporting that the US Congress approved full-scale war in Southeast Asia in the early 1960s on a false pretext (MacPherson 2006). The so-called Gulf of Tonkin incident, when North Vietnamese vessels reportedly torpedoed the American destroyer USS *Maddox* in international waters on August 2, 1964, didn't happen the way President Lyndon Johnson's government had claimed.

"The process of brain-washing the public starts with off-the-record briefings for newspapermen in which all sorts of far-fetched theories are suggested to explain why the tiny North Vietnamese navy would be mad enough to venture an attack on the Seventh Fleet, one of the world's most powerful," Stone observed (ibid.).

Conclusive evidence, including confidential tape recordings, show the United States was provocative yet did not respond to the first torpedo boat strikes. President Johnson was warned by a trusted confidant that he

appeared too soft to moderate Republicans, whose support the president needed against hawkish Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater. Johnson quickly phoned Defense Secretary Robert McNamara.

“Call a group of 15 or 20 people together from the [House and Senate] Armed Services, Foreign Relations,” Johnson said. “I want to leave an impression on background...that we’re gonna be firm as hell....The people that’re calling me up want to be damned sure I don’t pull’em out and run....Goldwater is raising so much hell about how he’s gonna blow’em off the moon.”⁵

McNamara delivered the next morning, informing the president: “We just had word by telephone from Admiral [Ulysses Grant] Sharp that the destroyer is under torpedo attack.”

The second attack never happened (Patterson 2008). More than 58,000 American troops died for that lie. Hundreds of thousands more suffered physical and psychological wounds. Many still struggle through the trauma and pain. Up to two million Vietnamese civilians, and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers, also died (Spector n.d.). The secret American bombing of Cambodia, ostensibly aimed at destroying Viet Cong guerrilla sanctuaries, directly led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge and its genocide, which killed up to three million people. As Harvard University’s Stanley Hoffman put it, William Shawcross’s investigation of Cambodia’s collapse “presents hard and irrefutable documentary evidence showing that the monsters who decimated the Cambodian people were brought to power by Washington’s policies” (Hoffman 1979).

The human, financial and political costs of the Vietnam War are many and immense. Yet those responsible for the lies that caused so much damage suffered few, if any, consequences for their actions. Perhaps worse, the public, along with the officials they pay and elect, and the journalists who are their best hope of seeing through the fog of war, don’t seem to have learned much over the generations. If anything, we know less about the killing done in our name, largely in the shadows.

The hallmark of our age is not just the head-spinning speed of the information highway, but the steady decline of moral shame. The very words “spin artist” elevate the professional liar and obfuscator when we should all be working toward the day when a mother would be ashamed to introduce her daughter as an official spokesperson for anything. If you’re doing the right thing, you don’t have to do any more than tell the truth. That doesn’t require sophisticated public relations campaigns, buried secrets, stonewalling or outright lies. All that is necessary is a simple realization: when people’s lives are on the line, it is never enough to think the ends justify the means.

It would be naïve to expect politicians and warriors to come to that place of grace themselves. Determined journalists can nudge them in that direction. Only a society that collectively renews the power of moral shame can keep them from drifting.

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- 1 President Bill Clinton as quoted by his former spokesman, George Stephanopolous, in *All Too Human: A Political Education* (1999, 214).
 - 2 Transcribed by the author from a video recording of the exchange at the round table Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond, Carleton University, Ottawa, December 2017 (Media and Mass Atrocity 2017).
 - 3 Roméo Dallaire, transcribed by the author from a video recording (ibid.).
 - 4 From the documentary film *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, as quoted by *The Washington Post*, reprinted in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 15, 1973.
 - 5 US President Lyndon Johnson, as quoted by Michael Beschloss (1997) in "The Johnson Tapes."



17

A POST-COLONIAL MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL NEWS: PERSPECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF STRINGERS AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

ANJAN SUNDARAM

It is well established that colonial discourse persists in news coverage on Africa, even today. However, few studies have tied such colonial discourses to the structure of international news. Two of my recent works — *Stringer: A Reporter's Journey in the Congo* (2014a) and *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship* (2016a) — show that from the perspective of stringers and local journalists, colonial exclusions of these “subaltern” categories of journalists, of lower paygrade and rank, continue to characterize international news about Central Africa. This has led to biased and incomplete portrayals of the region and the appropriation of labour and credit from subaltern journalists. These inequalities in the structure of international news also facilitate the appropriation of post-colonial discourse by authoritarian leaders such as Paul Kagame. This

analysis of the role of stringers and local journalists in international news about Africa is applicable to news coverage of other parts of the world.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF JOURNALISM IN AFRICA: COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN NEWS COVERAGE

In 2000 the cover of *The Economist* famously proclaimed Africa “The Hopeless Continent.” Eleven years later its cover would announce “Africa Rising.” The reversal was in part influenced by a 2010 report published by consulting firm McKinsey & Company, “Lions on the Move,” about a new era of African growth.¹ That report also led *The Wall Street Journal* to publish a series of features on African economic growth under the “Africa Rising” banner. But in October 2016, only five years later, *The New York Times* reported that Africa is not rising after all and that “Africa Reeling” may be a more fitting description (Gettleman 2016). In an attempt to make sense of these polarized headlines, and perhaps approaching the truth, Lily Kuo (2016) wrote in the online news magazine *Quartz* that “Africa wasn’t ‘rising’ before and it’s not ‘reeling’ now.”

News coverage of Africa is particularly negligent when compared to coverage of the rest of the world. “Over the past 30 years there has been a steady decline in the attention given to reporting Africa,” writes Suzanne Franks (2007, 59) in “The Neglect of Africa.” She makes the startling observation that such neglect continues despite improvements in communications and technology that should have made it easier to cover the world. For Franks, there has been a marked decrease in interest in Africa following the end of colonialism and the “end-of-Empire” narrative. And she has noted that little has changed, since “many parts of Africa are less understood and less well reported in this period than they were several generations ago” (Franks 2010, 72).

Hugely significant events, such as the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo that began in the genocide’s aftermath, have been grossly ignored by the news media. Franks notes that although Congo’s war has killed millions of people, “for western purposes it has been largely invisible,” and for this reason it has

been branded “Africa’s hidden first world war.” Rwanda’s genocide, which killed nearly a million people in a hundred days, had the misfortune of occurring at the same time as Nelson Mandela’s inauguration as South Africa’s president, “a very rare good news story out of Africa,” which took precedence over the genocide because the “feeling in newsrooms was that one story at a time from Africa was enough” (ibid., 73-74).

Furthermore, the dominant view in academic literature is that there are significant biases in the reporting on Africa that *is* produced. Reflecting on the findings of her landmark 1992 book, *Africa’s Media Image*, Beverly Hawk writes that “metaphors used to frame African stories were Western and often colonial, not African at all” (Hawk 2016). The scholar Achille Mbembe has written about how such foreign frames reinforce neo-colonial, paternalist attitudes toward Africa and stereotypes about Africans, perpetuating inequalities and Western systems of dominance (Mbembe 2001).

The case can be made that such coverage of Africa can be linked not only to race and the legacy of colonialism that led to portrayals of Africans as less human than Europeans, but also to structural inequalities in the international news system. Judith Butler writes about how some lives are still deemed more “grievable” than others, leading to a lack of media coverage of those considered less grievable and the implicit legitimization of violence against them (Butler 2009). She also shows that media narratives reinforce ideas of “otherness” by expressing deeper grief for certain deaths on the basis of nationality and race (Schneider 2010). Butler’s analysis is directly relevant to news coverage of Africa today. When African wars are covered inadequately in the press, relative to incidents in the West on a similar scale of violence, those African lives are immediately rendered less grievable. The media thus reinforces the notion that those African lives matter less and implicitly condones greater levels of violence against Africans. Franks cites the former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in support of this view: “If six thousand people in Europe died of malaria [as they do every day in Africa], the media would not just report the disaster: they would look for signs of negligence, for culpability, failures of science and technology and governmental corruption” (Franks 2005, 60). Franks notes how CNN did not publish a

story to which it later awarded a “CNN African Journalist of the Year” award, showing how high-quality stories from Africa are ignored (ibid., 63).

Evidence of the international news media’s historical racism can be found in how African leaders have used it to their advantage. During a 1977-1978 rebellion in Congo (then Zaire) that threatened the government, President Mobutu Sese Seko claimed that white miners were under siege, leading to exaggerated Western media coverage and the deployment of Belgian soldiers that ultimately protected Mobutu’s government (ibid., 2010). There is also extensive literature about how Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe has exploited post-colonial critiques of colonialism (Primorac 2007; Tendi 2014).

The recent positive discourses about Africa are a response to this historical neglect. Researchers and writers have expressed their belief that news coverage about Africa may be moving past negative and one-dimensional portrayals of the past (Bunce 2016). “It is fashionable, these days, to be upbeat about Africa,” writes Michela Wrong (2015). This new, positive image of Africa, embodied by the “Africa Rising” narrative, has been applauded by politicians, the African diaspora and the business community (Bunce, Franks and Paterson 2016) as a post-colonial narrative.

But there have been several criticisms of this new narrative, including from Africans, hinting that the fundamental nature of reporting on Africa may not have changed very much. These criticisms are reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s observation of contradictions in colonial discourse, whereby “the colonized subject can be simultaneously beyond comprehension (as in stereotypes about ‘the inscrutable Oriental’ or ‘the mysterious East’) and yet completely knowable as the object of the all-seeing colonial gaze” (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 119).

In addition to Kuo (2016), Howard French (2016), a well-known former *New York Times* Africa correspondent, has written that “Africa Rising has always been tedious + hollow, just as its journalistic opposite.” Grieve Chelwa, an economist at Harvard University, has questioned the economic underpinnings of the “Africa Rising” argument, which he describes as a

“myth” (Gettleman 2016). For Chelwa, “Africa Rising” has been something akin to propaganda about the continent: “The rhetoric around ‘Africa rising’ is giving us a false sense of comfort and distracting us from the real work that needs to happen” (Chelwa 2015). This flip-flopping between polarized narratives about Africa points to persistent problems in news production. It indicates that “Africa Rising” may have been more a reaction to criticisms of negative portrayals of Africa than a structural shift in how realities on the ground in Africa are covered by the news media.

POLITICS AND STRUCTURES OF NEWS PRODUCTION IN AFRICA

Franks notes that 50 years ago, just after the end of colonialism across much of Africa, European newspapers still invested significant resources in covering Africa: “Even middle-market papers such as the *Daily Express* and *Mail* had Africa specialists, correspondents based in Africa who filed on a regular basis and offered informed comment on African affairs. The fact that newspapers and broadcasters had invested in correspondents meant that they were then inclined to take their material, and the story was reported in a steady, incremental way, informed by locally-based expertise” (Franks 2005, 59).

The way Africa is covered has dramatically shifted. Many news organizations, facing cost pressures and making use of improved digital technology, have shut down foreign news bureaus. Instead, they operate headquarters in a few hubs across Africa from where their foreign correspondents “parachute” into places to report on breaking news (Sambrook 2010, 18). These correspondents often report on places remotely in between their parachuting trips (Vicente 2016). Such parachute journalism has been criticized for its lack of context and commitment to a country, for its propensity to manipulation from unreliable or one-sided sources, and for its inability to follow up on gradually unfolding stories (Musa and Yusha’u 2013; Wrong 2016). However, Richard Sambrook cites his view and that of some other foreign reporters that improved technology and mobility make it easier for them to cover the world without necessarily having to live in those places,² that

parachute journalism is cost-effective and that the parachuting in and out preserves a place's foreignness, making foreign reporters more alert (Sambrook 2010, 19).

This new parachute model of journalism has come to rely heavily on local journalists and stringers, in Africa in particular, where "local journalists now provide substantive portions of day-to-day reporting" (Bunce 2015, 44). Many news agency bureaus now include local journalists and stringers (Sambrook 2010). Academic research on journalism in Africa is heavily focused, however, on foreign correspondents. There has been research on how foreign correspondents perceive their audience in Africa and the West (Nothias 2016), on foreign correspondents as anthropologist-like translators between cultures (Hannerz 2004) and on foreign correspondents' demographics and evolving digital working tools (Vicente 2016).

Despite the importance of stringers and local journalists in foreign news production, little research has been done on them or their motivations and working conditions (Bunce 2011). Several major academic books about foreign correspondents, such as *Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents* (Hannerz 2004), *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* (Pedelty 1995) and *Journalists at War: The Dynamics of News Reporting during the Falklands Conflict* (Morrison and Tumber 1988), exclude local journalists, although Ulf Hannerz (2004) acknowledges the occasional journalistic contributions of local "fixers" (Seo 2016).

Stephen Hess (1996) devotes a chapter to American freelancers in his book on foreign correspondents, categorizing them into archetypes such as "the spouse," "the expert" and "the adventurer." He discusses the stringer's generally low wages, patterns in their marital status, the social class to which they tend to belong in their home countries and examples of freelancers who have transitioned to full-time correspondents.

Mel Bunce has researched whether portrayals of Africa have changed because of the integration of local journalists, whom she calls "local-national foreign correspondents," in international news bureaus (Bunce 2015). She concludes that their contribution is important, but is limited by

hierarchical relationships with their mostly Western bosses and the need to produce stories sellable in Western markets, thus continuing the prevalence of colonial discursive structures, institutional hierarchies and economies. In “‘This Place Used to be a White British Boys’ Club’: Reporting Dynamics and Cultural Clash at an International News Bureau in Nairobi,” she describes how Western correspondents responded to election-related violence in Kenya with often incendiary reports, focusing on atrocities and tribal divisions, while Kenyan journalists emphasized unity and progress, as they would benefit from an end to the violence (Bunce 2010). In “The New Foreign Correspondent at Work,” Bunce (2011) studies the news landscape in Sudan, examining the role of “local-national foreign correspondents,” “Western foreign correspondents” and “hybrid foreign correspondents” (that is, foreign stringers or Sudanese stringers who had absorbed Western news values) who shared characteristics with the other two categories of journalists. Her main findings arose from analyzing these three groups for their news values: she found that Sudanese foreign correspondents were less likely to hold the government accountable, partly because they faced the risk of severe harassment and could not leave the country, unlike their Western counterparts. She found that hybrid correspondents fell somewhere in between, still holding governments accountable while relating easily with local culture and with their foreign editors. In her book on international newsgathering, Colleen Murrell (2015) looks at the role of another neglected group in news production, “fixers,” who often translate and arrange logistics for foreign correspondents, but sometimes take on more roles that affect the content of news stories, almost always with minimal credit. Murrell’s analysis of fixers centres on how they relate to and work with foreign correspondents (Brooten 2016).

This is a good point at which to define journalist categories as they will be used in the rest of this chapter. The term “foreign correspondents” refers to staff correspondents working for Western news organizations. “Stringer,” as mentioned previously, refers to journalists paid by the word or by assignment, working for Western news organizations. It is important to distinguish between “stringers” and “super stringers,” who live and work in conditions close to those of foreign correspondents.³ And finally, “local journalists” refers to local-national journalists covering events within their

countries, subject to the national media regulatory environment and government pressures. In *Stringer*, I describe a foreign stringer working in Congo, and in *Bad News* and *Stringer*, I describe local journalists working in Congo and Rwanda.⁴

It is worth remarking that these terms can be used quite flexibly in the field. Journalists can make transitions between categories and can play multiple roles simultaneously. A local journalist reporting for national media may at the same time be working as a stringer for Western media, for example. There are also several examples of journalists who make the transition from stringer to foreign correspondent. This is a possible area for future research, building, for example, on Hess's book (1996) describing some stringer transitions, and Bunce's work (2011) showing that local-nationals often absorb Western news values in transitioning upward within Western media organizations.

In "Marginal Majority at the Postcolonial News Agency," Soomin Seo (2016) studies the oral history collection of interviews with Associated Press (AP) staff to examine the increasing role of local journalists (whom she calls the "marginal majority") employed by the AP, as well as how foreign staff perceive the locals. She cites "a discriminatory framework in compensation and status — which can be traced back to the colonial days" (ibid., 39), and "a caste system" in which expat journalists — "who are usually white, American, and male — constitute the top, supported by an underclass of local journalistic hires, many of whom are elites from English-speaking families with college degrees. Somewhere in the middle are the expatriates, which include Americans as well as British, Canadian, and Australian nationals with some expertise in the region, who may have started out as scholars or backpackers" (ibid., 44). She supports this description of a "caste system" by pointing out that news organizations value American lives more than local journalist lives, compensating families four times more in the case of an American journalist's death (ibid., 47).

Seo concludes that the importance of non-Western journalists will only increase in news production, although there is little research about them, and she calls for future research on foreign news production, "away from

the exclusive focus on American or Western correspondents, to include the stringers, fixers, and freelance videographers who have come to provide the bread and butter of foreign news” (ibid., 52).

This paucity of research on stringers and local journalists is all the more surprising given the substantial documentation of the democratization of news media in Africa. For example, H. Nanjala Nyabola (2016) writes about the Kenyan #SomeonetellCNN Twitter campaign, and how social media led to the inclusion of African perspectives in news stories. In *Participatory Politics and Citizen Journalism in a Networked Africa*, Bruce Mutsvairo (2016a; 2016b) and his co-authors focus on the growing participation in new forms of media by citizens in Nigeria (Kperogi 2016), Ethiopia (Skjerdal 2016), Central Africa (de Briujn 2016) and Kenya (Ogola and Owuor 2016), describing the ability of previously excluded citizens to influence political processes and media discourse. This research has provided substantial insights on these new journalistic actors, who have arguably received greater attention than stringers and local journalists. Complementary research has described how online journalism in Africa is transforming how journalists communicate public-interest news and engage their audiences (Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker 2014).

However, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (Thompson 2007), a collection of essays edited by Allan Thompson, does focus on local journalists in Africa. The book examines the production and impact of hate media in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. Essays in the book also describe the failure of international media to cover the genocide adequately, providing an addition to the literature of the neglect of Africa in the Rwandan context.

THE CONTEMPORARY NEGLECT OF AFRICA FROM A STRINGER’S PERSPECTIVE

In *Stringer*, I describe the difficulty of selling what seemed to me an important story about mass rape in Congo. I recount the following conversation with my AP editor, who was based several thousand kilometres away in Dakar, Senegal:

“Four hundred rapes and the UN hasn’t acted,” I told the editor. “One woman says she was raped on the road by six policemen but no one was questioned.” Hundreds of women had protested, I explained. There had been a spate of human-rights violations in Kananga.

“Where?”

“Kananga. It’s near the middle of Congo.”

“Was there any shooting?”

“No.”

“Any fighting, clashes?”

“No.”

“Any violence at all?”

“Not that I know of.”

“So no dead.”

“Correct.”

He paused.

“Nah, not interesting.” (Sundaram 2014a, 87)

After several such exchanges with my editor, I arrived at an insight about the nature of what qualified as international news:

Death, as a rule, had the best chance of making the news. And in a country torn by war one might imagine such news would be abundant. But in Congo so many people died that,

farcically, mere death was not enough: I needed many deaths at once, or an extraordinary death. A raid on a village—with a hundred people displaced—was only important if it involved the army or the UN. Rape was too frequent to be reported even six at a time. And the constant fear people lived in, if mentioned at all, was either in the penultimate paragraph of a news story or on the opinion page. (ibid., 88)

To Franks' (2010) descriptions of the neglect of Africa, we can add the perspective of the stringer, showing why the Congolese war is not covered as extensively as it should be. The issue is not a lack of reporters or budget, as news organizations often claim (Sambrook 2010). If the stringer covered Congo as he or she might cover America or Britain, a mass rape would be news. Rather, the world saw Congo as “not worth reporting on, unless the story was spectacular and gruesome” (Sundaram 2016d). Such interactions with editors naturally incentivize stringers to produce news that features spectacularly violent and extreme notions of Africans discussed by Mbembe (2001), Edward Said (1979), Ania Loomba (1998) and Etienne Balibar (1991).

In *The Road Through War* (Sundaram 2016b), I report on the neglect of the conflict in the Central African Republic from my vantage point as a freelance journalist. I describe massacres that went unreported in the international media, despite warnings of an impending genocide that should have drawn international attention to the war. I wrote this just after the Westgate mall attack in Nairobi, which had drained African media resources. I thus challenge claims by defenders of the technology-enabled parachute journalism model (Sambrook 2010) that it satisfactorily covers Africa. The current neglect of Africa is, in fact, the result of a news production system that has foreign correspondents parachuting into the same places, at about the same times, “to tell us, more or less, the same stories” (Sundaram 2016d), while vast swathes of Africa are left uncovered, even when they experience turmoil affecting millions of people. There is a case to be made that using stringers would lead to cheaper, more extensive and higher quality foreign correspondence than is currently produced by parachuting in correspondents (ibid.).

The use of parachute journalism is one manifestation of Butler’s notion that some lives are portrayed as less “grievable” by the media (Butler 2009). Butler writes that news media depict wars in ways that make the loss of certain lives seem less worthy of grief — and outrage — than others. She writes that, in certain places, entire populations have been destroyed but “there is no great sense that a heinous act and egregious loss have taken place” (Schneider 2010). She also acknowledges, however, that it can be more challenging to grieve deaths that have occurred in faraway places (Stein 2016). Parachute journalism is presented by some journalists, as I have previously noted, as a legitimate and cost-effective method of covering faraway wars. However, parachute journalism instead embodies the global inequalities cited by Butler, and it deepens the challenge of covering distant deaths. The hypocrisy of international news in Africa is evident when one observes that a parachute newsgathering model would be considered unacceptable by most organizations in the production of credible reporting on Western countries. Parachute journalism does not mitigate the neglect of Africa; rather, it exacerbates and institutionalizes the neglect.

THE CENTRALITY OF LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN INTERNATIONAL NEWS PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

Existing literature about journalism in Africa rarely mentions the contributions of local journalists, portraying foreign correspondents as the central figures in international news gathering.

And yet, in many instances, newsworthy events that were not reported by the local press go unreported by the international media, and biased information reported by the local press in Africa is repeated by the international media — thus contributing to the argument that local journalism is central to the production of international news.

Throughout *Stringer* and *Bad News* I reference how local journalists introduced me to important stories. In *Stringer*, I make clear how important local journalism is to my reporting for the AP, as I obtain daily news (Sundaram 2014a, 69), war correspondence (ibid., 174) and election results (ibid., 237). I map the contemporary international news gathering

process that begins with local journalism, which is filtered, verified, augmented and then transmitted by stringers or local journalists to international news bureaus, who broadcast it to the world. The contribution of local journalists and stringers in this process is generally excluded or mentioned only in passing. But the quality of international news is highly dependent on the quality of available local journalism.

The narrative arc of *Bad News* follows the destruction of Rwanda's free press. However, in that book, I describe how, as the repression grew, the international media emphasized not the killing, exile, imprisonment and abuse of Rwandan journalists, but a positive image of Rwanda that mirrored the propaganda published in Rwanda's government-controlled media (Sundaram 2016a, 74, 117, 119). Once its link to an active local press was cut off, the international press became an amplifier for the press that remained, which was largely a mouthpiece for the government's message. Some reviewers received my account of the press's destruction in Rwanda as important news, an unearthing of "secrets" from Rwanda (Rosen 2016; Birrell 2016).

A crucial scene in *Bad News* describes how Rwandan villagers destroyed their own homes on government orders. Several thousand people made themselves homeless in the rainy season. They grew sick and began to die from pneumonia and malaria. It was a shocking scene that should have made international news, but the local press, by then already silenced, did not report it. International reporters, mostly sitting in hubs hundreds or thousands of kilometres away and relying on the local press to alert them to major news, did not report it either (Sundaram 2016a, 126–37). Until the publication of *Bad News*, in which my reporting of this tragedy relied heavily on Rwandan journalists, this major incident went largely untold.

These depictions add to research and knowledge on the political economy of news in Africa. They also bolster criticisms of "Africa Rising" by Chelwa (2015) and French (2016). Current media narratives of "Rwanda rising" from the ashes of the genocide — an important piece of the "Africa Rising" narrative (Gettleman 2016) — are created by an international news system disconnected from the realities on the ground in Rwanda. The positive tone of new African coverage is not based on a model of

journalism that provides a better understanding of the continent. “Africa Rising” may well be a superficial attempt to move away from past negative narratives of Africa, an easy way to deflect criticism. There may also be an element of overcorrection here in an attempt to atone for excessively negative portrayals of Africa in the past, negative portrayals linked to colonial assumptions of Africa as savage and primitive.

Current academic scholarship about the media in Africa focuses primarily on reporters working for international news organizations. My contribution is to link the international media to local journalism narratives and structures. Further research might explore where and how global discourses on Africa — and the Global South — intersect with narratives produced by journalists working locally. These local narratives and reports are rarely cited or acknowledged internationally, in media stories or in scholarship about the structure of international news. Mapping how international news systems appropriate information from subaltern reporters would help to restore credit for subaltern reporters’ labour. Scholars researching the media in repressed countries might study how government propaganda and repression influences narratives in the international media, thus further exploring the centrality of local journalism to international news. Journalism researchers in Africa might study whether online journalism, besides giving voice to marginalized populations, also reduces the appropriation of subaltern journalist labour by holding international news more accountable on the internet.

This is a good place to introduce the notion that current news production systems in Africa bear several structural similarities to colonial empires. Current news production systems are characterized by “centres” and “margins,” as described by Lomba (1998) and Bart Moore-Gilbert (1997). Centres of news production are headquartered in major world capitals such as London and New York, with “outposts” of the news empire in foreign correspondent hubs such as Nairobi (East Africa), Dakar (West Africa), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Cairo (North Africa). It is in these centres and outposts that discourse about the “margins” is largely decided and constructed, as described by John McLeod (2000) and Said (1979), thus continuing the domination of the centres over the margins. The strong “core” sends out foreign correspondents to govern and

administer news systems in the weak “peripheries,” mirroring Wallerstein’s (2012, 55) descriptions of foreign officers sent to administer the colonies in world-systems theory. The discourses constructed by the centre and its emissaries glorify these emissaries, perpetuating the “heroic male adventure story” (McLeod 2000, 58), mirroring a tradition of heroic, mostly male, foreign correspondent memoirs that continues until today. We can further develop this application of post-colonial theory to the international news system over the rest of this section, drawing on current literature and research on journalism in Africa.

APPROPRIATION FROM STRINGERS AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS IN THE PERIPHERIES

A defining feature of colonial rule was the appropriation of territory, property, labour and resources from subalterns in the peripheries, often with insufficient compensation to the subaltern (Loomba 1998; Moore-Gilbert 1997; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002). Appropriation from subaltern journalists is also a feature of international news systems.

I write in *Stringer* how after reporting for the AP from Congo for nearly a year, my bureau told me it was sending in a team of senior correspondents to cover the elections. I was expected to supply this team with insights, expertise and story ideas: “The editor wanted me to team up with the correspondents. ‘As what?’ I asked. He said I should continue working as I had planned to — I should know where to look for the news, I had been living in Congo. And the chief Africa correspondent wanted to chat before she arrived, ‘to pick your brain, share ideas.’ It sounded as if she wanted to steal my stories. The head of African reporting was in a sense my boss, but before that day I’d never heard of her. Now suddenly I was important” (Sundaram 2014a, 189).

This is the classic scenario for how stringers support foreign correspondents who have parachuted in for a big news story. The stringer opens up their list of painstakingly gathered contacts, uses their carefully cultivated relationships to set up meetings with these contacts for the correspondent who has just arrived, and advises the correspondent about the nuances of the unfolding story. These are essential contributions to

news. In return, often it is up to the correspondent to decide how benevolently they want to credit the stringer. Sometimes the stringer receives a joint byline; more often they are credited with having “contributed reporting” in small print at the end of a story; most often the stringer goes entirely unmentioned. In this way the labour, contacts and knowledge of the stringer on the periphery are appropriated by the foreign correspondent who represents the core, mirroring the process of “unequal exchange” in world-systems theory (Wallerstein 2012). Taken together with research about appropriation from fixers by Murrell (2015), one sees that the work of an entire underclass of journalism is exploited for the gain of foreign correspondents and international news.

Appropriation from local journalists operates in several ways. Local journalists who work as stringers find their work appropriated largely in the fashion described earlier. However, there is another appropriation from local journalists that is more difficult to observe. Foreign correspondents in their memoirs often refer to local news reports guiding them (Mealer 2009; Richburg 1997; Beeston 2006). In *Stringer*, I perhaps go further than most when I write about my reports for the AP: “Almost every element of news I first heard on the UN radio station” (Sundaram 2014a, 80). Behind those news and radio reports are local journalists who first unearthed the story and reported it. However, in the news reports produced by “international journalists” (foreign correspondents and stringers), those local reports and local journalists are rarely credited. The information in those local reports is independently verified and appropriated by the international journalist. All credit for those reports henceforth goes solely to the international journalist and to the international news organization.

In a recent post-US election news story, “Michelle Obama ‘ape in heels’ post causes outrage” (BBC 2016), the BBC credited the American local news outlet WSAZ for first breaking the story: “The Facebook post was first spotted by local news channel WSAZ3.” This was despite the fact that the BBC could independently verify the Facebook post that was the origin of the news story. It is, however, standard procedure for the BBC and other international news agencies to take stories first reported by Congo’s Radio Okapi or Nigeria’s *The Nation*, verify them independently and serve them to readers as their own without credit. In devaluing and appropriating the

work of subaltern journalists in the peripheries, the colonial paradigm is here still operative. The division of labour and power is structured on geographical, economic and racial grounds.

The copying of news without credit also occurs in contexts that are not post-colonial. I would argue that the ability to copy without credit is a function of power relation inequalities between news outlets. My analysis here mainly pertains to the dynamics and effects of such appropriation in a post-colonial context.

Aijaz Ahmad criticizes post-colonial intellectual structures for recreating colonial divisions of labour and hierarchies even as it attempts to redress historical inequalities. Ahmad characterizes Western intellectual elites as refining raw material from the “Third World” that they then send back to the peripheries as “theory” that they have validated and approved (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 18). Some of Ahmad’s criticisms translate to the news industry, in that the international news media, even as it claims to be growing more inclusive, still serves as gatekeepers for the work of local journalists. It appropriates, processes and disseminates the labour of subaltern journalists in the peripheries for profit, and the West still has to grant permission in order for the subaltern journalist to enter global discourse and receive their due.

REPRESENTING THE PERSPECTIVE, COURAGE AND LABOUR OF THE SUBALTERN JOURNALIST

Bad News contributes to literature about journalism in Africa by chronicling the lives of local journalists, a group about whom there is little existing writing. In *Bad News*, I describe the bravery of Rwandan journalists, thus balancing literature that presents foreign correspondents as the principal heroic and courageous figures working within the international news system in Africa. These descriptions of bravery also contest a prevailing view in academic research (Bunce 2011; 2015), which tends to portray local journalists as less willing to hold their governments accountable — although for very understandable reasons. These portrayals corroborate Okoth Fred Mudhai’s academic research on the vulnerabilities of African journalists and his examples of Kenyan and Zambian

journalists who challenged their governments' abuses of power (Mudhai 2004, 213; 2007), as well as academic analyses of the extent to which South African journalists hold their government accountable (Wasserman 2013).

The Rwandan journalists I describe in *Bad News* worked at risk of their lives and freedom, and those of their families, and therefore in far more dangerous positions than foreign correspondents, who generally risk, at worst, expulsion from the country. Despite this, I note, it was the Rwandan journalists who attempted to hold their government accountable while international news took far fewer risks in their largely positive portrayals of the government. For example, shortly after the Rwandan journalist Jean-Léonard Rugambage was shot dead on the very day he criticized President Paul Kagame, the international press hardly reported his killing, preferring to focus on how “Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary-general, had chosen Rwanda’s president to lead a special high-profile committee....Ban said the committee would be a collection of development ‘superheroes’” (Sundaram 2016a, 74). This picture, as painted in *Bad News*, is unlike most portrayals of the news values of foreign correspondents and local journalists.

Also in *Bad News*, I describe how Rwandan journalist Jean-Bosco continued to write critically about the Rwandan government despite having been beaten into a coma after criticizing the regime (ibid., 3, 189). Agnès stridently continued to hold the government accountable, although she had “endured psychological and physical abuse while in prison,” where guards did not allow her to sleep even though she was sick with HIV. I describe her subsequent imprisonment (ibid., 4, 58-59, 74-75, 145). And through the book I narrate the story of Gibson, who, despite fleeing the country in fear for his life, decided to return and begin reporting anew after he was moved by a farmer who told him how the government had ripped apart his field and destroyed his nearly ripe crop because the farmer had not obeyed government rules. Gibson would again flee his country after being physically attacked (ibid., 52, 150–156). In *Bad News* I describe the personal cost incurred by local journalists in order to inform us, and their motivations for persisting.

Moreover, *Bad News* presents Rwandan journalists' perspectives of their country at a time when their free press was being destroyed, thus providing a view of Rwandan society that escaped the foreign news and the experience of most expatriates in Rwanda. In *Bad News*, I refer to how "the dictatorship had made two worlds: one for visitors and another for the citizens. One in which the explosion was real, and another, in parallel, in which it was not. One in which there was memory, and another with new trauma. A world in which the streetlights seemed wonderful, signs of progress, and another in which they were frightening" (ibid., 90).

The existence of these two worlds itself was revealed to me only by Rwandan journalists. These subaltern journalists helped me penetrate this second, hidden world. They showed me how at genocide memorials, which foreigners saw as respectful ceremonies, Rwandans felt fear (ibid., 22), and how foreigners saw well-lit, well-paved roads as signs of economic development, whereas Rwandans saw them as places of government surveillance and risk (ibid., 49-50). I write about how the silence in the country, perceived by many foreigners as peace, is really a silence of fear (ibid., 176). It is this perspective and experience of the Rwandan subaltern journalist, for which many of them paid such a high price to report, that is presented in *Bad News*.

Stringer is also my representation of a subaltern journalist's experience. I have written about how the stringer's news reporting resembled Bhabha's description of camouflage (Bhabha 1984). *Stringer*, then, was a coming out, a representation of the subaltern experience that I was unable to explicitly reflect in my news reports. In this way it is a form of resistance to the centre that "arises from the subaltern's apparently deliberate attempt to elude the subject positions to which the dominant order seeks to confine the other," allowing me to occupy a "multiplicity of subjectpositions" (Moore-Gilbert 1997, 132).

As a stringer in Congo, I was part of the order of the international news system. As the author of *Stringer*, I stand outside that system, illuminating its inequalities, including my own appropriations of local journalists' work. I am at once complicit in the international news system and exposing its flaws and injustices, occupying multiple positions.

Bad News adds to William Finnegan's (1995) book about black South African journalists who risked their lives to obtain stories that their white editors often did not print. I extend his work in the context of a Rwandan press that is shutting down, and not opening up with the decline of apartheid, as was the case in Finnegan's experience. Rwandan journalists who take on the role of human-rights activists became increasingly vociferous in the face of the growing repression: "Unable to talk, the country's journalists had begun to scream" (Sundaram 2016a, 59). Once the Rwandan press had been destroyed, "there was silence in the country. Those voices that had resisted had been hushed, and the attainment of this peace in the country had needed the liberty and lives of several brave Rwandans" (ibid., 176).

THE APPROPRIATION OF POST-COLONIAL CRITIQUES BY RWANDA'S STRONGMAN

Franks (2010) describes how Congo's President Mobutu Sese Seko exploited the international news media's racism for his advantage in 1977-1978. There is a literature about how Robert Mugabe had defended his repression — including justifying a ban on the BBC — using post-colonial arguments (MacGregor 2002). In *Bad News*, I document how Rwandan President Paul Kagame appropriates post-colonial critiques of colonialism. These critiques are resonant in many parts of the world. And Kagame has positioned himself as one of Africa's new post-colonial leaders. He continually emphasizes concepts such as freedom, democracy and African self-determination, even as his critics end up in exile, fearing for their lives, in prison or dead, within the country and abroad.

This is an example of how post-colonial critiques, often dealing with the politics of appropriation, can themselves become appropriated by an African president who is an example of continuing imperialist domination in Africa. Kagame has no democratic mandate from his own people, who vote in largely cosmetic elections (Sundaram 2016a, 108, 114), while Western countries legitimize his leadership, financing half of his government's budget and providing military support (Sundaram 2012; 2014b). These same Western nations provide little meaningful support for Rwandan civil society activists and journalists who seek self-

determination and criticize the Rwandan government's frequent abuses of their rights (Sundaram 2016a, 169-70).

Early in *Bad News* I describe how Kagame, in his public speeches, “spoke about democracy in the country and the freedom that his people enjoyed, and how sad the coup d'états on the continent were, being the result of the absence of democracy” (ibid., 6). Kagame frequently cast himself in opposition to Western imperialism, citing the Rwandan genocide in 1994, when the world did not intervene despite evidence genocidal killings were underway. After his forces invaded and took over Rwanda, Kagame “cast himself as the hero of the genocide, as the man who had ended it while the world stood idle” (ibid., 32). This sounds like a straightforward post-colonial discourse of defiant African leaders solving African problems, and plays into notions of the West not holding Africa's true interests at heart. There is some legitimacy in the assertion that the West does not have Africa's interests at heart. However, *Bad News* points to the appropriation of post-colonial critiques by noting that Kagame's government has subsequently censored genocide survivors from remembering that Kagame had himself “opposed the deployment of U.N. peacekeepers one month into the hundred-day genocide. The president had worried that the peacekeepers would interfere with his military campaign, and prevent him from taking power” (ibid., 32). Kagame thus censors part of the truth to create a post-colonial narrative in which the West is solely to blame and he is an African hero.

After his government had destroyed Rwanda's free press, Kagame “announced that there was a vibrant and free press in Rwanda, and the population, if asked, would repeat this...The president said that if people did not speak it was out of their own will” (Sundaram 2016a, 175).

Kagame frequently uses such language in telling the West not to lecture him on freedom and democracy, thus continuing his post-colonial discourse of having enabled African freedom and self-determination.

Kagame's post-colonial narrative has resonated in a world desperate for African success stories. In the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Tristan McConnell writes about how support for Kagame is driven by “a genuinely felt desire to fight the image of a basket-case continent”

(McConnell 2011). Around the time Rugambage was shot dead, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon chose Kagame to lead a committee of “development ‘superheroes’” (Sundaram 2016a, 74). *Time* magazine has called Kagame “the embodiment of a new Africa” and quotes former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Kagame’s defence: “What I see in President Kagame [is] this impatience for a new Africa, not some throwback to an authoritarian past” (Perry 2012). Yale University in 2016 invited Kagame to speak, citing his “leadership in... good governance, promotion of human rights” without any mention of his repressive methods (*YaleNews* 2016).

The world’s hunger for post-colonial narratives and leaders in Africa can be seen in the positive reception given to a man against whom there exists credible evidence of complicity in mass murder (French 2009). This hunger, as noted in an article for *The Observer* (Sundaram 2016c), stems partly from guilt in the West for the injustices of colonialism, and a need in the former colonies for leaders who truly represent their interests. It is rooted in the ways that colonialism and neo-colonialism continue to structure relations between former colonies and the former colonial powers. This hunger for post-colonial leaders is clearly perceived and exploited by Kagame.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates the critical importance of stringers and local journalists to international news production, and how much harder we need to work to understand the motivations and perspectives of these excluded groups of journalistic actors. News bureaus should restructure to cater to the needs of these vital subaltern journalists to create higher quality journalism, while according these journalists proper credit and compensation. Post-colonial theory finds several applications in current news structures. It is my belief that this analogy, which I introduce in some detail, can be further developed to better understand how modern news production systems function and can diminish their appropriation from the margins and subalterns. Chronicles about stringers and local journalists serve to humanize and illuminate these journalists, in particular for readers generally unaware of the invisible actors behind their daily

international news. With greater empathy and understanding, the gap between news producers and consumers narrows, and consumers, in seeing the inner workings of news production, come to understand just how much to trust what they read on the page or hear on television. This has broad implications beyond news production, touching important elements of foreign policy, peacekeeping and foreign aid in places on the margins of the world.

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- 1 See Roxburgh et al. (2010). Note the reference to “lions,” an allusion to African safaris, a long-standing theme of colonial writing about Africa.
 - 2 Note how this foreign correspondent view contrasts with the assessment of Franks (2010) that coverage of Africa by news organizations has not improved despite technological improvements. The self-belief of foreign correspondents in their own coverage of Africa and the narrative of African negligence in academia are possible future areas of investigation.
 - 3 “Super stringers” are often deployed internationally and generally receive generous benefits packages, including Western-standard accommodation and paid-for transport and communication.
 - 4 My descriptions in *Stringer* would apply to local-national stringers in many respects. I will indicate where major deviations between the foreign stringer and local-national stringer might arise. My analysis of local journalists would apply in several other Sub-Saharan African countries. However, it would not apply to certain exceptions. In the particularly well developed national media environment of South Africa, for example, many local journalists work for media outlets covering events across the continent.



18

MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS OR LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS? COMPARING US NEWS COVERAGE OF LOCAL AND DISTANT SUFFERING

LAUREN KOGEN

INTRODUCTION

When stories about distant humanitarian crises appear in the news, audiences are certainly sympathetic. They make charitable donations and post social media messages expressing their horror and sorrow. Yet such reactions are often short term, lasting only until news coverage wanes and is replaced with something new (Moeller 1999). Scholars and journalists have lamented the public's superficial and fleeting responses to global humanitarian issues (Iyengar 1991; Moeller 1999), but to what degree are audience responses limited by the way the news media present information?

In other words, can citizens be expected to do anything more than provide short-term sympathy if the news media fail to provide information on long-term solutions or responses to distant humanitarian crises and hence fail to provide the tools for more powerful audience engagement? American journalism schools embrace the notion that the news industry ought to provide citizens with the tools to engage politically in important issues, but this mandate does not seem to apply to far-off crises. Whereas national news is expected to provide citizens with information they can use to discuss issues of public importance (Habermas 1989), govern themselves (Downie and Kaiser 2002; Murdock and Golding 1989; Picard 2005; Zaller 2003) and monitor the actions of those who govern them (Bennett and Serrin 2005; McChesney and Nichols 2010), the same is not expected of foreign news coverage (Kogen 2017). Indeed, coverage of foreign suffering that does not directly impact the everyday lives of those in the United States, such as ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hunger in Zimbabwe or genocide in Rwanda, tends to focus on things audiences will find interesting or shocking rather than things that will help audiences become politically engaged and help explain what can be done to address root causes of problems (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Kogen 2017).

This chapter takes this notion as a starting point and looks specifically at two humanitarian crises in order to assess to what extent, and how, the news provides information on long-term solutions to distant humanitarian crises. How does the news, in this case the US news, report on a catastrophe happening in a far-off locale, and how might particular reporting habits impact how readers respond to such disasters?

I look at one particular distant crisis — the 2011 famine in East Africa — and compare it to coverage of a domestic crisis — 2005's Hurricane Katrina in the United States — to uncover the differences in how the news media describe local and distant suffering. While both of these examples relate to disasters and not mass atrocity events, the patterns that emerge from the coverage are entirely relevant to a discussion of the intersection between news media and mass atrocity. The analysis reveals four important patterns in how the news constructs information for US audiences regarding responses and solutions to distant suffering. First,

short-term relief is emphasized over long-term development; second, causes of the crisis are disconnected from solutions; third, the tone of articles is far more pessimistic in articles on distant, rather than local suffering; and fourth, human interest stories displace information regarding solutions to distant suffering. In short, coverage of foreign crises suggests either that there are no solutions or that the solutions that do exist are ineffective. Given this construction, I conclude that it is unsurprising that American audiences have such limited engagement with foreign crises.

SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED INFORMATION IN THE NEWS

Many in the Global North assume that the public has a right to be politically informed, to take part in its own governance (for example, by voting) and to keep a watchful, critical eye on its officials. The media are fundamental to this process by providing the fuel for public debate and discussion.

This “fuel” includes, although is not limited to, providing a variety of viewpoints regarding solutions to a problem. The well-accepted notion that the media in the United States should provide a “marketplace of ideas” on how the nation should respond to social problems supports this claim. The Hutchins Commission (1947, 20), formed to report on the relationship between the press and democracy, advocated a “forum for the exchange of comment and criticism.” Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm (1963, 51) state that under the libertarian media system, the purpose of the media is “to help discover truth, to assist in the process of solving political and social problems by presenting all manner of evidence and opinion as the basis for decisions.” James Curran (2005, 122) argues that the media “should enable organized groups to present their concerns and solutions to a wider public.” Together, such claims offer a clear mandate to the news industry to offer solutions and other ideas to the American public regarding ways to address issues of social concern.

Additionally, the media are tasked with covering whether there are actors addressing a public problem or thwarting a solution. This is referred to as

the industry's "watchdog" role (Bennett and Serrin 2005; Curran 2005).

Collectively, information related to potential responses to social problems, to those who are addressing problems or thwarting solutions, and to the causes of problems can be considered "solutions-oriented information" (Kogen 2017, 3). This information functions to help audiences engage politically with what they see and hear in the news. Covering the cause of a problem, for example, is an important corollary to discussing solutions, because how cause is constructed often (although not always) implies what remedies should be pursued. If the cause of hunger is determined to be, in the case of Africa, for example, food scarcity, then at least one potential solution — increasing food aid — may be obvious. If, on the other hand, the cause of hunger is determined to be a lack of rain, solutions may be less obvious but might include, for example, investing in irrigation improvement.

SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED INFORMATION ON DISTANT SUFFERING

Solutions-oriented information is the kind of information that would, in theory, help audiences think about long-term solutions to local or distant suffering. In the case of distant suffering (Boltanski 1999) reported in the US press, however, solutions-oriented information is lacking, particularly in comparison to coverage of local suffering (Kogen 2015). Indeed, reporters covering distant suffering regularly avoid including solutions-oriented information in stories because they see it as biased. This is because reporters often consider "solutions" to distant suffering to mean donations to charities, and reporters do not want to be seen as supporting particular charities or as supporting the idea that Americans should donate money to foreign crises in general (Kogen 2017). The traditional "marketplace of ideas" mandate therefore does not apply in the case of distant suffering because, for many reporters, the most prominent "idea" is charity. Long-term solutions to suffering are not on the radars of most reporters, and are therefore absent from their stories.

In sum, if solutions-oriented information is lacking in stories on distant suffering, the question then becomes, what do these news stories suggest, if anything, about how to address suffering in the short and long term?

Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the following research question: what do news stories covering distant humanitarian crises suggest about how to address suffering?

In answering this question, we can also consider how news constructions can have an impact on which solutions, if any, are supported both by policy makers and the public.

METHOD

While the extant scholarship suggests that coverage of distant suffering features little solutions-oriented information, there remains a gap in our understanding of what the news *does* suggest, if anything, regarding how citizens across the globe might ameliorate this suffering. This chapter seeks to answer this question by looking specifically at how solutions-oriented information is constructed in discourse on one foreign humanitarian crisis — the 2011 famine in East Africa — in order to reflect upon how the US citizen may be “taught” to think about and respond to such events.

Humanitarian “crises” are events that hit the global stage suddenly (even if the crisis was predictable) and threaten the well-being of a large group of people.

Humanitarian crises, such as natural disasters, violent conflict and disease outbreaks are often very complex, making it difficult to determine the best course of action to save the most lives. This is especially true when national authorities lack the capacity to address the problem themselves and require an international response (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 1999).

Crises are useful examples for answering the question posed here, as to how the news media construct solutions to foreign suffering, because crises typically receive a large and sustained amount of coverage relative to stories in the normal news cycle — at least for a short period of time (Kogen 2015). In the case of the 2011 Somali famine, although it took nearly seven months for the media to pay sustained attention to the crisis, it ultimately received media attention when it was officially declared a

famine in late July 2011.¹ When these crises make the mainstream news, a large chunk of the American public that may not typically seek out stories on foreign affairs may be exposed to them. This is also the time when much domestic political action regarding foreign crises occurs in terms of donations, volunteering, discussion in the editorial pages and policy making. Therefore, we can think of crisis reporting as having a particularly strong role in constructing discourse and debate about the problems of distant sufferers, and their solutions, for American audiences.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

By constructing an issue, its causes and its solutions, the media play an important role in shaping how and whether audiences even see an issue as a problem in the first place. Critical discourse analysis is a particular form of discourse analysis that attempts to understand how everyday discourse constructs our social world and affects social and cultural practices (Van Dijk 1993). Critical discourse analysis examines the social and cultural practices and norms that are embedded in everyday discourse (ibid., 3; Wood and Kroger 2000) and which construct power relations. The method thus allows for an evaluation of the news based on how story patterns subtly and subconsciously suggest which topics are suitable for political engagement and which kinds of responses are most sensible. Deconstructing this discourse means revealing its inherent assumptions and prejudices.

Revealing how news stories construct reality for audiences is difficult when we, the researchers, are ourselves embedded in the same everyday reality as news audiences. For this reason, a comparison between domestic and foreign coverage is useful, as it puts into relief the differences in how we treat “American” crises and crises that occur elsewhere, and thus reveals the patterns that are subtly and often imperceptibly buried in news stories. As Robert M. Entman (1991, 6) observes, comparing stories that have the *potential* to be reported on similarly, but are not, helps reveal the “critical textual choices that framed the story but would otherwise remain submerged in an undifferentiated text.” By comparing stories, argues Entman, constructions that would have otherwise simply seemed natural begin to stand out.

I have chosen to compare coverage of the East African famine (here referred to as the “Somali famine,” since Somalia received the most coverage and was, arguably, hardest hit) with a US-based humanitarian crisis, Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans and other parts of the US Gulf Coast in 2005. I focus specifically on issues of hunger related to Hurricane Katrina to make the two events more comparable. By comparing an African disaster to one that is very relevant to US citizens’ daily lives, we can see how alternative constructions might influence Americans’ short-term efforts to help Africans.

The two events are obviously not identical. First, only a small number of people died of starvation or dehydration during Hurricane Katrina (Boyd 2006). Second, the period that could be considered a “crisis” was much shorter in the case of Hurricane Katrina: about one week compared to about seven months for the famine in Somalia. Third, most experts had not predicted the extent of damage the hurricane would cause until it was too late, while the famine in Somalia was a slow-onset crisis — there were warnings long before it was formally declared a famine by the United Nations on July 20, 2011.

There are other differences as well, but there are enough similarities that we can make comparisons on some key points. First, death, chaos, violence, confusion, refugees, and a lack of food and water were complications that plagued both crises. Second, governments or other political bodies in both cases were accused of mishandling the response, thus thwarting potential resolutions. Third, the crises had multiple causes, both natural and manmade, and a complex variety of potential solutions.

SAMPLING

I analyzed two months of coverage surrounding the Somali famine, from July 1 through August 31, 2011. This was the period of intense coverage, even though the famine had not improved significantly by the end of August — approximately five months before the United Nations declared the crisis over.

Articles were taken from 16 newspapers representing either the first or second top-selling newspaper in their state.² Within this time period,

some 35 dates were randomly chosen, and all stories appearing on those dates were included, for a total of 161 articles. The articles represent 52 unique news articles, 85 reprints of newswire articles, and 24 pieces from the editorial pages.

One week of coverage surrounding Hurricane Katrina was analyzed, from August 30 through September 5, 2005.³ Although there was major criticism of the slow response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to the disaster caused by the hurricane, by September 6, one week after the storm hit, almost everyone had been evacuated from New Orleans and the surrounding areas. News coverage at this point began to stop focusing on the disaster itself and moved on to the recovery effort. For Somalia, on the other hand, the famine had not improved significantly by the time news coverage decreased at the end of August — approximately five months before the United Nations declared the crisis over. Limiting the analysis to the one week during which the hurricane disaster occurred and peaked serves to keep the content of news coverage of the two events as similar as possible.

For Hurricane Katrina, 150 articles were randomly selected from the top-selling newspapers of each US state.⁴ These included 137 unique news articles, 37 reprints of newswire articles and 48 pieces from the editorial pages.⁵

FINDINGS

Overall, 97 of the 137 non-editorial Somali famine articles (71 percent) included solutions-oriented information. For articles on Hurricane Katrina, 50 of the 78 non-editorial articles (64 percent) included solutions-oriented information. In other words, solutions-oriented information was included in both Katrina and Somalia articles on an approximately equal basis. However, this finding is deceptive, as the solutions that were presented in the case of Somalia did little to facilitate political engagement or provide information on viable long-term solutions.

There were four overarching themes in the Somali famine discourse on “solutions” that suggested the limited efficacy of US or other efforts, and thus generally served to constrict public discussion of solutions. Disaster relief was emphasized over development aid; causes of the crisis were disconnected from solutions (here, specifically, al-Shabaab was presented as the main cause of the famine, and as an insurmountable hurdle preventing famine relief); the tone of articles was decidedly pessimistic and human interest stories displaced solutions-oriented information.

I use numbers below to demonstrate the frequency of certain patterns, but they should be taken as general tendencies and not rigorous scientific data. I conducted the analysis alone, observing patterns arising from the text, rather than conducting the analysis with additional coders based on a pre-defined coding schema. I use quotations from the text to illustrate the patterns I identify.

DISASTER RELIEF EMPHASIZED OVER DEVELOPMENT

Of the non-editorial articles on the Somali famine that included solutions-oriented information, the majority suggested immediate humanitarian aid as the logical response, generally referring to food and medicine, either through governments or through private donations and charities. In other words, the most common type of solutions-oriented information, in the case of the Somali famine, concerned temporary solutions that would do little to promote the kind of long-term change needed to facilitate prevention of the next famine.

As Entman (1991) argues, what is left *out* of news stories is often just as important as what is included. This lack of attention to long-term change suggests, by omission, that there is little likelihood of long-term change, and thus that these crises are inevitable and will continue in the future. It therefore may add to an impression of the region as embroiled in ongoing humanitarian crisis; indeed, Somalia may stand in for wider Africa when it is described as “an anarchic country hit by years of drought and a never-ending cycle of violence” (Sheikh 2011, A19).

News audiences may also interpret a focus on short-term solutions as an assumption that it is simply not the place of outside governments such as

the United States to become politically involved in countries such as Somalia, other than to provide ameliorative care under circumstances of egregious human suffering. Nevertheless, a focus on interventions that take place after a crisis has already occurred and eschew the prevention of future crises places a severe limitation on public discussion of preventative measures or long-term change.

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, there was also a focus on immediate humanitarian relief. However, two features of the coverage suggest a very different interpretation of the nature of short-term relief. First, 39 percent of Hurricane Katrina articles in the opinion pages addressed infrastructural improvement, suggesting that short-term relief should be coupled with long-term prevention. In comparison, no opinion articles addressed infrastructure in the case of Somalia, even though infrastructural improvements could, arguably, do much to reduce the frequency of drought (Shiferaw et al. 2014). Second, the focus on humanitarian relief in the case of Hurricane Katrina lasted only about one week — the amount of time it took for officials to evacuate the city. Thereafter, coverage of Katrina rapidly refocused on the rebuilding of New Orleans, explanations of what had happened and how to strengthen the city in the future (although this period of coverage was intentionally left out of the sample).

In the case of Somalia, on the other hand, news coverage was reduced to a “drip,” well before the need for immediate relief had ended, and so the recovery phase was never included in media coverage. In other words, in the case of Hurricane Katrina, short-term aid did not encompass the totality of news coverage as it did for Somalia. Instead, long-term solutions were an important element of the coverage as well.

CAUSE DISCONNECTED FROM SOLUTION: AL-SHABAAB AS INSURMOUNTABLE HURDLE

Only one-fifth of non-editorial Somali famine articles (25 of 137) suggested an underlying cause to the famine. The absence of a discussion of cause may leave audiences with the impression that there is no cause to a famine. In other words, a failure to report cause may suggest that famines in Africa are inevitable, exacerbating stereotypes regarding the continent.

The two causes that *were* mentioned, however, did little to support long-term solutions because they were presented as unsolvable. First, many articles stated that drought led to the famine; but drought does not automatically lead to famine, and simplifying the issue in this way suggests that droughts are simply acts of nature and that nothing can be done. Few articles addressed contributing factors such as a lack of institutional or technological mechanisms to cope with low rainfall. This pattern may suggest to readers that addressing the underlying institutional factors that lead to drought is either impossible or simply outside the scope of potential US foreign policy.

Second, the most common cause cited in the Somali famine articles (in 16 percent of non-editorial articles) was the militant group al-Shabaab. These articles reported that the group was blocking food and other forms of aid from reaching the areas most in need. Yet in this case, knowing the underlying cause of a problem does not imply an obvious solution. Blaming al-Shabaab for the crisis is unhelpful for political engagement if the Western public does not have any means of holding al-Shabaab to account. Save for six articles that advocated military intervention, no methods for addressing al-Shabaab were suggested.

Not only was al-Shabaab presented as a cause without solutions, but the terrorist group was also used as one of the reasons why particular solutions — primarily food aid and medical care — were failing. This discourse emphasized that the aid the international community was providing was ultimately blocked or stolen, either by UN officials, al-Shabaab, government troops, greedy aid workers or hungry thieves.

In both cases then, when a cause was included, the implicit assumption was that the famine was caused by something outsiders could do little to nothing about: either a force of nature (drought) or an untouchable terrorist group (al-Shabaab). In the case of Hurricane Katrina, by contrast, stories that focused on cause tended to focus on the role of FEMA in the aid effort. FEMA is part of the federal government and it was therefore clear how FEMA leaders could be held to account. In the aftermath of the disaster (one week after the hurricane struck) coverage also focused more on the role of the faulty levees, something that could clearly be fixed.

To sum up, articles on Hurricane Katrina and on the Somali famine included solutions-oriented information with approximately equal frequency, but information regarding the Somali famine did little to facilitate audience engagement regarding long-term solutions. This was because that reporting either presented primarily short-term solutions in the form of humanitarian aid; or it presented the cause as either “drought,” full stop, or as the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab, without including solutions for either case, and thus leaving all but the most informed audiences at a loss for how such problems could be dealt with by outsiders.

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, by contrast, the coverage turned to rebuilding efforts approximately one week after the crisis started, and it presented FEMA (and later, the failure of the levies) as the main reasons for the extent of damage, a characterization more likely to support political engagement, as both could be addressed by an elected government administration. Coverage of Hurricane Katrina therefore supported the marketplace of ideas and watchdog functions of the media in a way that coverage of the Somali famine did not.

PESSIMISTIC TONE OF SOMALI FAMINE ARTICLES

A third trend in the discourse was that many of the articles on the famine struck a pessimistic tone that fell just short of suggesting the situation was hopeless. This kind of tone implicitly suggests, again, that the situation is unsolvable and inevitable, and evokes a certain resignation to an unhappy ending for famine victims. This was particularly apparent in article conclusions. The following were typical concluding sentiments:

Sirat Amine, a nurse nutritionist with the International Rescue Committee, puts [baby] Mihag’s odds for survival at only 50-50... His mother, Asiah Dagane, fans Mihag with the edge of her headscarf to keep flies away. He cries weakly, and when he does, she bounces him gently to try to soothe him and murmurs softly. (Kazziha 2011)

When Faqid Nur Elmi’s 3-year-old son died of hunger and thirst on the road from Somalia, his mother...couldn’t stop

to mourn — there were five other children to think about....‘I was just thinking of how I can save the rest of the children. The God who gave me him in the first place took him away. So I didn’t worry much about the late son. Others’ lives were at risk.’ (Muhumed 2011b, para. 21)

Concluding lines are important in news articles because they suggest what the reader might ultimately take away from the piece (Pan and Kosicki 1993). Here the takeaway for audiences is gloomy. In the examples above, the suggestion is that victims — and perhaps audiences — are resigned to the inevitable outcome of starvation and death.

In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the tone of conclusions to stories was far more optimistic. For one, journalists embedded assumptions that things would eventually normalize. Even articles filled with death and despair usually ended with solutions-oriented information and ended on a hopeful, optimistic note. The following offer illustrative examples:

[In reference to the refugee camp]: Alice George, 76, a homeless woman, was searched for almost 10 minutes. “They took my cigarettes and lighter,” she said. “I guess I’ll do without.” (Foster 2005, A4)

As [Glenn’s] family waded toward the Superdome from their destroyed home two days ago, he grabbed a football floating by... Inside on Wednesday, he was going long to try to catch a pass from Perrance Williams, 17... “I play in the projects,” he said. He never thought he’d be playing in the Superdome, but there he was. (Gerhart 2005, A1)

The idea that one of the refugees’ most concerning problems is that she does not have cigarettes stands in stark contrast to a mother in Somalia witnessing her child’s death. Although the hurricane was treated as a true disaster by reporters, the tone of these articles is one of muted optimism; they are not meant to offend or to minimize the traumatizing experiences of the victims, but they do suggest that the reporters know there is an end in sight and that lives will eventually return to normal. Obviously,

reporters may not have the same kind of confidence that lives will improve in Somalia, so these distinct tones might be fair. But stories that paint the Somali famine as hopeless, nonetheless limit political engagement by suggesting that death resulting from famine is inevitable, and that a discussion of solutions is thus moot.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES DISPLACE SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED INFORMATION

The fourth trend that helps us understand how causes and solutions were constructed is the high number of human interest stories included in coverage of both crises. Telling the story of an individual or family in order to make the story more interesting and the context more understandable for the reader is a common technique in news reporting.

Articles that included human interest narratives either as a hook in the beginning of the article to draw readers in or as the focus of the entire article made up 55 of the 137 non-editorial stories in the Somali sample. Many of these stories were heart-wrenching, often about dead or dying children.

“Which Child Should Live?” (Muhumed 2011a, A19) (reprinted seven times in the sample) is a typical example of a story that focuses on an individual’s ordeal and eschews solutions-oriented information. It centres on a mother forced to leave her four-year-old son on the side of the road, dying, in order to save her one-year-old daughter: “The 29-year-old mother had to make a choice that no parent should have to make. ‘Finally, I decided to leave him behind to his God on the road,’ [she] said days later in an interview at a teeming refugee camp in Dadaab. ‘I am sure that he was alive, and that is my heartbreak.’”

The analysis reveals that these kinds of stories, although moving and likely to pull in readers, *push out* solutions-oriented information. First, these stories tended to be about 100 words longer than pieces that did not have a human interest focus, so they take up more space on the printed page. Newspapers thus devoted more of their already limited international news space to stories of little political substance.

A second piece of evidence that human interest stories displace solutions-oriented information is that newspapers cut more politically pertinent information from human interest stories. This can be seen by comparing original versions of newswire stories (available online) with the versions that ultimately appeared in papers across the country. Of the 137 non-editorial news stories, 34 provided solutions-oriented information in their original newswire version, but were reprinted without this information. Half of these (17) incorporated human interest elements.

For example, one Associated Press story, which was reprinted five times (Straziuso 2011), illustrates the effect achieved when newspapers choose to cut different elements of a story. Jason Straziuso's original article describes Isaac Bulle, who travelled with "two wives and 14 children for 25 days by donkey cart" to reach a refugee camp (ibid.). After seven paragraphs about Bulle and his family, the article discusses a conference planned to take place in Rome regarding global assistance. This section of the article also includes a quote from a US ambassador stating that the United States has not yet decided whether it will provide additional monetary aid. The conclusion of the piece reports that both the World Food Program and the Red Cross were able to help victims despite the presence of al-Shabaab, and that Australia was demanding more action from global governments.

Two of the newspapers ended the story after the description of Bulle's ordeal, thus focusing only on the human interest element; the other three ended after the discussion of the Rome conference (although one of these cut the sentence regarding US aid). The discussion of a global effort to coordinate aid, and the question of whether or not the United States would donate more to the effort — information arguably important to a discussion among Americans on how to address the crisis — were cut from all five sampled newspapers except one. All five cut the conclusion of the article discussing the organizations that had been able to help (despite difficulties presented by al-Shabaab) and the quote from the Australian foreign minister regarding global action. The choice of cutting just one or two sentences thus has a significant effect on the information provided in the piece.

CONCLUSION

While we might blame news audiences for their short-lived engagement with foreign crises, their reactions are far less surprising when we look carefully at what news stories truly communicate to readers. As illustrated above, the subtle lessons the news media teach audiences about foreign crises work together to suggest that there are few, if any, solutions to foreign suffering and the solutions that have been implemented do not work very well. By way of comparison, the media suggest that national crises, such as Hurricane Katrina, can and will be effectively addressed by responsible governments and engaged publics. Given these patterns in news discourse, it is no surprise that Americans engage superficially with the topic of distant suffering.

Is it therefore the responsibility of the news industry to present information in a different way? Many would argue that it is illogical to expect the news industry to be the sole supplier of fodder for political engagement and discussion when it was not designed for that purpose. It is a profit-making industry, and so profits will almost always trump providing a public service. At the same time, however, most people working in journalism did not join the industry in order to help corporations make profits. Most journalists and editors do see their role as grander — as helping contribute to a vibrant public sphere and a well-informed citizenry, and even making the world a better place. With that in mind we can hope that by exposing and revealing flaws in the system, those who produce the news will eventually shift priorities and policies in order to make a system that comes as close as possible to fulfilling its public service mandate.

This means treating foreign disasters as we would a disaster occurring on US soil, such as Hurricane Katrina. It also does not necessarily mean assuming that US political actors ought to alleviate suffering, or that it is the responsibility of the US public to do so, but it does mean providing American audiences with the information needed to productively discuss potential courses of action, including choosing not to take action. To do otherwise is to dictate which issues Americans ought to consider part of their own political sphere.

We still do not have an adequate understanding of how and when people respond to foreign suffering. Susan D. Moeller (1999, 2), for instance, argues that because Americans eventually grow tired of sensationalized disaster coverage, journalists must “[ratchet] up the criteria” for stories, attempting to portray each new crisis as “more dramatic or more lethal than [its] predecessors.” This, in turn, Moeller argues, creates a vicious cycle whereby Americans’ apathy toward these crises grows. But recent research also suggests that when the media provide information on how to solve problems, audiences often want to help (Kogen and Dilliplane 2017). In other words, it may be that repetitive coverage of death and drama promotes disengagement not because of boredom or apathy, but rather because audiences have not been given the tools to care; they have not been given convincing evidence that something can be done to address global suffering in the long term. Showing sad stories of victims can motivate people to engage, and frequently does, but this is usually accomplished through short-term solutions such as food aid. When no long-term options are listed, when there is no marketplace of ideas — when there is, in effect, no choice — problems may be perceived as ongoing and inevitable.

Journalists could begin to change the way foreign crises are covered and present better coverage of solutions by actually asking victims on the ground what they think rather than relying on political leaders and charitable groups for facts and quotes. For instance, despite many stories on al-Shabaab, none included any comments by Somalis themselves on what could be done to stop the group, and only a very small number of victim comments explicitly addressed causes or solutions. While several pieces stated that the famine was caused by drought, no Somalis were ever quoted regarding what government policies or international interventions might have lessened the severity of future droughts. While many articles featured Somalis telling sad stories, and some even included the opinions of Somali victims (for example, Dixon 2011; Mohamed 2011), there was generally only a minimal connection between victims and their political opinions.

In articles on Hurricane Katrina, on the other hand, victims’ opinions were featured more often, and they seemed eager to suggest ways to remedy the

situation. They were “restless,” “angry” (Ovalle, Long and Merzer 2005) and “complained” about the government’s response (Nossiter 2005a). They told reporters they needed water and ice, that they “could use National Guard units” (Slevin and Moreno 2005), that the government “need[ed] to start sending somebody,” and complained that the government “can do everything for other countries but...can’t do nothing for [its] own people” (Nossiter 2005b). They had the courage and confidence to voice their opinions, and journalists ensured that their voices were heard by the public and the powers that be.

Bringing in the voices of foreign victims is respectful and perhaps more likely to open the eyes of outsiders to what is causing problems. Methods of reporting on foreign news are not written in stone, and both readers and victims can be addressed as politically active citizens, even when it comes to foreign affairs, if news outlets choose to view them this way.

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- 1 The article counts found through the analysis demonstrate the rise and fall of coverage regarding the Somali famine in the selected US newspapers: July 1–7, 2011: four articles; July 8–14, 2011: 14 articles; July 15–21, 2011: 21 articles; July 22–28, 2011: 58 articles; July 29–August 4, 2011: 75 articles; August 5–11, 2011: 60 articles; August 12–18, 2011: 54 articles; August 19–25, 2011: 10 articles; August 26–31, 2011: 12 articles.
 - 2 At the time of the research, articles on the Somali famine had not yet been posted on Lexis Nexis, and so PressDisplay was used. Sixteen papers were available that were the first or second bestselling in their respective states. These papers were searched manually.
 - 3 For Somali famine coverage, 35 dates between July 1 and August 31, 2011, were randomly chosen, and all stories appearing on those dates were included. Because Hurricane Katrina coverage spanned only seven days, all stories were collected (298 total), and 150 of those were randomly chosen.
 - 4 Delaware, Hawaii and South Dakota were not included in the Hurricane Katrina sample because none of their top three selling newspapers were available on LexisNexis or Newsbank. At the time of the research, articles on the Somali famine had not yet been posted on LexisNexis, and so PressDisplay was used. For this search, 16 papers that qualified as the most popular for their particular state were identified and searched manually. Hurricane Katrina stories were identified through LexisNexis and Newsbank; Hurricane Katrina keywords: hunger (and its variants), starvation (and its variants), food or soup kitchen, with “Katrina” in the title or lead. Stories in which hunger was not a major topic were removed; stories of fewer than 75 words were removed.
 - 5 The newspapers used to analyze the two events were not identical because of availability of newspapers for the two time periods.



**SOCIAL
MEDIA:
THE NEW
ACTOR**



19

SOCIAL MEDIA IN AFRICA: AN EMERGING FORCE FOR AUTOCRATS AND ACTIVISTS

GEOFFREY YORK

Within the space of a few short years, social media has emerged as a powerful force in Africa. Its impact, both positive and negative, has been deep and far reaching, and is likely to grow even stronger in the future. Understanding the influence of social media has become crucial for any understanding of African political systems, how conflicts rise and fall, the ways in which social tensions can spiral into violence or atrocities, and potential strategies for defusing or preventing those conflicts.

In many African countries, social media has helped to expand freedom and empower citizens. It has challenged the traditional state-controlled monopolies of information. It has given a voice to the voiceless. It has exposed wrongdoing and helped citizens to find information that strengthens their fight against corruption and injustice. And it has created new avenues for political accountability through citizen journalism and social protest.

At the same time, social media has had dangerous and worrisome consequences in some African countries. It has facilitated new forms of hate speech against ethnic minorities or opposition groups. It has allowed the spread of false information that misleads and distracts the population. And it has allowed authoritarian governments and powerful business groups to intimidate and harass dissidents and others who challenge their authority, including journalists, opposition politicians and civil society groups.

In this chapter, I examine the rise of social media in Africa and the key reasons for the dramatic expansion in its popularity. I look at the positive and negative consequences of this important trend, including several detailed examples from specific African countries. Through this analysis, I discuss the lessons for citizens: how they can use social media to strengthen democracy and human rights; and how they can counteract the anti-democratic uses of social media that have already been witnessed in many parts of Africa and the world.

A brief note on definitions: in this chapter, I am focusing primarily on Sub-Saharan Africa, although some historical examples will be drawn from North Africa, where social media arrived sooner and became influential more quickly. My case studies are drawn from Sub-Saharan Africa, but most of my statistics are from the entire continent, simply because of a frequent lack of specific regional data for Sub-Saharan Africa. My definition of social media focuses primarily on Twitter and Facebook, by far the biggest and most important of the social media in Africa, but it also includes the growing use of WhatsApp discussion groups.

THE POPULARITY AND POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Why have social media become so popular and politically important in Africa? First, I discuss the reasons for this phenomenon, and then give an overview of how social media is functioning in the political sphere.

The number of Africans using the internet has increased dramatically in recent years. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), an agency of the United Nations, estimates that 213 million Africans were using the internet in 2017, compared to just 15 million in 2005 (ITU 2017). In most African countries, a majority of internet users gain access to the internet through their mobile devices, primarily smartphones, because it is cheaper and requires less infrastructure. The costs of mobile internet access are dependent on the amount of data that is used, so there is a logical preference for information sites that are relatively streamlined and simple. Twitter and Facebook are among the cheapest and easiest sites to use, especially on the relatively slow networks of the internet in Africa. Twitter is, by definition, a micro site. Facebook has introduced a more streamlined site for its African users, to encourage greater use of its site by those with limited access or limited data.

As prices drop, smartphones are becoming much more popular in Africa. A report by a mobile industry group (GSMA 2016) estimated that there were 226 million smartphone connections in Africa in 2016. That was twice as many connections as there had been two years earlier, partly due to a drop in the price of smartphones. (The number of smartphone connections is greater than the number of internet users because many Africans have two or more devices.) The study predicted that a further 500 million smartphone connections would be added over the following five years.

In addition to these technological reasons for the fast-rising popularity of social media in Africa, there are other key reasons for the rapid growth of social media as a tool for political and societal discourse. In Africa, as in Western countries, there is a growing distrust of politicians and traditional media. In the West, this distrust is a result of a broader alienation and polarization in society, with the media being just one of the institutions that have lost support. In Africa, it is more often because the mainstream media lack credibility and independence, since they are often state controlled and severely short of resources. African journalists and editors are often poorly paid and subjected to political and commercial pressures. Social media has become an alternative to information sources that are distrusted.

In many African countries, the dominant media are the state-controlled broadcasters, which hold a monopoly or disproportionate influence in much of the country. Social media allows citizens to challenge these monopolies. It allows citizens to gain access to news and information from independent sources. It has opened up entirely new sources of information and political engagement. As a result, it has become increasingly popular, not just among ordinary citizens, but also among civil society groups, journalists, opposition political parties and other key groups in society.

The data for Facebook and Twitter confirm this trend. About 170 million Africans are using Facebook at least once a month. This is an increase of 42 percent over the past two years. About 94 percent of Facebook users in Africa use their mobile phones to get access to the Facebook site (Shapshak 2017). A study by Portland Communications found that there were 1.6 billion tweets in 2015 that were geo-located to Africa. That represented an increase of an astonishing 3,400 percent over the number from three years earlier (Portland Communications 2016).

One of the most distinctive aspects of social media use in Africa is its politicization. Because of the difficulty in gaining access to state-controlled media, political activists in Africa have often turned to social media, which can be an effective and affordable method of reaching large numbers of supporters and mobilizing greater support for their causes. A high-profile example of the political influence of social media was seen in 2011 in North Africa during the early stages of the Arab Spring. Social media played an organizing and catalyzing role in the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt that launched the Arab Spring. The exact extent of this role has been debated: there have been disagreements on how much influence was exercised by social media in comparison to other mobilizing factors. But it's clear that social media did help to allow protest leaders to bypass the traditional state-controlled media and organize the street rallies and demonstrations that contributed greatly to the toppling of the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt.

In recent years, we have seen a similar story in many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, although on a smaller scale because internet penetration rates in most African countries are still lower than those of Tunisia and

Egypt. Internet access is largely an urban phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa, but urban citizens are a disproportionately influential and vocal group in African politics. Social media has played a galvanizing role in street protests and popular uprisings in many places across the continent, from Burundi and Cameroon to Togo and Zimbabwe.

In implicit recognition of this galvanizing power, an increasing number of African governments have imposed temporary shutdowns or restrictions on internet access, especially during elections or major street protests, as one of their main tactics in their efforts to defeat the opposition and halt the protests. Since the beginning of 2016, African governments have shut down the internet at least 21 times, sometimes for months at a time across the entire country (Access Now 2017). This has been a particularly common tactic in authoritarian states such as Ethiopia, Cameroon, Togo, Gabon, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, where political unrest has been growing, the internet was shut down twice in 2017, for several months each time. The regime of Cameroon's dictator Paul Biya, who has ruled the country for the past 37 years, has furiously denounced social media as "a new form of terrorism" and "a social pandemic" — a clear sign of how much the regime is worried by the political influence of social media. In countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe, government officials have proposed laws to restrict the use of social media. These regimes have recognized social media as a significant threat to their monopoly on power. Tellingly, the internet shutdowns in these countries have often been targeted specifically at social media sites (especially Twitter and Facebook) and messaging apps such as WhatsApp. This is a clear confirmation that authoritarian regimes are afraid of the organizing power of social media.

There is, indeed, some statistical evidence to suggest that social media is more politicized in Africa than in other regions of the world. One study found that political tweets (in other words, tweets about political subjects) represented just two percent of all tweets in the United States and Britain, but they represented somewhere between six percent and 10 percent of all tweets in Africa. This suggests that political tweets are nearly five times more common in Africa than in wealthier regions of the world (Kazeem 2016).

THE NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In analyzing the impact of social media in Africa, I begin by examining the negative impact: the ways in which social media can be used as a weapon to fuel hatred and encourage violence, to intimidate and harass a regime's opponents and to distract or mislead voters. I follow with a discussion of the positive impact: examples of how social media has been used to fight corruption, to promote democracy, to defend human rights and to encourage a more peaceful and fair society. I conclude with a detailed case study of South Africa, where both kinds of impact have been highly visible.

The most extreme damage inflicted by social media can be seen in South Sudan. As documented in the chapter by Theo Dolan, social media in South Sudan has contributed to hatred and conflict among ethnic groups. Many investigators, including UN investigators, have warned that South Sudan's social media are triggering violence against ethnic groups. Since the beginning of the civil war in late 2013, social media has fuelled waves of hate speech that have provoked deadly violence and ethnic conflict in South Sudan, including massacres and other atrocities. In that sense, social media has become a new variation of the "hate radio" phenomenon that flourished in Rwanda before and during the 1994 genocide.

One example has been documented in the South Sudan city of Yei, where dozens of people were killed or injured in a series of interethnic killings that erupted in November 2016. Politicians and witnesses on the ground said the killings were a result of animosity that had been stoked and inflamed by hate speech on social media (Lynch 2017). It was part of a larger pattern. "The media, including social media, are being used to spread hatred and encourage ethnic polarization," said Adama Dieng, the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, in a statement to the UN Security Council (UNSC) after a visit to South Sudan in November 2016 (UNSC 2016a). A report by a UN panel of experts on South Sudan in that same month reported: "Social media has been used by partisans on all sides, including some senior government officials, to exaggerate incidents, spread falsehoods and veiled threats or post outright messages of incitement" (UNSC 2016b).

Even when it falls short of hate speech, social media is put to many other dangerous uses in Africa. Social media has allowed African political parties or interest groups to spread hoaxes and misinformation in attempts to distract or divert the attention of voters in election campaigns. There were strong examples of this in the 2017 Kenyan election campaign. Kenya has one of Africa's biggest and most active communities on social media, with more than six million Facebook users and about 2.2 million Twitter users. Social media has become so crucial to political technology in Kenya that some commentators described the 2017 campaign as the country's "first social media election." Fake reports, intended to resemble real media, were widely distributed on social media. One was a reproduction of a Kenyan newspaper's front page, falsified to show an opposition member defecting to the ruling party. Others were fake videos, purporting to be BBC or CNN reports, claiming that President Uhuru Kenyatta was far ahead of the opposition in the polls. Others claimed to show that the opposition candidate was funded by the United States. These false social media reports were slick enough to make an impact. A survey of 2,000 Kenyans, conducted by Portland Communications and GeoPoll, found that about half of those surveyed were getting their election news from social media, and 90 percent said they had encountered fake news reports (York 2017c).

Social media is also emerging as a powerful way to harass and intimidate the opponents of a regime or a political party. In this sense, it adds another weapon to the arsenal of a powerful regime that already has multiple weapons at its disposal. A regime can mobilize its supporters to use social media in a targeted way against its foes, or it can use its financial resources to create a fake army of fictional users on social media. In either case, it is tilting the playing field against its enemies. A targeted attack through social media can be more effective than the telephone threats or messages often deployed in the past. The use of social media can be more intimidating because it belittles the targeted person in front of a much bigger audience. The presence of this audience means that the attack is more damaging, more difficult to ignore and has the potential to mobilize large numbers of people against the victim.

There are many examples of this, including a South African example that I will document later in this chapter. One of the best examples, however, is in Rwanda. The Rwandan government is an authoritarian regime that tightly controls all elections and domestic media, allowing almost no opposition or independent organizations within the country. This means that the biggest threats to the regime are in the Rwandan diaspora, who often use social media in their campaigns against the regime. This has sparked a digital conflict in which the Rwandan government's supporters (who can sometimes be traced back to the government itself) have used vicious personal attacks to bully and denigrate its critics.

Journalists and human rights activists who expose wrongdoing by the Rwandan government are routinely subjected to harassment and verbal assaults in social media. These attacks have included death threats, personal insults, false allegations and similar tactics. Female journalists and researchers, in particular, have been targeted with misogynistic attacks. Tweets from anonymous accounts have posted fake doctored photos, edited to portray the female journalists or female researchers as prostitutes or strippers. The clear intent is to intimidate and silence the government's critics.

In one specific case, a female journalist tweeted an item about a Human Rights Watch report that had documented the disappearances of Rwandans who were presumed to be secretly detained or killed. The tweeted image included a montage of photos of the disappeared. A pro-government Twitter account responded by editing this image, inserting a photo of the journalist herself among the photos of the disappeared, and then tweeted it back at the journalist so that she and others would see it. It was clearly intended to have a chilling and intimidating effect on the journalist. The same anonymous Twitter account had also issued death threats to the same journalist.¹

These kinds of "trolling" tactics are normally anonymous, or hidden behind false names. But they can sometimes be traced back to the government itself, showing that the government values these tactics as a useful weapon against its enemies. In a case in 2014, after a pseudonymous Twitter account had launched a wave of personal attacks

against a French journalist who had reported on the deaths of Rwandan dissidents, an American journalist named Steve Terrill tweeted in defence of his colleague and told the attacker to stop the “misogynistic harassment.” In the midst of the angry exchange that followed, a response to Terrill was swiftly tweeted — but it came from the official Twitter account of President Paul Kagame, apparently because of a slip-up by the person who was tweeting. This revealed that the trolling attack originated from someone with access to Kagame’s official account. The president’s office later admitted that the account that had attacked the French and American journalists was “an unauthorized account run by an employee in the presidency.” The account was deleted and the presidency said the staff member was reprimanded (Terrill 2014).

Terrill, who was based in Rwanda at the time of this incident, said he had already noticed that “anonymous websites and social media accounts were dominating the Rwanda conversation.” Then, after further research, he discovered “a program of online harassment of journalists, human rights workers and diplomats.” This program, he learned, “was being run from inside the Office of the President of Rwanda” (ibid.).

While social media is often used for anti-democratic purposes in Africa’s authoritarian states, it has also been used as a force for reform, accountability and justice. It has helped to safeguard the fairness of elections. It has allowed greater scrutiny of potential threats, such as vote-rigging or violence, allowing citizens to be alerted when there is still a chance to prevent the worst abuses. It has put a spotlight on corruption and political wrongdoing, allowing activists to mobilize pressure on governments to resolve these long-neglected problems.

In some cases, as it did in the Arab Spring, social media has played a role in toppling an authoritarian state. When an election was called in the small West African state of Gambia, where the dictator Yahya Jammeh had ruled for 22 years, opposition candidates had little access to state-controlled media. So the main opposition party created more than a dozen WhatsApp groups, allowing it to communicate with voters. Other forms of social media also proliferated. A leading independent group, the Gambia Youth and Women’s Forum, discussed election issues on a public Facebook group

with 55,000 members. The government blocked access to WhatsApp and eventually extended the shutdown to the entire internet, but Gambians used virtual private network (VPN) technology to bypass the shutdown. The opposition won the election and Jammeh was forced to flee the country (Camara 2016).

In other authoritarian states, such as Uganda and Zimbabwe, social media has allowed human rights activists to bypass the state-controlled media and reach citizens directly. In Uganda, for example, the scholar and feminist Stella Nyanzi has become a star on Facebook for her rude criticism of President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the country for 33 years. In a country where the vast majority of the population is below the age of 30, she has been able to reach the country's young generation through Facebook, where she has thousands of followers. The regime has responded by arresting her for "offensive" communication and "disturbing the peace." But even after she was imprisoned for five weeks, she continued to speak out (York 2017a).

In Zimbabwe, opposition politicians and independent activists often use the Facebook Live function to speak to large online audiences without any state interference. With street protests largely crushed by the police, the battleground between the regime and the opposition has shifted to social media. Nelson Chamisa, a leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, says he reaches 80,000 people with his regular Facebook Live appearances.² One of the most effective critics of the Zimbabwean regime, Pastor Evan Mawarire, rose to fame through the videos that he releases on Facebook and the hashtag #ThisFlag that he uses on Twitter. One of his videos was viewed by 120,000 people. "You cannot shoot a hashtag," one of his supporters tweeted, taunting the police (York 2016). Mawarire and other social media activists in Zimbabwe have been repeatedly arrested, but have always been eventually released by Zimbabwe's independent-minded court system.

In Burundi, where protestors took to the streets in 2015 in prolonged demonstrations to oppose an extension of the rule of President Pierre Nkurunziza, the government tried to crush the protests by closing all independent media outlets and by shutting down social media. The

protestors used VPN technology to maintain their access to social media. They used WhatsApp groups, in particular, to communicate their protest plans, to expose the movement of police vehicles and to organize barricades in different neighbourhoods of the capital (York 2015).

SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

For a closer study of the positive and negative impacts of social media, I examine South Africa, which has one of the most active social media citizenries in Africa. In a country with a population of 55 million, there are about 16 million people using Facebook, and about eight million using Twitter. South Africans are among the world leaders in the amount of time spent on social networks. On average, they spend 3.2 hours per day on social networks, compared to a global average of 2.4 hours (Parke 2016).

South Africa is also, in some ways, a post-atrocity society, still bearing the scars of the apartheid era. More than two decades after apartheid ended, South Africa remains a highly unequal and divided society. The old wounds of apartheid have not healed, and racial fault lines still exist. While political apartheid has ended, there are forms of geographic and economic apartheid still lingering. South Africa's rates of income and wealth inequality are among the highest in the world. Cities are still divided along the geographic lines that were created during apartheid, with blacks still largely living in townships and informal settlements that are physically separated — often by large distances — from the city centres where workplaces are concentrated. These divisions and inequalities have created the fertile conditions for campaigns of racial hatred and racial conflict, which can thrive in the unregulated space of social media.

South Africa also has a high rate of unemployment and a stagnant economy, where GDP is growing slower than the rate of population growth. And it has a ruling party that has remained in power for the past 25 years, despite corruption scandals and unpopular leaders. So the country has all the conditions that can breed conflict: social and political discontent, a poor economy, extreme inequality and persistent divisions

based on lingering racial fault lines. And for those who want to capitalize on these tensions, social media is the most powerful weapon to use.

In this environment, South Africa's social media has been exploited by covert lobbyists for wealthy businessmen and political factions. The goal of these forces is to use the vast reach and anonymity of social media to harass and threaten their enemies, to provide a distraction from their own corruption or wrongdoing and to inflame racial and ethnic tensions in ways that are politically useful. The most visible example took place in 2016 and 2017, in a campaign aimed to build support for President Jacob Zuma and his close allies, the Gupta business family.

The Gupta brothers, who were business partners of Zuma's son Duduzane, controlled a financial empire in mining, media, computers and consulting. Official inquiries and media investigations found they were so powerful that they even controlled appointments in the Zuma cabinet. Gupta-linked companies were able to win lucrative tenders from state-owned enterprises with the help of cabinet ministers and other officials who were loyal to Zuma and the Guptas.

In early 2016, as the evidence against them was mounting and the corruption scandals were widening, the Guptas and Duduzane Zuma hired a major British public relations firm, Bell Pottinger, to muddy the waters and distract the attention of the South African public by switching their focus to a different enemy. For a fee of about US\$150,000 per month, Bell Pottinger helped promote a racially explosive campaign that was centred on provocative phrases such as "white monopoly capital" — its term for white business owners. The campaign alleged that South Africa needed to be "emancipated" from the "white monopoly capital" that had a "stranglehold" on the economy. Leaked emails showed that Bell Pottinger advised the campaign to use "emotive" slogans such as "economic emancipation." The campaign was fronted by Zuma's political allies, such as the youth wing of the ruling African National Congress, but the tactics were covertly shaped by advice from Bell Pottinger. In essence, the campaign blamed the country's white businessmen as the villains for economic inequality and slow economic growth (York 2017b).

This strategy soon erupted into the social media sphere. Thousands of fake Twitter accounts were created to push the same message of racial conflict, often targeting white businesses and journalists with this dangerous rhetoric. It is unclear exactly who created the accounts, but investigations conducted by the South African media have revealed that many of the fake Twitter accounts were linked to Gupta-owned companies. Many of the accounts were automated “bot” addresses. It has been described as the first large-scale fake news propaganda campaign in South African history. A study by the African Network of Centres for Investigative Reporting (ANCIR) has estimated that the campaign included at least 220,000 tweets in the period from July 2016 to July 2017 (ANCIR 2017).

During the course of 2017, several South Africans used Twitter’s self-reporting system to file complaints against 900 automated bot accounts, demanding that Twitter take action against them. By December 2017, more than 450 of these accounts had been suspended (Child 2017). But this still left hundreds or perhaps thousands of accounts alive. Corporate regulation, by itself, would not resolve the problem.

In a tactic similar to the tactics I documented in Rwanda, the South African “white monopoly capital” campaign included a wave of personal attacks on journalists who had spoken out against the Guptas and had written extensively about the corruption allegations surrounding Zuma and the Guptas. Two editors and columnists in particular, Peter Bruce and Ferial Haffajee, became key targets of this social media campaign. Thousands of tweets were directed at them, using vicious language and insults. Bruce was secretly placed under surveillance, and covert photos of him were posted on social media, where anonymous accounts claimed (falsely) that the photos were evidence that he was committing adultery. Haffajee was targeted with misogynistic tweets, including faked semi-nude images that portrayed her as a prostitute who served “white monopoly capital.” The tweets may have seemed crude, but they were retweeted thousands of times, often by automated bot accounts, in a sophisticated and well-organized campaign that sought to intimidate these journalists and silence their reporting.

The tweets were produced by “a social media army aligned to the Gupta family network,” Haffajee wrote later. “Every time I typed a tweet including the family’s name...the army would be out trolling. It was like an automated response....Images are powerful and the designers have very specific messages: that I am a whore, a harridan, an animal and a quisling” (Haffajee and Davies 2017).

At the beginning, the strategy seemed to have some success in diverting attention from the mounting evidence against Zuma and the Guptas. But the campaign was soon subjected to increasing scrutiny and rising awareness, not least on social media itself. The campaign lost effectiveness because South Africans recognized the cynicism and manipulation that lay behind it. The targeted campaign against journalists such as Bruce and Haffajee was a failure because they refused to be intimidated and because many citizens used social media to defend them.

As they learned more, South Africans used social media to fight back against the “white monopoly capital” campaign. Many South Africans joined a patriotic social media campaign called “Country Duty” in which they exposed corruption and held politicians accountable. They used the #CountryDuty hashtag, which soon became one of the most popular hashtags in South Africa. Another highly popular hashtag was #paidtwitter, the term applied to propaganda tweets that appeared to be sponsored by the Guptas or their allies. This hashtag became a common retort to the tweets that supported the Guptas. It was an effective way of casting doubt on their credibility.

When a series of leaked emails revealed the extent of Bell Pottinger’s role in the “white monopoly capital” campaign, there was further outrage on social media across the country. Bell Pottinger had worked successfully for authoritarian regimes in the past, but South Africa was very different: a thriving democracy with strongly independent media and a vibrant civil society sector.

By the middle of 2017, thousands of South Africans were hounding Bell Pottinger on social media. Whenever the British agency tweeted on any subject, it was immediately flooded with hundreds of angry tweets from South Africans. Shocked by the reaction, the company floundered. It

briefly locked its Twitter account to make it private. Then it began to block its critics on Twitter to prevent them from seeing the agency's tweets. These were panicked reactions, extraordinary for a public relations agency whose normal role was to communicate to the public, rather than to block or exclude the public.

As it struggled to quell the outrage, Bell Pottinger first announced that it was halting its work for the Guptas, then announced an internal investigation. In July 2017 it apologized publicly for its South Africa campaign, expressing “profound regret” for its “inappropriate and offensive” campaign on social media. But that failed to salvage its reputation. The agency was subjected to an investigation by a global public relations industry association. The association decided to expel Bell Pottinger from its membership for “inflaming racial discord” in South Africa. The agency's reputation was disastrously damaged. It lost most of its clients, collapsed and was placed into a form of creditor protection (York 2017b).

For those who might despair of the growing tide of propaganda and false information on social media, the South African case is an inspiring one. Instead of using harsh regulations to suppress social media propaganda campaigns and fake accounts, South Africa found that its own citizens could defuse the worst abuses of social media by countering the propaganda with their own social media posts. By spreading knowledge and awareness of the propaganda, ordinary citizens were able to disable it. South Africans trained themselves to recognize fake accounts and false information, and then entered the social media battlefield with their own techniques. They exposed the reality behind the false information: the orchestrators of the propaganda campaigns, who were manipulating social media to promote their own financial and political interests. By exposing these interests, South Africans neutralized them — and protected their own democracy.

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- 1 The female journalist, who asked that her identity not be disclosed, related this incident to this author and provided copies of the tweets to document it.
 - 2 Author's interview with Chamisa.



20

THE CALIPHATE’S IMAGINED SOLDIERS: ANALYZING THE PROMOTION OF “LONE WOLF” ATTACKS IN *RUMIYAH* MAGAZINE

NADIA HAI

INTRODUCTION

Upon declaring itself a caliphate in 2014 and officially separating itself from its predecessor, al-Qaeda, Daesh (also known as the Islamic State) started to expand its territory, both through military campaigns and by pledging allegiance (or *baya’ah*) to other religious insurgent groups. The establishment of the so-called caliphate became a draw for individuals from areas surrounding Iraq and Syria and from “Western countries” such as Australia, Canada, England, France and the United States to migrate to, live in and defend Daesh’s territories in Syria and Iraq. According to a 2017 study, an estimated 5,718 Western European and 439 North American foreign fighters have migrated to Syria and Iraq. As Daesh loses territory, many are returning to their home countries (Barrett 2017, 10-11).

Dabiq, Daesh's first magazine, typically focused on Daesh followers making *hijra* (migration) to Syria and Iraq to conduct "jihad."¹ The magazine also discussed the activities in the so-called Islamic state, including the construction of buildings and bridges, the running of hospitals, military victories, the development of currency and the establishment of law and order. *Dabiq's* authors typically prioritized migration to their territory over conducting individual attacks in the West.

After Daesh lost major territory in 2016, its online magazine *Dabiq* was rebranded as *Rumiyah*. Unlike *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah* was shorter in length and included attack manuals. *Rumiyah* promotes individual attacks on civilians in "the West" by providing instructions and encouragement to do so. Although individual or "lone wolf" attacks such as those in London (2017) and New York (2017) tend to be small scale, and perpetrators have little to no concrete ties to Daesh's main leadership, they are still portrayed by the group, many mainstream media organizations and some public figures as part of the group's wider strategy rather than isolated incidents.

Using framing from social movement theory, I will discuss how individual or lone wolf attacks are framed by Daesh in *Rumiyah* magazine, in particular, in its "Just Terror Tactics" and "Military and Covert Operations" sections. I will focus on how Daesh frames individual attacks not only as part of a wider military and communication strategy against an enemy but as a ritual uniting other believers in their cause.

Like the propaganda used to foster past mass atrocities, *Rumiyah* calls for more violent attacks on individuals the authors have deemed "other" or enemies, the main target being individuals residing in Western countries. Using their own narratives and mainstream media frames, the authors of *Rumiyah* pull together seemingly random attacks and imbue them with a greater meaning as part of a larger struggle. In this case, it is not a large-scale organized mass atrocity, but an attempt to create the impression of one. Although the killings they promote are on a very small scale and generally not organized, the promotion of these small-scale attacks reduces barriers to joining or acting on behalf of Daesh. Daesh's "soldiers" in Western countries are not limited to an actual battlefield but, as the authors of *Rumiyah* claim, they bring the battlefield home.

First, I consider the media environment in which Daesh operates, including both the relationship between mainstream media and terrorist groups and the production of online jihadist material. Second, I discuss the development of online English-language jihadist magazines, such as *Rumiyah*'s predecessors *Dabiq* and *Inspire*. This is followed by an examination of David Snow and Robert Benford's (1988) framing in social movement theory and an analysis of *Rumiyah* magazine's attack manuals and reports on lone wolf attacks.

MEDIA AND TERROR

Discussions on Daesh's publications and the attacks they promote require an examination of the relationship between terrorist groups and mainstream media organizations, and the media environment in which they operate. Terrorist attacks are often created for an audience; indeed, many scholars have conceptualized such attacks as a form of theatre. Terrorism scholar Gabriel Weimann uses the "theatre of terror" metaphor to examine modern terrorism as "an attempt to communicate messages through the use of orchestrated violence" (Weimann 2006, 39). The audience is essential for an attack to have any impact. Although attacks often involve killing or severely injuring their victims, the primary target of the attack is not so much those killed in the attack, but those made to witness it (Archetti 2012, 34; Eid 2014, 5; Crenshaw 2011, 23). This coverage is essential for groups to send their audiences a message, namely, the nature of the group as a significant threat and the threat of more attacks.

The dependency of Daesh and similar groups on news media is not a one-way relationship. The codependence between insurgent groups and media organizations is explained in Mahmoud Eid's concept of "Terroredia," which he describes as "the interactive, codependent, and inseparable relationship between terrorism and the media, in which acts of terrorism and the media coverage are essentially exchanged to achieve the ultimate aims of both parties — exchanging terrorism's wide-ranging publicity and public attention (i.e., oxygen) for media's wide-ranging reach and influence (i.e., airwaves)" (Eid 2014, 1).

The intensity and impact of a given terrorist attack may be exaggerated by media organizations to generate ratings and more viewers, but this may unintentionally increase the publicity for a given group. It is important to note that Daesh and al-Qaeda have, in the past, incorporated mainstream media narratives into their publications to establish their legitimacy as a threat. For example, *Dabiq* featured a regular section entitled “In the Words of the Enemy,” dedicated to how Daesh was being discussed by journalists, scholars, and public officials in the West. Naturally, they would share statements portraying Daesh as a powerful threat.

“Terroredia” as a phenomenon is particularly relevant in regard to “inspired” or lone wolf attacks in which individuals with no concrete ties to the main group conduct attacks. Some examples include attacks in Ottawa (2014), Nice (2016) and Westminster (2017). As terrorism scholar Haroro Ingram contends, irresponsible coverage may inadvertently help a terrorist group gain legitimacy. Ingram (2017, 18) states that “In the aftermath of ‘inspired’ attacks, misguided media reporting and political rhetoric help to further fuel the jihadist’s publicity boon by presenting skilled propagandists with an opportunity to portray the attack as part of not only a larger politico-military struggle, but a global revolution.”

Ingram uses the example of the Westminster attack in 2017, when Abu Izzadeen (formerly known as Trevor Brooks) drove into pedestrians and stabbed a police officer before being killed. Before Daesh officially claimed responsibility for the attack, it was described by public officials as an “attack on parliaments, freedom, and democracy everywhere,” as opposed to being a desperate or cowardly act by a disturbed individual. As Ingram (2017, 20) states, “Other statements by politicians similarly condemned the Westminster attack as a reminder of a ubiquitous threat with media reports further fuelling this narrative.” In this case, media can often work as an amplifier to fuel the given group’s publicity and their narrative as a global movement. This can be seen in what terrorism scholar Brigitte Nacos describes as terrorism contagion. As Nacos (2014, 115) says, “besides personal contacts and cooperation between various groups, mass media reports are the most likely sources of information about the efficacy of terror methods and thus important factors in the diffusion of terrorist tactics.” Highly publicized attacks are often copied; that is

another way that insurgent groups spread their influence, either intentionally or unintentionally. Interestingly enough, tactics used by Daesh-inspired individuals — vehicle attacks in particular — have not only been used by those allegedly conducting attacks on Daesh's behalf, but also by those on the extreme right, as in Darren Osborne's 2017 attack on London's Finsbury Mosque and Alex Fields' attack in Charlottesville a few months later.

Taken as a whole, this terror contagion is relevant in establishing Daesh's media strategy as it loses territory and works to assert itself as a relevant threat. Although Daesh and other groups can control depictions of themselves via online media, they still need the attention of mainstream media organizations to stay relevant and to imbue individual attacks with a greater meaning.

ONLINE JIHADIST MEDIA

Although *Rumiyah* resembles a traditional magazine, as it appears in PDF form and cannot be changed, it is still distributed and produced via the internet. Increased use of the internet not only expanded the reach of jihadist movements (Bergen 2002; Sageman 2008; Hoffman 2006; Archetti 2012); it also allowed for different kinds of participation in the movement. Daesh and al-Qaeda supporters can continue to support the movement online without having to travel to their respective theatres of conflict. Terrorism scholar Jarret Brachman uses the term "Jihobbyist" to refer to al-Qaeda supporters who solely support the movement online through media production — hosting websites, editing and translating videos, designing websites and posters and so on. Brachman (2008, 18) claims that these individuals "help to form the base that keeps the movement afloat." Jihobbyists participate only online, but they make the movement more accessible and create important promotional material. Jihobbyists or "media jihadists" see their actions as spreading the truth and fighting a battle to win over the hearts and minds of their audiences. Online media products not only function as a form of promoting the movement or recruitment, but their creation is also seen as a significant contribution (Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai 2017, 30).

Both the creation and distribution of publications such as *Rumiyah* play an important role in sustaining the movement. The shift from websites and fora to increasing use of social media platforms has also changed the media environment in which these texts are produced. Daesh has often been credited with using Twitter efficiently for recruitment and spreading its message. According to extremism scholar John M. Berger (2015), Daesh was the first, and will not likely be the last, group to use Twitter for media output on an industrial scale. This can also be seen in what terrorism scholar Ali Fisher refers to as “swarmcasting.” Fisher used big data techniques including network analysis to examine both ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria) supporters on Twitter. Fisher (2015, 2) states that “the networks through which jihadist groups operate have evolved to allow them to maintain a persistent presence online.” So-called “media mujahidin” use swarmcasting to maintain their online presence. According to Fisher, they do this through speed (spreading a video or document to multiple accounts and devices before it is removed), agility (the ability to move across multiple platforms such as justpaste.it and the internet archive), and resilience (to survive deletions and account suspensions or reconfiguring like a swarm of birds when one node is taken down). Much like Jihobbyists or those conducting “media jihad” to produce materials, these social media users work to spread the movement’s message and maintain its online presence.

There have been recent studies on *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah*’s predecessor. Before delving into previous studies, it is useful to review the history of English-language jihadist magazines. *Inspire* was the first English-language magazine published by al-Qaeda or an affiliate. It was published in mid-2010 by *al Malahem Media*, the media arm of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (Ingram 2017, 358). The magazine was founded by the late Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan. Al-Awlaki and Khan were both Americans who migrated to Yemen to be a part of AQAP. According to Ingram (ibid.), *Inspire* caught the attention of other “Islamist” groups and influenced publications such as the Taliban’s *Azan* and, of course, Daesh’s *Dabiq*. *Dabiq* was produced by al Hayat Media, Daesh’s media foundation. *Dabiq*’s predecessor was *Islamic State Report*, which “featured mostly photo reports and short articles offering English-speaking audiences timely updates on IS’s politico-military campaign” (ibid.). *Al Hayat*

released several issues of *Islamic State Report* between May and June 2014. In July 2014, they transitioned to a larger periodical format and *Dabiq* was born (ibid.). As Daesh lost territory in 2016 — including the town of Dabiq, which was said to be the site of a final battle during the end of days with “the Romans” (the West) — the magazine was relaunched as *Rumiyah* (or Rome). Issues of *Rumiyah* magazine are much shorter than a typical issue of *Dabiq* and include more instructional material on how to conduct an attack, something that was not found in *Dabiq*.

Brandon Colas from West Point published a content analysis of the first 14 issues of *Dabiq*. In this study, Colas (2016, 6) identified *Dabiq*’s three main audiences: English-speaking second-generation Muslims and converts, Western policy makers, and would-be members of Daesh who are not integrating or functioning well in the organization. Ingram conducted a study of nine issues of *Dabiq* to examine how the magazine authors drive radicalization by employing certain narratives. As Ingram (2016, 474) states, “The reinforcing narratives within and across *Dabiq*’s issues plunge its readers into a bi-polar world, characterized by cosmic war on the verge of end times, that demands Sunnis choose between the forces of good and evil. Through this lens, becoming a foreign fighter or lone wolf terrorist is obligatory for any true Sunni based on identity and rational choice reasoning.”

The magazine presents a narrative in which action is required to take down the enemy. It is presented as a rational choice for the audience in order to defend the “superior” group (Sunni Muslims) from a large group of “others” or enemies (including governments in the West and the “Islamic world,” Shias and moderate Muslims). Fighting for and settling in Daesh’s caliphate is presented as a rational choice for the reader, presenting it as not only the way to defeat the enemy, but also a more “honourable” way to live.

Taken as a whole, this literature provides important background knowledge on *Dabiq*. Colas offers a glimpse into the types of audiences *Dabiq* may appeal to, while Ingram examines Daesh’s strategic logic regarding the publication’s potential to radicalize. Although some of Daesh’s narratives and appeals may have remained the same, the narrative,

at least in strategy, may have shifted with the loss of territory and the launch of *Rumiyah*.

Although training manuals or even attack instructions in publications such as *Inspire* or *Rumiyah* may be difficult to carry out effectively (Benson 2014), the presence of online manuals may play another role. The presence of manuals in the magazine may “say” something about the movement and its aims. In their study of online manuals in *Rumiyah* and *Inspire*, Alastair Reed and Haroro Ingram (2017, 9, 12-13) note that instructional material makes up a small section of each magazine and “violent extremists embed instructional material within a broader sea of narratives that are designed to legitimise, justify and inspire engagement in violence.” Moreover, “post-incident messaging from groups like ISIS and AQAP are designed to inspire a ‘copycat’ effect in audiences while reinforcing the group’s overarching message.” The attack instructions in these magazines, as well as reporting on other “successful” attacks, are embedded in the group’s wider narrative. Attack manuals are readily available online, so the fact that they are included in the magazine is a “bonus” and not the sole purpose of the magazine (Reed and Ingram 2017, 12).

As Reed and Ingram contend, the availability of attack materials is by no means a new issue; for example, there was the nineteenth-century anarchist movements’ *The Mini Manual of the Urban Guerilla*, *The Anarchist’s Cookbook* in the 1970s, the Irish Republican Army’s *An t-Óglach* magazine that contained explosives manuals, and *The Turner Diaries*, a white supremacist dystopian novel, which also contained attack instructions, used by Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and others.

Reed and Ingram (2017, 3) further suggest that *The Turner Diaries* is similar to *Inspire* and *Rumiyah*, as McVeigh did not simply get operational guidance, but also a competitive system of meaning in the novel’s narrative. In his study of *The Turner Diaries*’ legacy, John M. Berger (2016, 35) states, “The novel hollows out white nationalist ideology, creating a flexible structure that operates as a call to action for racists with widely varied beliefs, while the dystopian format serves to magnify the

book's rational-choice proposition that specific types of violence are urgently necessary.”

Attack manuals are embedded in a series of flexible narratives to motivate different individuals to action. Like the white nationalist ideology in *The Turner Diaries*, *Rumiyah*'s narrative — although it presents a very narrow idea of what “true Islam” is — can be flexible enough to draw in a wider audience and incorporate a variety of causes and grievances, ranging from Palestine to injustices in the global economic system. In a similar light, Olivier Roy discusses the hollowed-out or vague notion of an *ummah*, or Muslim community, that groups like Daesh promote to Western audiences in his study of young French jihadists. As Roy (2017, 45) contends, “The Muslim community such terrorists are eager to avenge is almost never specified. It is a non-historical and non-spatial reality. When they rail against Western policy in the Middle East, when jihadists use the term ‘crusaders,’ they do not refer to French colonisation of Algeria.”

Like *The Turner Diaries*, although it is in magazine and not novel form, *Rumiyah* creates a narrative that incorporates very diverse regional conflicts and past conflicts from different historical and cultural contexts. In addition, publications such as *Rumiyah* create a sense of urgency for individuals to attack while also providing the means (in the form of instructional manuals) for individuals to act on these beliefs.

Through these publications, Daesh invokes a type of imagined community with its followers. Although Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community is referring to nationalism and the nation-state, and Daesh is not a “national movement” per se, they appeal to some notion of an imagined community. As Anderson (1983, 5-6) contends, in an imagined community “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion.” Not only does Daesh use the notion of a global *ummah*, it also promotes its group as a larger global entity. For example, they may pledge *baya'a*, or allegiance, to other groups, which may be involved in insurgencies specific to a particular state or geographical area such as Daesh's affiliates in Egypt, Afghanistan and West Africa. Despite the differences in the actors or geographical

location of these insurgencies, Daesh presents these groups' struggles as a wider part of their movement; however, their connection to these groups is mostly imagined. This attempt to connect to a larger cause can also be seen in the strategy of promoting or claiming lone wolf attacks. As these isolated attacks are imagined as part of one grand strategy against their enemies, they function as an extension of the main group. Rather than being seen, for example, as an isolated incident where an individual committed murder, it is seen as an act that is part of the group's wider efforts. This relationship is often stressed not only through the group's media coverage, but also in "mainstream" coverage.

FRAMING

In order to articulate the patterns and narratives that make up *Rumiyah's* promotion of attacks, I draw from social movement theory to understand how Daesh frames and ascribes value to lone wolf attacks. According to social movement theory scholar Sidney Tarrow (1998, 2), social movements occur when "changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources of their own." These actors "contend through known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margins. When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents." Daesh is a type of social movement working against what it sees as a corrupt international system. Daesh uses culturally resonant symbols and narratives to promote the movement to audiences. Social movement theory is a large area of study, so I am focusing on theories of how social movements communicate and present themselves to their intended audience, be they supporters, opponents, bystanders or potential recruits. This group of theories is referred to as framing.

Framing is an important component of a social movement because it allows members of a movement to come up with a common definition of a problem and the prescription to solve it. Frames are essential to how a social movement presents itself to its supporters, opponents and potential supporters. As Snow and Benford (1988, 198) contend, "Movements function as carriers and transmitters of mobilizing beliefs and ideas, to be sure that they are also actively engaged in the production of meaning for

participants, protagonists and observers.” In order to mobilize their target audiences, movements have to use ideas and beliefs that are meaningful to their target audiences. Although messaging plays an important role in recruitment, other factors such as peer influence and social networks also play significant roles (Sageman 2008; Dawson and Amarsingham 2016).

According to Snow and Benford (1988, 199), movements have three common framing tasks. They must create diagnostic frames which are “A diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration,” prognostic frames “a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done,” and motivational frames “a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action.” These concepts establish the elements that make up the narratives of these movements. These frames can reveal how Daesh imagines itself and its supporters.

***RUMIYAH* MAGAZINE**

As mentioned, *Rumiyah* is distributed online in PDF form. Like its predecessor *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah* has a very slick and professional look. Each issue has an average of 46 pages; most issues are 38–45 pages long. At the time of writing, a total of 13 issues of *Rumiyah* have been published. Like most magazines, *Rumiyah* has a foreword similar to an editor’s note for each issue. The magazine features long articles on issues such as Turkey’s war in Syria, religious rulings on particular activities such as killing or stealing property from *kufir* (non-believers), information on enemies such as Shia Muslims, and pieces on “evil scholars” or Muslim scholars who disagree with Daesh. Authors of these articles often cite scripture, the work of selected Islamic scholars and prophecies to provide religious justifications and legitimacy to Daesh’s actions. They also record dates (months and years) according to the traditional Islamic calendar.

Rumiyah also has regular features such as interviews with individuals involved in their “provinces” or “Wilayats,” areas they rule or whose leaders have pledged allegiance to Daesh. For example, the first issue of *Rumiyah* features an interview with an Amir (or head) of the Central Office for Investigating Grievances (al Hayat, 2016a, 10). *Rumiyah*’s ninth

issue features an interview with the leader of an Egyptian affiliate (al Hayat 2017b, 52). They have a regular feature “For Sisters,” providing advice for women living in the Islamic state, written by a woman. They also have the “Among the Believers Are Men” series, in which they profile individuals who have joined Daesh. *Rumiyah* also contains many advertisements, most of them for their media releases, including books, and their selected top 10 videos. They also include the odd advertisement for products such as an app to teach children the alphabet.

The magazine also contains many listicles and infographics on subjects such as how many enemies Daesh has killed or vehicles destroyed during battles both in Daesh territories and outside of them. For example, *Rumiyah* 9 includes a chart on “Epic Battles of Mosul” that details the number of Shia soldiers killed and the types of vehicles, such as tanks and Humvees, they destroyed (al Hayat 2017c, 45). *Rumiyah* 13 contained an infographic summarizing Daesh’s achievements from vehicle attacks in Barcelona (al Hayat 2017f, 13). They also share infographics on damage inflicted on *Rafidah*, a derogatory term for Shia Muslims. These kill-count infographics typically follow their “Military and Covert Operation” (MCO) section, which I examine below. They also contain infographics on certain religious principles; for example, *Rumiyah*’s ninth issue features an infographic on Christians and Jews and a short list of “problems with Jews and Christians,” each with a short quote from scripture and religious scholars (al Hayat, 2017d, 11). The two features I focus on here are the “Just Terror Tactics” (JTT) and MCO sections. The former appears in five issues (*Rumiyah* 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9) and the latter is featured in every issue.

The JTT section provides guidance for individual attacks. In the first JTT section, which was featured in *Rumiyah*’s second issue, the authors state why they call this feature Just Terror Tactics: “Instead of using the term ‘lone wolf,’ we will refer to operations in Dar al-Kufr² executed by mujahidin with bay’ah to the Khalifah as ‘just terror operations’, ‘just’ being the adjective form for justice” (al Hayat 2016c, 12). The first JTT discusses stabbings or knife attacks; they include information such as what knives to use, what knives to avoid and ideal targets. The second JTT in *Rumiyah* 3 provides readers with guidance on vehicle attacks including ideal targets and the best vehicles to use. *Rumiyah* 4 again provides advice

on knife attacks; however, unlike the JTT in *Rumiyah 2*, this is written as an infographic summarizing the previous JTT knife attack manual's main points. *Rumiyah 5*'s JTT section discusses arson attacks and *Rumiyah 9* discusses hostage taking.

Authors of the JTT section will often share examples of other Daesh-inspired individuals who have conducted similar attacks, for example, the vehicle attack feature used the example of Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel's attack in Nice (al Hayat 2016d, 10), and in the hostage-taking feature the author used examples of attacks in Paris and Orlando (al Hayat 2017e, 47). In every JTT feature, the authors emphasize the importance of the attacker affiliating themselves and the attack with Daesh. The authors suggest such methods as pinning a note to a victim's body (al Hayat 2016c, 13), throwing papers with their declaration out the window as they conduct a vehicle attack (al Hayat 2016d, 12) and tying a note to a brick and throwing it through the window of a nearby building when conducting an arson attack (al Hayat 2017f, 10).

This feature appears to be aimed at Western audiences; for example, the truck attack guide featured a photograph of Macy's Thanksgiving parade with the caption "An Excellent target" (al Hayat 2016d, 12). In the arson guide they provide a photo of a church in Dallas with the address and description, "A popular Crusader gathering place waiting to be burned down," in the caption (al Hayat 2017f, 10). As well, in *Rumiyah 9*'s hostage-taking feature, the authors provide advice for acquiring a gun in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. They include a photo of two men at what appears to be an American gun convention with the caption "Gun conventions represent an easier means of arming oneself for an attack" (al Hayat 2017e, 48). Overall, the tactics in this section are not very advanced, as compared to other instruction manuals from their predecessor al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine, which included instructions on building explosives. The authors seem to acknowledge the simplicity of some of these attacks; for example, in their arson guide in *Rumiyah 5* they state: "Arson attacks should in no way be belittled. They cause great economic destruction and emotional havoc and can be repeated very easily. Even if such attacks do not always result in the killing of the

enemies, Allah has promised to reward the mujahid for simply harming and enraging them” (al Hayat 2017a, 12).

In this case, these small attacks are not only inflicting damage on the enemy, but are also deemed godly acts for heavenly rewards. (They have also been described elsewhere in the magazine as forms of worship.) These attacks, although devastating, are generally small scale. Advising would-be assailants to announce their allegiance to Daesh, or perhaps take up the Daesh “brand,” amplifies the impact: it is not just a random act of violence but connected to the strategy of Daesh’s leadership and the many inspired attacks before them.

The MCO section is typically three pages long and provides brief summaries of battle victories by Daesh and its affiliates. This can include anything from stabbing civilians to ambushes on military personnel. The section typically opens with this statement: “As the soldiers of the Khilafah continue waging war on the forces of *kufur*, we take a glimpse at a number of recent operations conducted by the mujahidin of the Islamic State that have succeeded in expanding the territory of the Khilafah, or terrorizing, massacring, and humiliating the enemies of Allah. These operations are merely a selection of the numerous operations that the Islamic State has conducted on various fronts across many regions over the course of the last few weeks” (al Hayat 2016b, 22).

In these passages, they refer to all individuals as soldiers of the Islamic State. At the top of this feature there is an image of a world map with images of Daesh soldiers in the background. They also feature photos of said “soldiers” and the devastation from these attacks. This section portrays Daesh as a united global force fighting and terrorizing its enemies around the world.

DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES

The promotion and reporting of attacks in *Rumiyah* magazine are often presented as a response to problems coming from a very diverse “enemy” or network of enemies, which includes Western governments, Shia Muslims, regimes in Islamic countries,³ moderate Muslims, religious

scholars that disagree with them, and even al-Qaeda. It is these groups, according to Daesh, that are blocking the creation of the pure Islamic state ruled by a strict interpretation of Shariah law, which according to Daesh will solve problems created by “man-made laws” (that is, not their version of Shariah law), ranging from oppression of Muslims to economic instability. Regardless of whether victims are Christian or from “the West,” Daesh will often refer to these individuals as “crusaders” or “servants of the crusaders.” Individual attacks are often woven together to look like a unified strategy to destroy this diffuse network of enemies. In the JTT feature on hostage-taking the authors describe the enemies to whom they are responding:

As the Crusaders continue to wage their vicious campaign on the lands of Islam in the wilayat of Iraq, Sham, Khurasan, Sinai and elsewhere, they are constantly reminded of the painful reality that this honorable ummah has men — heroes who gallantly demonstrate with their operations against them that their howitzers, Tomahawks, white phosphorus bombs, and MOABs, which they rain over the heads of the Muslims and their homes, will be met with blades that plunge into their bodies, vehicles that unexpectedly mount their busy sidewalks, smashing into crowds, crushing bones, and severing limbs, and bullets that pierce their filthy bodies while they are in the midst of their foul enjoyment. (al Hayat 2017e, 46)

Not only are these individual attacks framed as a form of retributive justice (or just terror), they are also seen as a less technologically advanced yet pervasive force that is allegedly weakening their stronger adversaries. The vague nature of the enemy also makes for a flexible definition of who to target. Any atrocity toward those vaguely defined as crusaders is seen as a step toward helping the movement eliminate its enemies, and with its enemies, problems within their equally vague notion of the *ummah* in culturally and geopolitically diverse conflicts from Afghanistan to Palestine.

This notion of the persecution of a vaguely defined *ummah* can also be seen in the MCO sections, where they frame lone wolf attacks from stabbings to vehicle attacks as a response to “the Islamic State’s call to target the citizens of nations involved in the Crusader coalition” (al Hayat 2016e, 37). When reporting on Abdur Razzaq, an American who stabbed and wounded 11 people at Ohio State University, the authors provide a message allegedly written by Razaq:

Prior to carrying out his blessed operation, Abdur-Razzaq left the following message: “My brothers and sisters, I am sick and tired of seeing my fellow Muslim brothers and sisters being killed and tortured everywhere. Seeing my fellow Muslims being tortured, raped, and killed in Burma led to a boiling point. I can’t take it anymore. America, stop interfering with the Muslim Ummah. We are not weak. We are not weak, remember that. If you want us Muslims to stop carrying out ‘lone wolf’ attacks, then make peace with the Islamic State. Make a pact or a treaty with them where you promise to leave them alone, you and your fellow apostate allies.”(al Hayat 2016e, 37)

This individual uses a vague, imagined Muslim *ummah* and cites only one specific case in Burma. By sharing this note, Daesh illustrates how his individual attack is responding to and working toward eliminating the persecution of Muslims as well as weakening Daesh’s enemies. Both in the reporting and encouraging of attacks, the authors make an appeal to a larger *ummah* being persecuted, and these attacks are portrayed as a way to help those in these scattered and diverse areas take down an equally diffuse enemy as part of Daesh. The struggle of Muslims in Burma is the same struggle of those in Libya and Afghanistan, where their persecution is the result of the same enemy crusaders, who can be civilians or soldiers.

PROGNOSTIC FRAMES

Though the magazine still to a certain extent promotes *hijra*, or migration to Daesh’s territories, there is a push for conducting individual attacks. Lone wolf, individual attacks are framed as an important part of

establishing Daesh's caliphate as reported in the MCO section alongside the successes of Daesh's "official" army in Iraq and Syria. The main prognostic frame as seen in the JTT and MCO sections of *Rumiyah* is simply to terrorize or kill as many of Daesh's enemies as possible. This is evident in the following JTT feature, in which the authors provide a different take on hostage-taking:

The objective of hostage-taking in the lands of disbelief — and specifically in relation to just terror operations — is not to hold large numbers of the kuffar hostage in order to negotiate one's demands. Rather, the objective is to create as much carnage and terror as one possibly can until Allah decrees his appointed time and the enemies of Allah storm his location or succeed in killing him. This is because the hostile kafir only understands one language and that is the language of force, the language of killing, stabbing and slitting throats, chopping off heads, flattening them under trucks, and burning them alive, "until they give the jizyah⁴ while they are in a state of humiliation." (Hayat 2017e, 47)

Here, taking hostages is more of a bloody "performance" than it is a military or negotiating strategy. The greater aim is to create carnage and increase the number of atrocities they commit. The written-out instructions create a semblance of a direct strategy to take down Daesh's enemies, and the requests to pledge allegiance to Daesh (or credit them for the attack) give the attack more meaning. These are no longer fatalities from a mass murder, but more casualties of Daesh. This focus on creating more carnage can be seen in *Rumiyah*'s many infographics featuring kill counts from Daesh battles and attacks by Daesh-inspired individuals.

Individual attacks are also framed as part of a strategy to pressure their enemies by "bringing the war to their enemies' land." This is seen in an MCO section in which they discuss an attack in Paris: "On the 24th of Ramadan, a soldier of the Khilafah — Abu Maysun al-Faransi — drove his vehicle, which was loaded with weapons and explosives, and crashed it into a van belonging to the Crusader French police in the city of Paris,

spreading terror among the Crusaders once more and reminding them that the battle has come to their homeland” (al Hayat 2017f, 43).

This was not just an attack on the French police by an individual, but an attack on behalf of Daesh, which has managed to move the battle from its territory to the streets of Paris. Much like certain mainstream media reporting of these attacks, the attack is reported in *Rumiyah* to reify the connection between the lone attacker and Daesh’s main group. These seemingly random killings are framed as a way to take down the enemy. Aside from the psychological impact, there are hardly any concrete military gains to be made from this so-called extension of the battlefield into civilian life.

MOTIVATIONAL FRAMES

These instructional guides also aim to motivate Daesh supporters to act on their beliefs. This is not to say that reading this advice will make an individual carry out Daesh’s instructions, since a variety of factors contribute to an individual conducting an attack. One form of motivation outlined in *Rumiyah* is that the simplicity of these attacks lowers the barrier of entry into Daesh’s movement. For example, the attacks in the JTT section do not require specialized training or migration to Daesh’s territories. This is explained in opening paragraphs in *Rumiyah*’s first JTT feature:

Whether in regards to the type of operation one seeks to conduct or the details of that operation, it is easy for someone to be defeated by doubt if they have not received proper guidance or training. Yet, one need not be a military expert or a martial arts master, or even own a gun or rifle in order to carry out a massacre or to kill and injure several disbelievers and terrorize an entire nation. A hardened resolve, some basic planning, and reliance on Allah for success are enough for a single mujahid to bring untold misery to the enemies of Allah, *in shaallah*.⁵ (al Hayat 2016c, 12)

Here the author reassures the reader that they do not require training to attack or “terrorize an entire nation.” In this case, terrorising the enemy can be an individual pursuit. The impact of a small attack, in this case with a knife, is exaggerated, much like certain media narratives reporting on such attacks. This individual act of violence is ritualistic, as the assailant claiming to represent Daesh invokes the community of Daesh supporters. As the authors of this section create the impression that an individual with very little means can terrorize or take down powerful nations, these attacks also motivate individuals to join the cause.

Another motivational frame employed by Daesh is portraying both attackers and would-be attackers as part of a long line of “warriors,” suggesting that this individual attack would put the would-be attacker amongst other great “heroes” and “martyrs” of their movement. In the JTT section of *Rumiyah 9*, the author states:

The likes of Khalid Masood in the UK, Man Haron Monis, Numan Haider, and Farhad Khalil Mohammad Jabar in Australia, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, and Martin Couture-Rouleau in Canada, Zale Thompson, ‘Abdur-Razzaq ‘Ali Artan, Elton Simpson, Nadir Soofi, Faisal Mohammad, Syed Rizwan Farook, and his wife Tashfeen Malik in the US, Bertrand Nzohabonayo, Larossi Abdalla, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, Abu Jarir al-Hanafi, and Ibn ‘Umar (Adel Kermiche and ‘Abdul Malik Petitjean) in France, Muhammad Riyad, Muhammad Daleel, and Abul-Bara at-Tunisi (Anis al-‘Amri) in Germany, Abu Ramadan al-Muhajir (Omar Abdel Hamid el-Hussein) in Denmark, and others have set heroic examples with their operations. With their blood they incited, instructed, and demonstrated practically for other Muslims how one can attain Allah’s pleasure and escape His wrath while stationed in the garrisons of the open war arena against the Crusader West. (al Hayat 2017e, 46–47)

Not only are there heavenly rewards, but an individual conducting such an attack can be part of an elite group of heroes and engage in “war” against

the West, a more powerful enemy, with simple guidance from *Rumiyah* magazine.

At the same time, this is an example of Daesh grouping these distant events and individuals together as part of its grand strategy and therefore establishing itself as the greatest threat to the West. This section may be an attempt by Daesh to connect or make sense of these many attacks.

CONCLUSION

Rumiyah's attack manuals do not directly make individual Daesh supporters conduct attacks. Rather, the presence of these manuals as part of the wider narrative in *Rumiyah* offers insights into the way Daesh frames its movement (at least the version presented to English-speaking audiences). It cannot be determined in this study how effective these attack manuals are. By reproducing the tactics of past Daesh-inspired attackers in its magazine and presenting them as a type of military strategy, Daesh is claiming these kinds of attacks as its own. The JTT and MCO sections showcase the ways that Daesh makes sense of these events by situating them in a grander narrative.

In *Rumiyah*, Daesh's promotion and reporting on individual attacks demonstrate how Daesh is relying more on the extensions of its caliphate (or an imagined caliphate) as it loses territory. They claim that these fairly unconnected attacks are part of a larger strategy of defending the *ummah* (or those Daesh sees as part of the *ummah*) against a large network of enemies. By reporting on its successes, or kills, from its "soldiers" (their army, affiliates, and individual attackers) and providing technical manuals on conducting attacks, Daesh presents itself as a legitimate threat that can be spread easily. *Rumiyah* promotes a type of portable movement aimed at increasing the number of atrocities or kills committed on behalf of the group; the aim is to create a semblance of a powerful mass atrocity by piecing together and legitimizing smaller attacks.

An understanding of how Daesh frames individual attacks in its official publications is necessary if there are to be more constructive and responsible public discussions about these incidents. Recognizing Daesh's strategy of incorporating the actions of individuals it did not train or

finance into its main narrative may reduce the legitimacy of Daesh and frame these violent acts as individual crimes and not the actions of an international army. At the same time, we could gain a better understanding of similar patterns of promoting and claiming individual attacks that could also apply to individuals in the growing global white-supremacist or “alt right” movement and other extremist movements.

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- 1 “Jihadist” and “jihadism” are also commonly used terms, both in the literature and the media. Jihad is often translated incorrectly to mean “holy war” (Karim 2014, 157). This interpretation ignores the fact that Jihad is a term that has many definitions and has been debated for centuries. The concept of jihad has been used for causes ranging from personal struggle to be a better person, to armed conflict for causes ranging from anti-colonial struggles for independence to war against “the West” by many insurgent groups (Karim 2003). Many religious insurgent groups like Daesh and al-Qaeda use the term “jihad” when defining their cause, so it is important to acknowledge how they use this concept. Twentieth-century ideologues saw the problems in the Islamic world as a result of neglecting jihad’s definition as a violent struggle and they set a precedent for groups like al-Qaeda, which saw jihad as an armed struggle (Esposito 2002, 62).
- 2 The lands of non-belief, typically referring to “the West” or non-Daesh territory.
- 3 I acknowledge that terms such as the “the West,” and “the Islamic World” simplify large and culturally diverse groups of people. As Eid and Karim (2014, 4) contend, the dominant discourse in discussing the the West and Islam tends to portray them as polar opposites and in constant conflict with each other: “when history provides multiple examples of personal, social, cultural, political, military, commercial, and intellectual alliances.” I am aware of the complexity of the terms and that “the West” and “Islam” share many historical and cultural connections.
- 4 *Jizya* was the head tax paid by Christians and Jews in the old caliphate.
- 5 *In shaallah* means “God willing.”

A TYPOLOGY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE'S SOCIAL MEDIA DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

YANNICK VEILLEUX-LEPAGE

Although all sides of the Syrian civil war have used social media extensively, the use of social media by the Islamic State (IS) appears to have generated the most attention. Since taking over a third of Iraq and declaring the establishment of a caliphate in the summer of 2014, the Islamic State has fascinated and disturbed the world with its highly sophisticated and, at times, shocking media. These impressive media products aided IS recruiting efforts, helping the group draw at least 30,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, including between 4,000 and 5,000 from Western countries (Norton-Taylor 2015; Schmid and Tinnes 2015; Dawson and Amarasingam 2017). This online presence assisted the group's establishment of new franchises in places ranging from Uzbekistan to Nigeria, Afghanistan and Bangladesh (Institute for the Study of War 2016), and represented the vehicle through which the Islamic State announced the establishment of its caliphate, the "annulment" of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and its declaration of war on

the United States. The online presence also inspired sympathizers to commit acts of terrorism throughout the world.

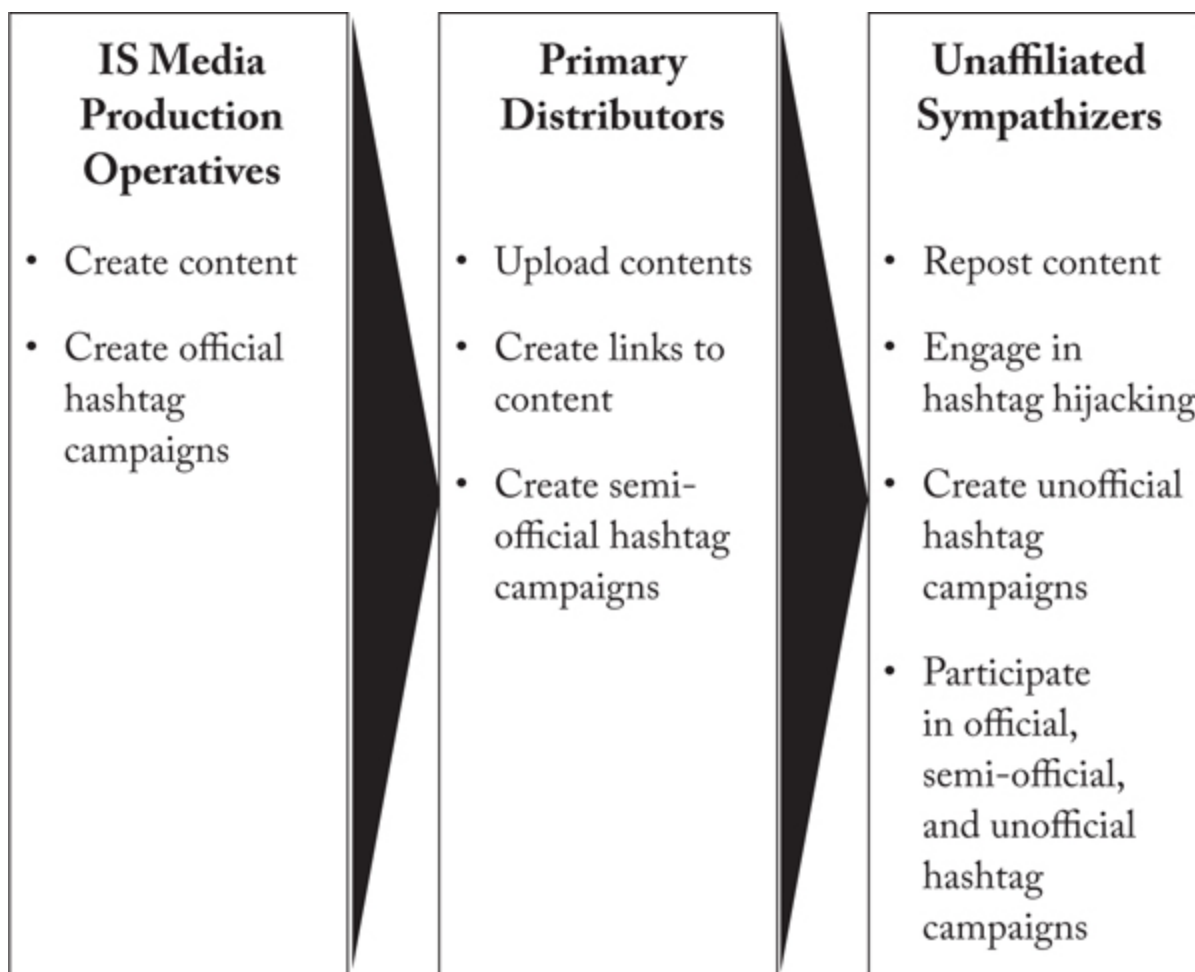
Confronted with the Islamic State's initial successes — both on the battlefield and online — scholars, journalists and policy-orientated think tanks have devoted considerable attention to dissecting and understanding various facets of the IS social media strategy.¹ However, despite the volume of scholarly attention, to date, relatively little work has studied IS propaganda holistically in the context of its production and dissemination strategy.

As astutely remarked by Charlie Winter (2015), it is not sufficient to understand IS propaganda simply in terms of its high-production values and professionalism. This chapter looks beyond eye-catching cinematography to the heart of the group's media machine in order to lay out a clear typological outline of the IS production and dissemination strategy. In doing this, I focus on the three different actors involved in the process: media production operatives, primary distributors and unaffiliated sympathizers (see [Figure 1](#)).

Drawing on the theoretical tenets of social network theory, three observations about the structure of the IS propaganda distribution network are advanced. First, it is argued that despite an initial foray into user-generated content, the production of IS propaganda has been centralized into a highly vertical hierarchical and centralized structure. Second, primary distributors operate as a network organization, that is, “a loose but bounded and consciously constructed organization based mainly on leveraging the benefits of reciprocity” (Mueller 2010, 41). Last and conversely, it is advanced that unaffiliated sympathizers can best be understood as an associative cluster — “an unbounded and de-centered cluster of actors around repeated patterns of exchange or contact” who disseminate propaganda horizontally (*ibid.*), thus giving participants the liberty to choose the most appropriate techniques in each case to diffuse messages.² In other words, it is suggested that the IS propaganda machine is simultaneously vertical and horizontal. This reliance on a top-down approach, as well as being comfortable with bottom-up initiatives instigated by unaffiliated sympathizers who retweet, repost or adapt

messages to local circumstances, allows content that is, initially, centrally controlled to reach a large audience. However, as the content makes its way vertically downward, the media production operatives lose some control of the message, and hence the narrative. In other words, while media production operatives and primary distributors do not micromanage unaffiliated sympathizers, they nonetheless exercise strategic influence.

Figure 1



Source: Author.

Mapping out the typology of and understanding the structure of the Islamic State’s social media networks provides important insights into the group’s understanding of the power of operating in a digital environment. Indeed, as aptly noted by Winter (2017), understanding exactly how the Islamic State refined its media operations, where they came from and the

driving forces and individuals behind them, is complicated by the group's operational opacity and its concern for operational and communication security.³ Although direct observation is therefore not feasible, it is postulated that answering these questions is possible by borrowing the revealed preference method (Samuelson 1948) from microeconomic theory, which proposes that the preferences of consumers can be revealed by their purchasing habits. Rather than primarily focusing on an actor's stated preferences, focusing instead on their actions reveals information about their goals, costs and resource constraints, institutional constraints, information and time. With this in mind, rather than primarily focusing on the Islamic State's own accounts of its social media strategy, such as its handbook *Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too*⁴ (Islamic State 2015a; 2016), this chapter focuses on observable characteristics at the structural level of IS social media operations and networks.

ISLAMIC STATE MEDIA PRODUCTION OPERATIVES

In the early days of the Islamic State's offensive into northern Iraq, Twitter was inundated by a mixture of combat photos and innocuous photos of IS fighters swimming in the ocean, playing soccer, hiking, eating Nutella and playing with kittens. Although incongruous with the slick professionalism for which subsequent IS propaganda is known, these pictures taken by IS rank-and-file fighters represented an attempt to document and romanticize the daily life between battles, which is often boring and monotonous (Veilleux-Lepage 2016b). While the existence of such photographs is unsurprising (as fighters, in a variety of conflicts, have long sought to photograph their day-to-day life away from the heat of battle),⁵ what is particularly interesting is that those pictures almost entirely disappeared from the "Twittersphere" by late 2014 (ibid.).

This disappearance can partly be attributed to actions by Twitter, but more important, to an increase in operational security within the Islamic State. Indeed, as keenly observed by Gilbert Ramsay (2016), despite the rather widespread belief of a "virtual safe haven" in which terrorists can freely plan operations, recruit and fundraise, the internet is often a deeply hostile medium, which can threaten and hamper group efforts. Bomb-making

instructions, for example, are often unreliable — in a much-publicized cyber-warfare operation UK MI6 and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) officers successfully sabotaged the launch of the first issue of *Inspire*, replacing bomb-making instructions with cupcake recipes — or they were incomplete, making it difficult to translate theoretical learning into reality (Norton-Taylor 2011). For instance, the two bombs employed during the 2006 German train bombing plot failed to detonate not only because the bomb-makers diverged from the instructions, but also because the instructions lacked certain vitally important information that limited their usefulness for novices unfamiliar with pressurized gases (Bale 2012). Moreover, as argued by Thomas Hegghammer (2014, 2), “the scarcity of non-verbal cues in digital communication facilitates deceptive mimicry, which undermines the interpersonal trust required for sensitive transactions,” and thus, the level of distrust among individuals interacting online is high and direct recruitment is rare.

What is more, the Islamic State has recently seen how easily the internet as an open medium can become an operational security liability. For example, in a highly mediatized incident, the US Air Force destroyed a suspected command and control centre after an IS fighter carelessly forgot to disable the geo-tagging function on his camera (Hoffman 2015). In another incident, a Canadian woman’s route from Toronto to Raqqa was revealed because she also failed to disable the geo-tagging function on her Twitter account, thus providing crucial information on the broader trends of women migrating to IS-controlled territories (CTV News 2015). Faced with these security concerns, among many others, the Security Office of the Islamic State has forcefully discouraged its fighters — foreign or otherwise — from having free access to the internet.

In addition to the group’s increased awareness of the need for operational security, the crackdown on unofficial IS content can be primarily attributed to the group’s deliberate and conscious media strategy aims, which led to the centralization and standardization of its propaganda in an effort to improve the IS brand. Terrorist violence can be understood both as expressive — where the violence is the goal in itself — and instrumental, meaning goal directed and relatively purposeful (Kydd and

Walter 2006, 72–75). The overarching context and meaning conveyed by a violent act is therefore vitally important in the creation and distribution of terrorist propaganda. Managing violence in order to maximize both expressive and instrumental goals, as well as maintaining fidelity to these goals in the face of state interference and internal disagreement and pressures, requires particular agility in organization structure. Indeed, like any other organizational entity, a terrorist group needs some form of discipline, without which agency costs proliferate, as undisciplined members risk pursuing their own impulses or agendas to the detriment of the organization's goals.

Accordingly, various IS documents show the group's efforts to curb unofficial propaganda. For example, in an early decree, the Islamic State specifically forbids the production of unofficial propaganda: “[it is] absolutely forbidden to undertake independent efforts in working on or publishing written, audio or visual releases in the name of Islamic State on the Internet network” (Islamic State 2015b). The General Committee also attempted to curb the emergence of unofficial propaganda by banning audiovisual devices from the battlefield: “The General Committee has decided to prohibit photography with phones, cameras and other things besides them during expeditions and what concerns battles, except by the responsible media personnel authorized to document and photograph these battles, in order to prevent unregulated efforts. And violators will be tracked down” (IS General Committee 2014). These attempts by IS leadership to curb the production of unofficial propaganda can be interpreted as an attempt to entrench what Jacques Ellul (1973) calls “vertical propaganda” or, in popular terms, top-down propaganda emanating from the organization's leadership.

Indeed, although often created by various media bodies, since the late 2014, IS media products appear to be centrally directed, following certain standards in quantity, content and production, in order to achieve uniformity and recognizability (Veilleux-Lepage 2016b). For example, a survey of IS multimedia banners announcing the release of new audiovisual products unveils six distinctive features commonly present in such products: the title of the release; the date of the release; content preview or images from the production itself; the logo of the IS media

office of the province releasing the production; an icon identifying the type of production — whether it is a video, a photo album or audio recording, for example; and a hashtag that either is specific to important productions or refers more generally to IS releases (Benjamin 2016). This degree of uniformity and recognizability of IS products has nearly eliminated the need for unofficial pro-IS content created by supporters of the group — a common practice among other jihadi organizations, which rely on fan-based production and translations (Benjamin 2016). Instead, the Islamic State relies almost exclusively on in-house productions. While relying almost exclusively on in-house media operatives and eschewing or discouraging fan-based productions might seem counterproductive, doing so has provided the Islamic State with some important advantages: its official content is more easily recognizable as “genuine” and, possibly most important, its messaging can be tied more tightly to changing organizational policies and aims.

The strategic benefits for a jihadist group eschewing fan-based production are best articulated in a 2006 policy paper entitled *Media Exuberance*, published by the al-Qaeda associate al-Boraq Media, which sought to curtail the proliferation and production of unattributed jihadist media, arguing that such low-quality, unapproved and amateur content undermined the credibility of jihadist media and diverted attention from official sources (Kimmage 2008, 5). Indeed, the Abbottabad documents are striking in that al-Qaeda’s leadership appears not only mindful of the difficulty of message control, but was deeply concerned about the risk of its message being distorted by both its critics and overzealous supporters online.⁶ This supports the assumption that al-Qaeda’s leadership appeared to support jihadist use of the internet to spread the ideology, but wanted concrete steps taken to ensure that those conducting such activities were qualified to do so responsibly.

The Islamic State appears to have heeded al-Qaeda’s lessons to limit the production of propaganda to those qualified to do so, and in-house IS media production operations have spearheaded a style of proliferating propaganda messaging unique among terrorist groups. This media output can be roughly divided into four major categories: audio products including radio broadcasts, the quality of which has been compared

favourably to Western radio stations such as National Public Radio, and which covered a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from religious programs and nasheed (works of vocal music that is either sung a cappella or accompanied by percussion instruments, which frequently refer to themes such as war and fighting) and news bulletins; visual products, including pictures, banners and infographics, illustrating facts and statistics; texts, primarily including online magazines (such as *Dabiq*, later renamed *Rumiyah*, *Dar al-Islam*, *Konstantiniyye*, and *Istok*) but also including internet bulletins as well as declarations and statements posted on the web, which usually have the same high technical quality. Lastly, but arguably the Islamic State's most influential and successful output, audiovisual products such as execution recordings that "proliferated instantly over the Web, reaching millions of Internet users, and thus becoming the greatest success in the history of cyber jihad" (Lakomy 2017, 42-43), battle footage, "documentaries," interviews and reports clearly designed to imitate the outputs from mainstream news networks, and *nasheed*, music videos that frequently resembled the best American and Western European pop stars' productions (ibid.). It is worth noting that all this material, whether videos, photo essays or magazines, is distributed both online and offline.

As of December 2016, the production of these outputs is the task of Islamic State's 10 central media units, the two most important of which are Mu'assasat al-Furqān (the al-Furqān Media Foundation) and Markaz al-H. ayāt l-il-I'lām (the al-H. ayāt Media Center), 21 wilayats (provincial) media offices based in Syria and Iraq, and an additional 23 "distant" media offices based in 12 other countries or regions, namely Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, the Caucasus, Egypt, Libya, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, West Africa and Yemen, totalling 54 media offices.

In addition to al-H. ayāt and al-Furqān, other IS media producers also include Mu'assasat al-I'tisam (al-I'tisam Media Foundation), which tends to produce off-the-battlefield interviews with jihadists; Wakālat Amāq al-Ikhhāriyyah (Amaq News Agency), the output of which is primarily in-battle footage and short news reports, both text and video, published on the encrypted mobile app Telegram. Amaq News Agency functions much like

an official news agency might inside a totalitarian state, with news alerts, articles and videos taking on the trappings of mainstream journalism, with “Breaking News” and “Exclusive” headings and reporters trying to appear “objective,” toning down the jihadist hyperbole used in official IS releases. Another producer is al-Furat I-il-l’lam (Furat Media Center), whose output has largely consisted of non-Arabic language videos aimed primarily at recruiting Russian-speaking militants, both from the Russian Federation, in the North Caucasus in particular, and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, especially Central Asia. In the summer of 2016, Furat Media Center launched the *al-Fatihin* newspaper in Indonesian, targeting residents of Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Thailand). The Maktaba al-Himma (Himma Library) publishes short pamphlets, typically between two and eight pages long, containing a single illustration on the front page and written in accessible Arabic.

The most distinctive characteristic of the pamphlets is their intent, which is to consolidate control over the local population through the promotion of IS policies. Finally, *Sahifat al-naba’* (al-Naba) reports relevant news on Twitter. The Islamic State also runs two radio stations, Idha’at al-Bayan (al-Bayan) and Idha’at al-Tawhid (al-Tawhid), which began broadcasting religious content such as prayers and recitations, along with a daily news bulletin in Arabic and several other languages including English, French and Russian in the territories under its control in 2014. In addition, Mu’assasat Anjad (Ajnad Media Foundation) specialises in creating and broadcasting jihadi nasheeds, chants songs, and Islamic vocal music.

The al-Furqān Media Foundation⁷ is the Islamic State’s oldest media branch for the production of propaganda. Established in 2006, al-Furqān essentially serves as the official media bureau for the Islamic State, producing official statements from the organization’s leadership, a status in part confirmed by the fact that it produced the 2014 video of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi delivering a sermon in a Mosul mosque, and all his subsequent media appearances. The al-Furqān Media Foundation is also responsible for the production of “The Beheading Series.”

The al-Ḥayāt Media Center,⁸ on the other hand, is a relatively new arm of the Islamic State aimed broadly at Western audiences, having been established in May 2014. Among its productions, the Islamic State’s online magazine *Dabiq*⁹ — later *Rumiyah* — is undoubtedly al-Ḥayāt Media Center’s most mainstream product, following the template established by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s widely distributed multilanguage online magazine entitled *Inspire*, whose ideologically driven material with pragmatic instructional and skill-building content sought to foster a do-it-yourself approach to terrorism (Lemieux et al. 2014). Available in many languages including English, Albanian, French and German, each issue of *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* deals with “key themes, strategic exploits and ideological constructions, as well as speeches from [IS] leaders” (Saltman and Winter 2014, 39) and contains powerful photographic imagery of the Islamic State’s military and state-building endeavours such as images of wounded Iraqi Security Force soldiers, the distribution of food and water by IS fighters in regions under its control, victorious parades of militants in invaded cities, the destruction of Shiite and Sufi shrines, and the execution of prisoners and members of religious minorities (Styszynski 2014). The content of these online magazines is evocative and aims to spread a very precise message — which can both engage the reader and stimulate curiosity — in order to enlarge the potential readership. In this way, *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah* target readers who are already interested in political Islam but not necessarily already convinced jihadists. These online magazines attempt to skillfully “educate” the reader on the caliphate’s aims, projects and accomplishments (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a).

Broadly speaking, the al-Ḥayāt Media Center and al-Furqān Media Foundation serve different purposes. Al-Ḥayāt Media’s content focuses on recruiting and centres on the utopian ideals of the “caliphate.” It is primarily, although not exclusively, geared toward a young audience that is already interested in or feels emotionally sympathetic toward the conflict occurring in Syria and Iraq (Saltman and Winter 2014, 38). The al-Furqān Media Foundation, on the other hand, serves as a means for intimidation and the dissemination of threats; its target audience is, primarily, anyone hostile to the Islamic State. However, it is important to recognize that this

distinction is not completely unambiguous, nor is the production of IS propaganda entirely limited to these two outlets.

Despite the ostensible distinction between al-Ḥayāt and al-Furqān's targeted audiences, all their products are filmed and edited in a consistent manner. More important, both media production groups employ the same recurring tropes or themes. Having examined media products produced by both al-Ḥayāt and al-Furqān, Winter (2015, 22) identified the following six themes.

Brutality appears in videos depicting executions, including “The Beheading Series” and other depictions of atrocities and human rights abuses serving to convey both vengeance and supremacy.

Mercy is a narrative closely connected to the idea of repentance before God and the Islamic State itself. Enemies of Islamic State, including enemy fighters, civilians and former government employees, are forgiven for their past transgressions, provided they wholly reject their previous allegiances. This narrative is regularly featured in tandem and intertwined with brutality, presenting the IS's foes with a stark choice: resist and be killed or willingly submit, recant past beliefs and be rewarded with mercy (ibid., 24).

Victimhood appears in the portrayal of Sunni Muslims' continued victimization at the hands of the West and “apostate” regimes. Footage of the aftermath of coalition airstrikes, images of dead or dying children, often juxtaposed with an act of brutality such as the execution of alleged “spies” in retribution, are intended to drive home the notion of the victimization of Iraq's Sunnis, as well as justify the Islamic State's retributions.

War is another theme of media products; these feature the group's military gains, depictions of training camps, parades featuring heavy artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles, along with martyrdom operations. Moreover, IS propaganda, in particular propaganda created by the Wakalat al-A'maq media group, routinely produces footage of front-line fighting, delivered in almost real-time by the media group's “embedded war journalists.” Winters suggests that these military displays are intended to feed into the

idea of the Islamic State as a real state with real armed forces (ibid., 26). Moreover, this content also serves an important tactical purpose, instilling fear in hostile forces, raising fighters' morale and presenting its supporters and sympathizers with a skewed understanding of its success, thereby enabling the organization to obfuscate the realities on the ground.

Belonging is emphasized by depictions of *istirāḥat al-mujāhidīn* — fighters relaxing with tea and singing with each other. The narrative of brotherhood in the caliphate is one of the most powerful draws to new recruits, especially those from Western states (ibid., 26-27). The carefully branded camaraderie that foreign fighters are absorbed into upon their arrival to IS-held territories is particularly prevalent in most of the foreign-language videos produced by al-Ḥayāt Media Centre.

Utopianism, the idea of a utopian caliphate, is prevalent in IS propaganda as the establishment of a caliphate represents a unique selling point for the organization. By declaring and re-establishing a caliphate, the IS asserted itself as above all other jihadist groups, as the utopia-in-becoming that they all aspire to create. This narrative is what I (Veuilleux-Lepage 2016a, 45) refer to as the “imagery of...state-building activities.” The aim of these depictions is the advancement of the notion of the Islamic State as a legitimate state in order to gain long-term support of the local populace. This is of critical importance to the IS in its attempt to socialize the Muslim world to the ideas and values of the Islamic State.

More recently, another theme has emerged within IS products: *baqiya* (remaining) is the notion that the Islamic State will endure despite its significant setbacks. As it teeters on the brink of territorial defeat, its media operations have adapted and seemingly prepared for a caliphate-less future where the Islamic State has lost control of its physical territories and populations. Indeed, although a great deal of speculation and attention is currently being devoted to the prospect of foreign fighters returning en masse to their home countries as a result the group's territorial defeat — a dire portent which has not yet materialized¹⁰ — the impact of the IS's loss of territories on its social media output and strategy has received relatively little attention. The newly emerging IS propaganda casts the loss of territorial control in Syria and Iraq as unimportant, simply a setback in

its preordained journey to eventual victory. For example, *nasheeds* recently released by Ajnad Media Foundation, such as *Dawlati Baqiya* (My State Is Enduring) and *labbu al-nida'* (Heed the Call) contain defiant replies to those who believe that the Islamic State's tactical setbacks signal the group's demise. Tactical defeats are also routinely framed as glorious martyrdom operations that highlight the bravery and the commitment of IS fighters. For example, four months before his death, Taha Subhi Falaha (known as Abu Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami), the official spokesperson of the group, published the following message: "Do you think victory is achieved by killing one or more leaders? Do you believe that defeat means losing a city or land? Oh America, you could be declared victors and the mujahedeen losers only in one case: the moment you succeed in removing the Quran from the hearts of Muslims" (as quoted in Votel et al. 2017).

Moreover, recent IS propaganda demonstrates an effort to adapt its narrative to continually portray a strong, prosperous and vibrant caliphate, continuing to promulgate the previously mentioned notion of utopianism, even if this involves rewriting the rules or redefining success. As previously alluded to, IS propaganda has gone to extensive lengths to project a new utopia of peace and harmony with simple and straightforward rules, a recovered righteous caliphate to which Muslims worldwide could migrate, attracting doctors and nurses, engineers, mothers and teachers. In some ways, near total territorial loss, and potentially post-territorial loss propaganda has been carefully curated to present the caliphate as a model or a blueprint for future actions. In many ways, the legacy of the caliphate can be arguably more compelling than the real thing.

The recurrence of similar narratives suggests a single director or a small group who possess extremely sophisticated skills and are familiar with editing, writing and cinematography techniques, drawing from both contemporary film and video game production. The sheer volume of official content, along with the internalization of the production process and IS control over release of materials has given the Islamic State exclusivity over much of the news coming from its territories. Thus, IS official standardized productions are one of the only sources of

information and content available to the pro-IS audience. This assessment is supported by an internal IS document, allegedly written by an IS administrator, and uncovered in December 2015 by IS researcher and online archivist Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi. The document purportedly depicts an international “blueprint” of IS administrative activities, including its media operations. Detailed in the document is the existence of “one media foundation,” called al-Mu’asasat al-Um (The Base Foundation), “branched out within multiple pockets” to promote ISIS ideology and activities (as quoted in *The Guardian* 2015). This body presumably reports directly to the IS *shura* (advisory council). This central office is likely the same *Diwan al-I’lam al-Markazi* (The Central Media Office) that ISIS identified in a July 2016 video that described the organization of the caliphate (SITE Intelligence Group 2016). *Al-Mu’asasat al-Um* “define[s] the priorities of publication and broadcasting as well as media campaigns,” according to Tamimi’s source.

PRIMARY DISTRIBUTORS

Roughly speaking, the distribution of IS digital propaganda resembles its distribution of offline media. Offline, IS propaganda is distributed via *nuqat i’lamiyya* (media points), makeshift propaganda offices that are sometimes as rudimentary as shipping containers or mobile homes equipped with projectors, printers and plastic chairs. These media points serve as open-air cinemas for official IS media outlets and satellite publishing houses for its propaganda (Islamic State 2015c; 2015d). They also serve as distribution centres for IS digital propaganda stored in physical mediums. For example, video and audio files are burned onto compact disks for wider distribution within the territories under Islamic State control.¹¹

Digitally, once the material is produced and ready for distribution, a suitable and reliable online platform allowing users to upload information anonymously (a digital media point, for lack of a better term) must first be found before the links to these productions can be shared on social media and on top-tier jihadi fora (Collier 2015). The main concern for the primary distributors is finding a platform that will permit their content to remain accessible long enough for it to be retrieved by secondary

distributors, who will in turn copy the content and distribute it further, to the point where the dissemination will not be affected by the removal of the original content. As such, although IS propaganda is regularly removed from major social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, sites such as Internet Archive and Liveleaks for videos, and JustPaste.it or PdfSR.com for text or photo series, have become the favourite platforms on which to host jihadi content as a result of their privacy provisions and relatively lax terms of use (Benjamin 2016).

Among the platforms employed by IS primary distributors to host their content, San Francisco-based Internet Archive (archive.org) has become the most important. The free, easy-to-use and versatile non-profit digital library, whose stated mission is to provide “universal access to all knowledge” through free public access to collections of digitalized materials, including websites, software applications/games, music, movies/videos and nearly three million public-domain books, has historically been used by various jihadi groups to host content. For example, many al-Qaeda affiliates, including al-Shahab Media Company, have traditionally opted to upload their content on archive.org (Zweig 2015, 94-95). Moreover, Shumoukh al-Islam, the important jihadi forum, instructed its readers to use Internet Archive to upload jihadi materials, providing a detailed step-by-step guide on how to upload material onto the site. Likewise, IS media distributors are known to operate numerous Internet Archive accounts, each of which either specializes in a particular geographic area or stems from a particular IS media production group (Benjamin 2016). These numerous accounts upload IS content in a number of different formats and qualities in order to increase its accessibility and ensure that the content can be viewed across multiple devices and regardless of internet connection speed.

Apart from being free and easy to use, Internet Archive’s appeal to jihadi groups can be largely attributed to its lack of content moderation. Whereas since 2016 YouTube significantly increased its efforts to remove IS videos flagged and reported by users, the Internet Archive platform does not contain any flagging mechanism. In fact, users must follow a lengthy and counterintuitive process to report material hosted on the site: users must email the administrators a link to the offending item along with a

description of the problem (Khayat 2015). The proliferation of IS content on archive.org is further exacerbated by permissive terms of use. According to its website, archive.org operates under the guidelines set out by the Oakland Archive Policy for Managing Removal Requests and Preserving Archival Integrity. This policy states that under the Library Bill of Rights, “Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval,” and therefore, when faced with “third party removal requests based on objection to controversial content (e.g. political, religious, and other beliefs),” “archivists should not generally act on these requests” (as quoted in Khayat 2015). Moreover, archive.org’s terms of use warn users that “Because the content of the Collections comes from around the world and from many different sectors, the Collections may contain information that might be deemed offensive, disturbing, pornographic, racist, sexist, bizarre, misleading, fraudulent, or otherwise objectionable,” and informs them that they are “solely responsible for abiding by all laws and regulations that may be applicable to the viewing of the content” (ibid.).

Once primary distributors have uploaded new IS content onto a public hosting service, they then seek to disseminate the content to the secondary distributors primarily via the use of social media, notably Twitter and, increasingly, Telegram, a mobile phone messaging app. Above all, primary distributors seek to stabilize the distribution process by centralizing the data location and the go-to distribution spot. These centralized repositories are the main avenue for unaffiliated sympathizers to obtain the material.

The means employed by primary distributors to reach unaffiliated sympathizers on Twitter have evolved since late 2014 from profile-centric networks coalesced around specific users toward message-centric networks coalesced around content (Kluver and Manly 2016, 33). This shift can be in part attributed to Twitter’s attempt to disrupt IS networks by suspending IS accounts through user reports of violent content. Faced with such a crackdown, hashtags have become a critical part of the Islamic State’s successful dissemination of its material to circumvent account suspension by providing a fixed point in cyberspace for reconnecting with a particular network. For example, while Twitter has routinely suspended

accounts associated with al-Ḥayāt Media Center, its content can still be easily found under the al Ḥayāt Media Center’s hashtag #زكرم_ةاىحل_مالعالل. In fact, each initial posting of IS multimedia content on Twitter includes basic information such as the title, date, the media production office that released it and, usually, a few relevant hashtags. Moreover, for every major IS release, a new hashtag is created and used; all other productions are released with existing generic IS hashtags relating to their content and to the IS media office that produced and released them. For example, the hashtag #ىتم_رفن, which roughly translates to “When will you migrate?” emerged in conjunction with a warning in *Dabiq* against those seeking to leave the caliphate for Western countries and a barrage of propaganda videos targeting refugees and telling them to join the caliphate instead of fleeing toward the “xenophobic” Europe (ibid.).

In response to Twitter updating the language of its stance on abusive behaviour to include statements “threatening or promoting terrorism” and its subsequent crackdown on IS accounts, the Islamic State’s primary distributors diversified their distribution platforms and began embracing mobile phone app Telegram (Bloom, Tiflati and Horgan 2017). This adoption of new platforms in response to crackdowns is not a recent phenomenon. For example, in 2013-2014, Facebook was a relatively popular means of reaching unaffiliated sympathizers — until the company decided to enforce stricter policy and ban hundreds of users. Telegram is a free cross-platform encrypted messaging service developed by Pavel and Nicolai Durov (the founders of the Russian social networking site VK) after several run-ins with Russian intelligence services (Hamburger 2014). Citing Edward Snowden as one of the founders’ main inspirations, the service was originally created to provide a safe place to quickly send files and messages without interception from government intelligence services (Murdock 2016). Aside from its security features, such as self-erasing messages and relatively robust encryption, Telegram also uses a novel feature, channels. Channels are a tool for broadcasting messages to an unlimited number of subscribers either by invitation from the channel’s administrator or by following a public URL.

This service is attractive to jihadists for several reasons. First, it provides relative anonymity, as a channel only displays the total number of

subscribers to other users without disclosing their usernames. Second, users can forward content they find on channels to other Telegram users, thus quickly heightening the dissemination of content. Third, the messages on the channels are transmitted in a single direction, thereby eliminating the possibility for counter-messaging and disruption of a content's feed, strategies that are used extensively on

Twitter to counter extremist propaganda. As such, soon after the introduction of Telegram's channels services in late September 2015, IS primary distributors created several channels on Telegram to share their content with thousands of followers. For example, in the aftermath of the 2016 Brussels bombing, IS primary distributors used Telegram in order to encourage their followers to disseminate IS content using specific hashtags, such as #Brusselsattacks and #Brussels, along with pre-scripted messages "*Attendez-vous à plus de bombes, plus de morts!*"¹² and "*Nous allons tous vous tuer avec des couteaux, des mitrailleuses et des bombes!*"¹³ ¹⁴ Finally, Telegram's application program interface (API) allows the Islamic State to create a series of bots¹⁵ — special accounts designed to automatically spread messages — to reach a greater audience. Even though Telegram has begun to shut down jihadi accounts and channels, IS primary distributors are still currently using Telegram as a means for distribution, switching to private accounts and to closed channels instead of open ones.

According to Mia Bloom, Hicham Tiflati and John Horgan (2017, 4), Telegram serves as a meeting place where IS propagandists serving as "proxies for the organization whose goal is to reproduce the content and disseminate the material as widely as possible," can share IS content with those who are "seeking information" and "those who want to engage more fully with the terrorist group." Across the IS channels observed by Bloom and her collaborators, two observations were made to support the argument that primary distributors operate online as a loose but bounded and consciously constructed organization based mainly on leveraging the benefits of reciprocity. First, Bloom, Tiflati and Horgan observed that particular posts or news items could be posted instantly across dozens of channels, leading them to determine that that administrators were using

bots to simultaneously post content (ibid., 6). Second, the same administrators were managing multiple channels, posting materials simultaneously and engaging with each other, leading Bloom, Taflati and Horgan (ibid.) to conclude that there is a significant degree of centralization in Islamic State's hierarchical media network.

UNAFFILIATED SYMPATHIZERS

The most innovative aspect of Islamic State's use of social media (and possibly the most under studied) concerns the crucial role of unaffiliated supporters. These unaffiliated supporters serve to further disseminate content, which represents a clear shift away from the highly organization-centric model advanced by al-Qaeda toward one where unaffiliated sympathizers can interact with and, to some extent, shape propaganda content in real time by actively participating in its dissemination, contributing to the organization(s) whose messages they convey (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a). Thus, while content is created under the direct guidance of IS media operatives and initially distributed by primary distributors, the mass dissemination of the content relies upon sympathizers at the grassroots level. This extensive reliance on unaffiliated sympathizers either retweeting or reposting content produced and authorized by IS leadership has "no clear precedent" (Barrett 2014, 51) and thus can be seen as a ground-breaking paradigm shift in the evolution of jihadism in cyberspace (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a).

This reliance on unaffiliated sympathizers was clearly exemplified on the day Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of "the Caliphate": the Islamic State's primary distributors began circulating pictures of his speech before a video of the speech was uploaded several times on YouTube in 2014. The links to these YouTube videos were then uploaded on the widely popular file-sharing website justpaste.it by primary distributors before being tweeted by them to tens of thousands of unaffiliated sympathizers. These unaffiliated sympathizers, in turn, retweeted the links and — more important — copied and uploaded links to the video and the video itself, using various accounts. These new links were then added to justpaste.it and tweeted again (Barrett 2014). This strategy, aimed at gaining maximum exposure and overcoming YouTube's

attempt to suppress IS propaganda, has shown its efficiency on many other occasions.

In order to reach a wide audience, IS sympathizers routinely engage in systematic “hashtag hijacking,” manipulating Twitter to magnify the IS message. Hashtag hijacking involves the repurposing of popular and trending hashtags by adding those hashtags into unrelated tweets as a means of infiltrating conversations. For example, on the eve of the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum, a primary distributor for the IS’s al-Furqān media production unit, using the Twitter handle @With_baghdadi, advised his followers that al-Furqān would soon be releasing a new video. The video, entitled *Lend Me Your Ears*, showed kidnapped British photojournalist John Cantlie discussing British foreign policy and his captivity. Within minutes of being uploaded to YouTube, another propaganda operative, identified as Abdulrahman al-Hamid, asked his 4,000 Twitter followers to inform him of the highest trending hashtags on Twitter in the United Kingdom: “We need those who can supply us with the most active hashtags in the UK. And also the accounts of the most famous celebrities. I believe that the hashtag of Scotland’s separation from Britain should be first” (as quoted in *ibid.*). Replies from his followers advised using #andymurray, #scotland, #VoteNo, #VoteYes and #scotlandindependence when retweeting the video in order to raise the video’s profile and exposure (as quoted in Malik et al. 2014). Al-Hamid urged his followers to “work hard to publish all the links,” while @With_Baghdadi asked his followers to “invade [the #VoteNo hashtags] with video of the British prisoner” (as quoted in Malik et al. 2014). IS sympathizers have also co-opted World Cup hashtags such as #Brazil2014 or #WC2014 in order to increase the visibility of their messages (Vitale and Keagle 2014). More recently, unaffiliated distributors also hijacked hashtags associated with popular social movements in the United States such as #BlackLivesMatter, along with hashtags related to high-profile personalities ranging from politicians to journalists to TV personalities and musicians such as One Direction and Justin Bieber. These popular and trending hashtags are used in conjunction with the Islamic State’s own hashtags such as #theFridayofsupportingISIS, #Thought_of_a_Lone_Lion and #AmessagefromISISstoUS, in order to increase the exposure of the message (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a).

The Islamic State's reliance on unaffiliated sympathizers to disseminate its propaganda is undoubtedly rooted in the understanding that the majority of its supporters will never engage in violent kinetic actions such as terrorist acts in their homelands or fighting abroad. Instead, the Islamic State utilizes these supporters for the purpose of disseminating information and propaganda relating to its cause. Arguably, not requiring Western supporters to engage actively in terrorist acts allows the Islamic State to garner the participation of these supporters without asking them to cross moral boundaries they might not feel comfortable crossing. This perfectly embodies Brachman's (2019, 19) notion of Jihobbyists, which he defines as: "an enthusiast of the global Jihadist movement, someone who enjoys thinking about and watching the activities of the groups from the first and second tiers but generally they have no connection to al-Qaida or any other formal Jihadist groups. And it is unlikely they will ever actually do anything that directly supports the movements."

Brachman contends that the rise of Web 2.0 allowed individuals to drive their own radicalization without direct assistance, training, or support "to move forward the Jihadist agenda" (ibid.). In other words, online jihadist activity came to have standing in its own right, and is seen by some as an acceptable alternative to kinetic actions to advance the cause. For example, a 2012 article on electronic jihad, posted on the leading jihadist fora al-Fida and Shumukh al-Islam, stated that "any Muslim who intends to do jihad against the enemy electronically, is considered in one way or another a mujahed, as long as he meets the conditions of jihad such as the sincere intention and the goal of serving Islam and defending it, even if he is far away from the battlefield" (as quoted in Weimann 2014, 4).

Similarly, Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim's *39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad* extolled "performing electronic jihad" as a "blessed field which contains much benefit" (as quoted in Awan 2011, 56). The sanction given to electronic jihad was particularly important in assuaging the cognitive dissonance for individuals who wish to advance the jihadist cause but are unable or unwilling to partake in actual conflict, by providing them with a vindictory rationale for this alternative and, because of such statements, a now entirely legitimate mode of action (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a).

As previously mentioned, while a considerable amount of work has been dedicated to identifying the shape and size of the Islamic State's social media network, few scholars have focused on the attributes of unaffiliated sympathizers. Some generalizations can, nonetheless, be made. First, tweets by unaffiliated sympathizers are typically retweeted between five and 20 times, suggesting that unaffiliated sympathizers reach a small audience and achieve relatively limited redistribution, and are instead coalesced around key nodes, which represent accounts of primary distributors and other prolific unaffiliated sympathizers. These unaffiliated sympathizers therefore instead rely on other means, such as hashtag hijacking, to reach those outside their existing networks. Second, the majority (approximately 80 percent) of these accounts have fewer than 1,000 followers. This finding is consistent with research conducted by S. Benjamin (2016) that found that, out of 3,000 accounts that distributed links to a specific IS production within a few hours of its release, 2,370 accounts had fewer than 1,000 followers. Last, unaffiliated sympathizers tend to follow a mixture of other unaffiliated sympathizers and high-impact accounts (defined as having more than 100,000 followers) such as journalists and scholars, in the hope that the followers of high-impact accounts, along with others within their communities, will be exposed to IS messages. Moreover, the majority of unaffiliated sympathizers' followers are other unaffiliated sympathizers themselves. This suggests that the networks of unaffiliated sympathizers are relatively small and insular, suggesting that unaffiliated sympathizers can indeed be best understood as an associative cluster disseminating propaganda horizontally.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic State's media strategy allows for a message that has been crafted by a handful of IS propaganda agents to be disseminated by a few primary distributors, who in turn can reach thousands of unaffiliated sympathizers, and therefore millions of Twitter users. By means of a conclusion, this chapter offers four short considerations on countering some of the different actors involved in the process.

First, given the highly centralized nature of IS media production, which is most likely spearheaded by a handful of well-trained, technologically savvy and talented individuals, IS media production efforts would be very sensitive to the removal of these individuals. Although research by Jenna Jordan (2009) and Robert A. Pape (2003), among others, on “leadership decapitations” — the strategy of killing the leadership of a terrorist group in hopes of destabilizing it — has been met with a great deal of skepticism regarding its efficacy and morality, it is undeniable that targeting IS media producers would deprive Islamic State of a group of individuals with a rare and valuable skill set. This strategy appears to have been adopted by the US-led coalition, which recently targeted, among others, the founder of Amaq in the eastern Syrian province of Deir al-Zor (Reuters 2017).

Second, although there is some anecdotal evidence (Berger and Perez 2016) that banning social media accounts is an effective way to curtail the activities of unaffiliated sympathizers, relying solely on social media companies to combat the spread of extremist material on their platforms not only raises questions regarding free speech, but would also give these companies the power to control public knowledge and discourse. Given how Twitter has become a global political force during events such as the Arab Spring, conveying real-time information and coordinating actions, such proposals would diminish some of the democratic power of social media, which stems from the fact that it is unedited, for better or for worse.

Third, and on a related note, none of the so-called “lone wolf” attacks in Western countries were perpetrated by individuals who were actively involved in disseminating IS propaganda. In fact, it may well be that distributing jihadist material is an alternate mode of participation for individuals who are unwilling to engage in actual violence. Unaffiliated sympathizers rarely, if ever, contribute both to terrorist attacks and online propaganda, as the former requires discretion and the latter seeks exposure. In this vein, while it appears that Canadian attackers Martin Rouleau, the perpetrator of the 2014 Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu ramming attack that killed one Canadian Forces member and left another injured (CTV News 2014), and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who shot and killed a Canadian soldier on ceremonial sentry duty before storming the Centre

Block of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa (Bell 2014), were consumers of jihadi propaganda, neither was involved in its dissemination. In contrast, Aaron Driver, a 24-year-old Canadian who was fatally shot by police officers as he attempted to carry out a suicide bombing in a public space, was a prolific disseminator of IS propaganda on social media (Bell 2016) until he was subjected to a peace bond that prevented him from doing so by prohibiting him from using a cellphone or computer or accessing social media accounts (Barghout 2016). It was under these conditions, devoid of a path for participation, that he allegedly turned to direct violence (Veilleux-Lepage 2016b).

Finally, although the Islamic State's military defeat appears imminent, one of the greatest mistakes of the "War on Terror" was the belief that the destruction of al-Qaeda's training camps and leadership would lead to the demise of the group, its affiliated movements and its ideology (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a). Likewise, while current military efforts against the Islamic State are proving successful at eroding the group's impressive land grab, the pervasiveness of its ideology and message means that defeating the group will require more of Western governments than a simple military response in Iraq, or even elsewhere in the Middle East: the message itself needs effective countering as well. Western countries need to use an integrated, coordinated and synchronized approach, with support from allied countries in the Islamic world and Muslim civil society more generally, in order to accomplish such a goal (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a). The necessity to counter IS propaganda will become only more pressing and important once military victory against the group has been achieved. In recent months, IS propaganda output has not only declined since its high point in the summer of 2015, but the prevalence of the narrative themes in its propaganda has also changed. Faced with an inevitable military defeat, a utopian narrative has become particularly prominent in IS propaganda. In this sense, IS media strategy has now shifted from genuine state building to instead securing its legacy for future generations of like-minded individuals.

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1 For example, J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan’s research (2015), along with subsequent work by Ali Fisher (2015) and Elizabeth Bodine-Baron et al. (2016) of the RAND Corporation, revealed the size of the IS social media network; Cori E. Dauber and Mark Robinson (2015), Javier Lesaca (2015) and Marco Lombardi (2015) considered the aesthetics of IS propaganda; Max Abrahms (2015) and I (Veilleux-Lepage 2015) debated the effectiveness of IS media strategy; Aaron Zelin (2015) provided a quantitative and qualitative examination of official IS media releases; and I (Veilleux-Lepage 2016a) considered

dissemination strategy, arguing that the Islamic State's extensive reliance on unaffiliated sympathizers, who either retweet or repost content produced and authorized by IS leadership, represents a groundbreaking paradigm shift in the evolution of jihadism in cyberspace.

- 2 This chapter does not purport to provide a comprehensive literature review of network theories. While the discussion here mainly relies on theoretical assets of social network theory, network theory is not a single theory. There are different variants, from social network theory to network organization theory and actor-network theory. For the network perspective of world politics, see Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery (2006), Stacie E. Goddard (2009), Daniel H. Nexon and T. Wright (2007), and Nexon (2009).
- 3 For examples of IS efforts to ensure communications security, see Islamic State (2015b) and Islamic State (n.d.), available through Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi's archive of administrative documents.
- 4 For an excellent overview of this text, see Winter (2017).
- 5 In fact, from the onset of World War I, Kodak marketed its "vest pocket" camera as "the soldier's Kodak," a means for enlistees to take their camera to the front (Harding 2014).
- 6 For example, while Bin Laden appeared to have some positive comments regarding online fora, writing that "the wide-scale spread of jihadist ideology, especially on the internet, and the tremendous number of young people who frequent the jihadist websites [represents] a major achievement for jihad" (Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point 2012, 3), his praises are limited to the medium itself and its potential to facilitate engagement with the wider audience, rather than the content itself. In fact, Bin Laden appears to have heeded the concerns raised by Adam Gadahn, who claimed that "As for the jihadi forums, it is repulsive to most of the Muslims, or closed to them. It also distorts the face of al-Qaeda, due to what you know of the bigotry, the sharp tone that characterizes most of the participants in these forums" (ibid., 4). This letter prompted Bin Laden to ask Abu Abd al-Rahman Atiyya and "Shaykh Abu Yahy" — presumably Abu Yahya al-Libi — to "write some articles and provide advice to those working in the jihad media in general to include the author partisans to the mujahidin on the internet" (ibid., 14). Moreover, Bin Laden proposed running all the recruits who arrive in Pakistan through "a quick training course that is heavy on ideology," to ensure they are "distinguished and capable" as recruiters, and then "send (them) to (their) country to conduct specific missions like inciting for jihad over the internet" (ibid., 43).
- 7 The literal transliteration of *Furqan* is "standard, criterion," or "arbiter" for judging the difference between truth and lies, but the word is also a name for the Qur'an.
- 8 *Hayāt* translates to "life" and is often linked to a passage in the Qur'an calling people to respond to the "call of that which gives them life."
- 9 Dabiq is a town located in north Syria and is mentioned in a *Hadith* (6924), which describes events of the Malahim (Armageddon), where the greatest battle between Muslims and the crusaders will take place before the Messiah returns (Saltman and Winter 2014). Although it is worth noting that some advanced Koranic Studies experts regard this interpretation as a reductive take on a very complex *Hadith*, the jihadist group has capitalized on this narrative (Maggioni 2015, 71). In fact, al-Zarqawi had stated (before he was killed by a US missile strike in 2006) that "The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heart will continue to intensify — by Allah's permission — until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq" (as quoted in ibid.). This sentence appears above the index of each issue of *Dabiq* released thus far. Moreover, the executioner of Peter Kassig also references Dabiq in the now infamous video of Kassig's beheading, stating, "Here we are, burying the first American Crusader in Dabiq, eagerly

waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive,” while the severed head of Kassig is shown on camera (as quoted in *ibid.*).

- 10 Although the alarming scenario in which the Islamic State deliberately resorts to an escalation of attacks against civilians in the West in order to uphold the illusion that the group is still on the offensive appears credible, as a result of the strings of attacks in European cities since 2015, Europol (2017) reported that the number of failed, foiled or completed attacks had been following a downward trajectory since 2014.
- 11 This can be observed in, for example, Islamic State (2015e; 2015f; 2015g).
- 12 Translation: “Expect more bombs, more dead!”
- 13 Translation: “We will kill you all with knives, machine guns and bombs.”
- 14 I would like to express my gratitude to J. Faraday for uncovering and sharing these Telegram messages.
- 15 The most notorious bot software employed by the Islamic State’s primary distributors was the Android application called *The Dawn of Glad Tidings*, available through the Google Play store before its removal for violating Google’s terms of service. *The Dawn of Glad Tidings* enabled users to keep up with the latest news about the activities of the Islamic State. Vitrally, the application also allows the main IS communication branch to send Tweets periodically from the accounts of everyone who has installed the application, thereby flooding social media with IS propaganda without triggering Twitter’s spam-detection algorithms (Berger 2014). *The Dawn of Glad Tidings* first went into wide use in April 2014, but reached an all-time high of almost 40,000 tweets on the day the Islamic State marched into Mosul (Vitale and Keagle 2014). Although the application had been suspended by Twitter by the end of summer 2014, the number of pro-IS accounts in 2014 and 2015 remained significant, further enriched by thousands of bots (that is, computer software pieces that act like actual Twitter users) tweeting and retweeting specific content.



22

“FAKE NEWS,” DANGEROUS SPEECH AND MASS VIOLENCE: CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

STEPHANIE MACLELLAN

In June 2016, a rampaging mob in the Bago region of Myanmar forced dozens of people to flee their village after online rumours convinced local Buddhists — incorrectly — that a mosque was being built there (Rajagopalan 2017). In South Sudan, which has been racked by civil conflict since 2013, false rumours that spread through social media blame rival ethnic groups for atrocities, and calls for revenge for these nonexistent crimes sometimes turn into death threats that drive victims from their homes (Fiedler and Kovats 2017). In India, viral rumours on social media about purported attacks by Muslims on Hindus have been blamed for numerous communal riots and lynch mobs (Arun and Nayak 2016).

Ever since the 2016 US election campaign, the world's largest social media companies have come under fire for their role in the spread of disinformation and harassment online. But while much of the focus has been on how these phenomena affect established Western democracies, the implications can be far more dangerous in the developing world, where underlying instability, weak media landscapes and populations largely made up of inexperienced internet users — mostly relying on mobile phone connections — can exacerbate the effects of rumours and calls to violence transmitted through social media. This is not to say that efforts to expand digital access in the developing world should be discouraged — the benefits for education, economic growth and human rights far outweigh the risks. But special care needs to be taken to meet the needs of local populations adapting to new forms of digital media, especially where social tensions exist.

This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive or conclusive examination of dangerous online speech, but rather a starting point for discussion, by elaborating the scope of the problem and factors that should be taken into consideration when deliberating policies to combat it. I begin by outlining the linkages between dangerous speech, mass violence and social media, and by providing recent examples of cases where harmful online speech has been connected to acts of offline violence. I then offer reasons why the platform-enabled spread of rumours and dangerous speech is particularly challenging in developing contexts. Finally, I discuss policy options and interventions that social media companies, civil society organizations and researchers should consider in order to mitigate the spread of harmful online speech that can provoke mass violence.

BACKGROUND

Much has been written about the links between speech and mass violence, and the difficulty of proving definitively if and how the former is responsible for the latter. It is generally accepted that even the most hateful speech is not sufficient in itself to cause mass violence in otherwise peaceful circumstances, but where there are existing tensions, it can exploit and intensify them. In certain circumstances, it has been found,

speech can be used to incite collective violence by members of one group against members of another.

In this chapter, I draw on the concept of “dangerous speech” developed by Susan Benesch: “any form of expression (speech, text, or images) that can increase the risk that its audience will condone or participate in violence against members of another group” (Dangerous Speech Project n.d.). According to this theory, five factors can make speech more dangerous, especially when they occur in combination: a speaker who is highly influential over the intended audience; an audience with grievances or fears that the speaker can amplify; speech understood by the audience to be a call to violence; social or historical conditions that are conducive to violence, such as long-standing competition between groups or previous episodes of violence; and an influential medium for transmitting the speech (Benesch 2013). David Yanagizawa-Drott’s study on the role of radio broadcasts calling for ethnic killings in the 1994 Rwanda genocide found that media can also have an indirect influence on participation in violence through social interactions: those who had heard the broadcasts could pass along the messages to those who had not (Yanagizawa-Drott 2014).

In many ways, social media is just another medium that can be used to transmit dangerous speech, much like radio broadcasts did in Rwanda in 1994. But unlike traditional media, it allows users to both receive and transmit messages. Users can create their own content, and if they think other content that they view is interesting or important enough, they can pass it along to their networks. In this way, messages can spread far and wide without the traditional vetting role that is performed by journalists. This can be positive, especially when it comes to enhancing freedom of expression under repressive regimes and providing access to ideas that are not otherwise available in local media. (Social media is widely credited for its role in mobilizing prodemocracy protesters during the Arab Spring movements of 2011, for example.) But it can also spread confusion and magnify existing social or political rifts.

There are some challenges to studying the effects of social media, media which can be broadly defined as websites and applications that let users

share content and build networks. For one thing, social media is relatively new: the world's most popular social media platforms, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp (Statista 2018), were founded between 2004 and 2009. (While the Facebook-owned WhatsApp is generally thought of as a messaging app, it allows messages to be posted, shared and reshared among groups of up to 256 people at a time, performing a similar function as social media.) Within their short history, social media platforms have constantly evolved, as companies change their policies and platform interfaces on an ongoing basis. This can make it more complicated to track their effects over the long term. In addition, social media companies are notoriously reticent about sharing their data, for fear of revealing proprietary information or compromising user privacy. All of this contributes to an environment where “we still lack a full understanding of the reach and impact of harmful speech online and know relatively little about the efficacy of different interventions” (Faris et al. 2016, 5).

What we do know is that there have been a number of cases in recent years in which, during times of tension and instability, hateful speech and rumours spread through digital media have preceded outbursts of violence against the targeted group. This suggests that dangerous speech has the potential to cause similar effects regardless of whether it is spread through mobile phones, leaflets or radio broadcasts.

One of the earliest examples was the violent aftermath of the disputed Kenyan presidential election in December 2007. The campaign leading up to the presidential vote invoked long-standing grievances between the Kikuyu tribe, affiliated with the incumbent government of Mwai Kibaki, and the Luo, who were more likely to oppose him (Human Rights Watch 2008). Violence broke out after Kibaki was declared the winner in an apparent case of electoral fraud, and the fighting continued for two months, including “ethnic-based killings and reprisals” on both sides (ibid.). During the unrest, social media, blogs and short message service (SMS) text messages were used to spread rumours, issue calls to violence and coordinate attacks (Gagliardone et al. 2015). In the end, about 1,000 people were killed and 600,000 were displaced (ibid.).

Contributing to the instability was the widespread presence of what we might today call “fake news”: inflammatory and baseless rumours that spread rapidly through text messages, emails and blog posts, heightening tensions at a time of unrest. Most of these messages played into the ethnic and political fault lines — for instance, members of one group would claim that a rival group was plotting an attack against them. While local rumours had always been a part of Kenyan political culture, digital technology allowed them to spread farther and faster, while the “voiceless” nature of text messages and blog posts made the rumours seem more convincing, according to Michelle Osborn (2008), who tracked election-related rumours in Kibera, a populous informal settlement in the capital of Nairobi. The veracity of these reports mattered less than their effect, she wrote: “Rumours were frequently perceived as truths in Kibera, while government or media accounts of events were dismissed as propaganda...Drawing a distinction between fact and fiction is less useful in this context than attempting to capture the way rumour, right or wrong, reflects and reinforces a collective lived reality” (ibid., 317).

A similar pattern can be seen in South Sudan, where social media has emerged as a “virtual battleground” that amplifies the fighting on the ground. As in Kenya, the fighting has both political and ethnic dimensions: President Salva Kiir’s supporters, who mostly belong to the Dinka tribe, oppose followers of former vice-president Riek Machar, largely from the Nuer tribe (Patinkin 2017). After five years of fighting and an estimated 382,000 deaths caused by the conflict, the two sides reached a peace deal in September 2018, but UN experts have since observed ongoing violence and violations of an arms embargo, casting hopes for a lasting peace in doubt (Agence France-Presse 2018).

In South Sudan the environment for traditional journalism is repressive, with government censorship and intimidation of reporters common (Patinkin 2017). This makes social media even more important as a primary channel for information. While internet penetration remains low in the country, mobile phone access is considerably higher, and individuals with smartphones serve as “hubs of information, within their families, and in their communities” (ibid.).

Social media in South Sudan is used strategically to demonize rival tribes and to shape narratives (Deng 2016). In many cases, this takes the form of false rumours — for instance, photos of soldiers or citizens killed in unrelated conflicts are posted on Facebook with captions that claim they were killed by rival factions in South Sudan (Fiedler and Kovats 2017). These rumours feed into ethnic tensions and spur calls for revenge, as described by James Bidal of Community Empowerment for Progress Organization, a civil society group that monitors hate speech in the country: “They can post an inciting message: ‘You of x tribe, what are you waiting for? Such tribe are finishing us, let us go and revenge!’...People read these messages and react on the ground” (Patinkin 2017). Often the instigators are members of the large diaspora, whose messages are particularly influential because they are held in high esteem in their homeland (ibid.).

Since the end of military rule and the opening of the economy in Myanmar, Facebook has been rapidly and enthusiastically embraced by a country of neophyte internet users, to the extent that many believe Facebook *is* the internet: “A large population of internet users lacks basic understanding of how to use a browser, how to set up an email address and access an email account, and how to navigate and make judgments on online content. Despite this, most mobile phones sold in the country come preloaded with Facebook” (Business for Social Responsibility [BSR] 2018, 12). The platform has also been seized on by Buddhist extremists, such as the so-called Ma Ba Tha movement, to spread inflammatory speech about the country’s Muslim minority groups. This includes describing them in dehumanizing terms (Baker 2016), characterizing them as “cruel and savage” (Frenkel 2016) and propagating the notion that they are “seeking to take over Myanmar by having too many children and converting innocent Buddhists” (Rajagopalan 2017). There have also been repeated false rumours about Muslims killing and raping Buddhists or stockpiling explosives in mosques, and calls for Muslims to be attacked or killed (Frenkel 2016; Baker 2016). The rumours often go unquestioned in a population with low media literacy. “We are afraid of Kalars [a slur for people of Indian origin], mainly because of the news we see on the Internet,” one Burmese teacher participating in a digital media workshop told Internews (Baerthlein 2016).

Against this backdrop, there have been repeated incidents of mob violence against Muslims since 2012, and they are often preceded by hate speech and rumours online (Baker 2016). The potential role of dangerous speech in the mass displacement of the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group, beginning in 2017 is less clear. It is the Burmese security forces who have led what has been described as a campaign of ethnic cleansing, including mass killings, sexual violence and widespread arson of Rohingya villages, which had displaced approximately 725,000 Rohingya as of August 2018 (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). There have been reports of Buddhist civilians participating in at least some attacks on Rohingya communities, but it is suspected they were orchestrated by the military (ibid.). However, a UN fact-finding mission underscored the role of hate speech online and offline, including through Facebook, in spreading “deeply exclusionary and dehumanizing rhetoric” toward the Rohingya that contributed to their vulnerability. “The impact of this rhetoric is compounded by the stream of false or incomplete information and explicit calls for patriotic action (for example, ‘every citizen has the duty to safeguard race, religion, cultural identities and national interest’),” according to the mission’s report. “The role of social media is significant. Facebook has been a useful instrument for those seeking to spread hate, in a context where for most users Facebook is the Internet” (ibid., 14). An analysis commissioned by Facebook of the platform’s human rights impacts in Myanmar, conducted by the BSR consulting group, contained similar findings: “Facebook has become a means for those seeking to spread hate and cause harm, and posts have been linked to offline violence” (BSR 2018, 24).

DEVELOPING WORLD CHALLENGES

Most of the existing academic research on the topic of harmful speech and social media tends to focus on advanced economies, where internet penetration rates and education levels are high and there is an open and competitive media environment. But countries at earlier stages of development share several characteristics that can make social media more potent as a means for transmitting dangerous speech.

The first is low levels of media literacy in general, or digital media literacy more specifically. In many cases, large portions of the population have gone online in only a short period of time, launching them into the digital world with little to no guidance for navigating it. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the UN agency for information and communications technologies (ICTs), found that mobile broadband subscriptions increased by more than 50 percent in the least developed countries, and more than 30 percent in developing countries, between 2012 and 2017. By comparison, the global average increase was 20 percent (ITU 2017).

The change has been nowhere more pronounced than in Myanmar. Before 2013, when the state held a monopoly on phone service, mobile subscriptions were an extravagance limited to only the wealthiest households. But within four years of the market opening, the estimated mobile penetration rate reached 90 percent (Heijmans 2017). Facebook subscriptions nearly tripled between 2015 and 2018: from seven million to 20 million users, in a country of about 50 million (Freedom House 2017; BSR 2018). This sudden exposure to a glut of online information from sources of various levels of authenticity can be overwhelming. “Some users believe whatever they see on Facebook and share it without first finding out if the post is true or false,” according to a project coordinator with the Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) (Baerthlein 2016). The analysis commissioned by Facebook came to a similar conclusion: “Significant shortcomings in the areas of digital literacy, privacy awareness, and critical thinking have a sizable impact on Facebook’s human rights risk profile” (BSR 2018, 24).

This can be exacerbated by the “flattening” nature of social media — platform design that makes news content, advertisements and posts from friends look virtually indistinguishable from each other — which challenges many social media users even in places with a strong media landscape and a longer history of connectivity (Edge 2017). This can be more severe for people who use low-data mobile versions of social platforms, such as Facebook’s Free Basics, which is available as part of basic mobile subscriptions in many developing countries. (Free Basics usage does not count towards a subscriber’s data limits, which makes it an

attractive option for low-income users.) Posts on Free Basics only offer headlines and brief descriptions of stories, omitting additional context that can help users evaluate the veracity of a post (Palatino 2017). These media literacy challenges can be particularly pronounced in countries that lack a robust free press, where most of the population has little experience in evaluating the authenticity of news reports.

Social media also plays an outsized role in the local news marketplace when traditional media is restricted or difficult to access, either because of government interference or distribution problems. This is often the case in conflict situations, as humanitarian researcher Abiol Lual Deng (2016) notes in her analysis of the South Sudan crisis: “Because traditional media is often suppressed or unreliable in conflict, those seeking to disseminate biased or false information, particularly on social media, are often able to reach an audience.” In Myanmar, Facebook’s popularity as a news source can be attributed in part to the difficulty of accessing news media websites on mobile phones (Freedom House 2017). Benesch (2013, 8) notes that speech can be more dangerous when it comes through an influential medium, such as “the sole or primary source of news for the relevant audience.” Social media undoubtedly fits this description in such an environment.

Speech can also be more dangerous, according to the Benesch guidelines, when it comes from someone with influence over the audience. The traditional conception is of a powerful, charismatic or highly esteemed speaker (ibid.). This can be seen in South Sudan, where media-savvy members of the diaspora use their influence to share inflammatory messages, and because of their high profile, users in South Sudan pay them more heed and continue to spread their messages (Fiedler and Kovats 2017; Patinkin 2017).

But social media content is often delivered to its audience by people with a different, yet more intimate, form of influence over them: their own family and friends. By sharing news on social media, these close connections are implicitly endorsing its significance. Rural India, where mobile connectivity has boomed in recent years, has been grappling with the chaotic effects of rumours spread on WhatsApp and other social

platforms, often with political or religious overtones. In the first half of 2018, as many as two dozen people were killed across India, mainly in villages, in outbreaks of mob violence related to rumours spread on WhatsApp. Many of these rumours involved false reports claiming that child kidnappers were in the area (Asrar 2018). “Many of the issues people see on these platforms have an emotional connect, and because the information comes to us via family and friends, the inclination to double check is very low,” Indian digital expert Durga Raghunath told the BBC (Perera 2017).

Finally, a particularly vexing challenge is posed by WhatsApp and similar messaging apps, which are ubiquitous in developing regions because they load quickly on mobile phones and do not use much data. It is common for WhatsApp messages that are shared with one group to be forwarded by group members to their other groups, allowing messages to spread widely and quickly. “This increases the ability of mobile phone technology to be used for violence mobilisation since it enables sharing of content to a wide audience and facilitates real time coordination at an operational level” (Mutahi and Kimari 2017, 18). The problem is that all WhatsApp messages are encrypted, meaning they cannot be seen by anyone who was not a recipient of the message. Not even the platform’s staff can see the content of messages to remove dangerous speech or determine the veracity of content that goes viral (Funke 2017). That makes tracking the spread of dangerous speech spread through WhatsApp incredibly difficult.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

As negative headlines about social media companies persisted throughout 2018, companies continued to tinker with their policies, including new measures designed to curb violence enabled by their platforms. For example, Facebook added more Burmese-speaking content reviewers and removed several accounts linked to military officials in Myanmar who have been accused of orchestrating mass violence against the Rohingya (BSR 2018). It also expanded its policies around violent content worldwide to remove false information aimed at causing physical harm (ibid.). WhatsApp has begun collaborating with researchers and fact-checking groups, introduced a label to identify forwarded messages, and

limited the number of people to whom a message can be forwarded to five in India and 20 elsewhere (MacLellan 2018). But researchers and civil society groups working in this space have been skeptical that these moves will be enough on their own to solve the problem. Over the long term, curbing online dangerous speech and preventing it from translating into mass violence will undoubtedly require a multi-stakeholder effort that combines the capabilities and expertise of governments, tech companies and civil society, as none of the players involved has the ability to effect change on its own.

The first step is for social media companies to improve their content moderation capacity, particularly by incorporating more local expertise. In many cases, content that includes calls for violence or hateful terms used against an identifiable group would be removed from social media platforms as a violation of their terms of service, but removal requires some form of content moderation. Although tech companies are introducing more automation and artificial intelligence to keep up with the overwhelming pace of content uploaded to their platforms every day, there are many nuances that cannot be detected by an automated program, and these require human oversight. Researchers have raised concerns that social platforms are severely understaffed when it comes to content moderation: for instance, Facebook has trumpeted its plans to expand its moderation workforce — from 4,500 to 7,500, then to 20,000 — but that number is still dwarfed by the billions of pieces of content shared on the platform every day (Zuckerberg 2017; BSR 2018).

Another question is whether it is possible for programmers and content policy teams based in Silicon Valley in the United States to have adequate understanding of the languages, cultures and concerns of people who use their products around the world to be able to respond to dangerous speech that affects them. For example, in Myanmar, MIDO monitored Facebook for instances of hate speech, as defined by the platform, and reported violations to the company. It found that only 10 percent of the posts it reported were taken down (Rajagopalan 2017). The concern is that without staff who understand the rationale and urgency behind such takedown requests, they are more likely to slip through the cracks. Both local groups and Facebook staff agreed that Burmese staff, from diverse ethnic

backgrounds, would be necessary to effectively implement the community standards (BSR 2018).

Hiring more moderators in different regions of the world, with diverse cultural backgrounds and language abilities, is one obvious solution, and the major social media companies have taken steps in that direction. But in addition to bringing more experts on staff, the companies should also consider establishing or expanding partnerships with independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and researchers working in the field who have deep knowledge of local culture and sources of tension. This would make it easier for them to flag dangerous speech for removal and have their concerns addressed more efficiently. One model for partnership could be YouTube's Trusted Flagger program, which gives expanded reporting tools to individuals and organizations with a demonstrated interest in removing content that violates YouTube's community guidelines and a good track record of accuracy (YouTube 2016).

However, moderation is an imperfect solution because it is vulnerable to human error, and it cannot be used with WhatsApp or other messaging platforms that are based on encrypted messages. More important, it has the potential to evolve into a form of censorship, rather than enhancing freedom of expression as a basic human right — which is particularly important in countries where that right has not always been recognized. Instead, reactive efforts targeted at content should be combined with proactive efforts targeted at users, in order to improve their resistance to misinformation and dangerous speech.

One approach to this is through digital media literacy, also called media and information literacy. Like traditional media literacy training, digital media literacy helps develop the knowledge to evaluate and interpret media texts and to recognize their social and political influence, but it also teaches the technical skills required to use digital technologies (Gagliardone et al. 2015). In the context of dangerous speech and rumours that circulate online, digital literacy can help users recognize “virulent, biased and de-humanizing language,” and learn critical thinking skills to help distinguish rumour and propaganda from reliable information,

“therefore [facilitating] the responsible use of the Internet and social media” (Fiedler and Kovats 2017, 372).

NGOs and independent activists in developing and emerging economies such as Kenya, India and Colombia have taken an on-the-fly approach to digital media literacy through crowd-sourced fact-checking initiatives (Mutahi and Kumari 2017; Perera 2017; Funke 2017). Crowdsourcing plays a particularly important role in identifying and debunking rumours that spread through WhatsApp, which could not otherwise be tracked. One common method is for users to submit examples of suspicious news and photos to fact-checking organizations, which weigh in on their veracity; the users are then asked to share the fact-checked content in the group(s) where the original false content was posted (Funke 2017). While the immediate goal is to stop hoaxes from spreading, the hope is that fact-checking will encourage more critical social media consumption in the long term. According to Juan Esteban Lewin, a journalist with a WhatsApp fact-checking organization in Colombia, “The conversation has changed [a] little bit in some groups, because once you have someone in the group who can say, ‘Okay, let’s stop a moment and check the facts’...the level of debate can change” (ibid.).

Another approach focuses on reducing the impact of dangerous speech by helping audiences understand the assumptions and prejudices implicit in it, as well as how it can be used to manipulate emotions to ratchet up existing tensions. An NGO called Radio la Benevolencija (RLB) has used this approach in developing radio programs in several Central African countries. In 2004, it created a radio soap opera in Rwanda called *Musekweya* (meaning “New Dawn”) that “explicitly deals with the psychology of incitement to hate and violence that leads to mass conflict” (Benesch 2014, 15). A 2007 study found that *Musekweya* listeners were more likely to think for themselves and express dissenting views (ibid.). A 2014 study examining RLB programs in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo found that RLB listeners “gained better understandings of the cycle of violence and methods used by politicians to manipulate audiences,” as well as the dangers of scapegoating, and “became more willing to hear an opposing group’s side of the story” (Kogen 2014, 3). Efforts should be made to translate positive experiences

with RLB and other traditional media formats to the digital sphere, possibly by drawing on strategies from the well-developed fields of social media marketing and audience engagement.

Efforts should also be made to identify, encourage and amplify speech originating from the community that counters dangerous speech messages. After election-related violence shook Kenya in 2007, the country was on high alert for the next election in 2013. In the months leading up to the vote, a research project called Umati monitored dangerous speech spread through social media, blogs, news websites and other digital media. One of its findings was that there was less hate speech on Twitter than Facebook, which it attributed to Twitter's more public nature. This allowed other Twitter users (a vibrant and active community known as #KOT, which stands for "Kenyans on Twitter") to call out hate speech on the platform — which they did, in vocal terms, until some of the original posters deleted their tweets or apologized (Mutahi and Kumari 2017; Benesch 2014).

In this way, internet users who have learned critical thinking and digital media literacy skills have the potential to serve as positive influencers online. Participants in digital media literacy projects in South Sudan who learned how hate speech and incitement to violence spread on social media expressed an interest in learning how to use social media for peace building (Fiedler and Kovats 2017). This role can be particularly important to establish in places where the digital public sphere is in its early stages of development, "rather than leaving that space open to agents of conflict" (ibid., 377).

Whatever approach is chosen, far more research is needed to evaluate the effects of online dangerous speech and of interventions being considered to counter it, including any potential unintended effects of such interventions in various global contexts. "Without systematic evidence about the outcomes of platform interventions, policymakers risk increasing harms rather than reducing social ills" (Matias 2017, 49). More transparency on the part of tech companies should also be encouraged, including allowing independent research and oversight. For example, a 2015 UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) report called for the private companies that own social media platforms to

make their extensive data troves available to researchers: “Social networking platforms...have access to a tremendous amount of data that can be correlated, analysed, and combined with real life events that would allow more nuanced understanding of the dynamics characterizing hate speech online. Vast amounts of data are already collected and correlated for marketing purposes. Similar efforts could be made as part of the social responsibility mandate of the companies owning these platforms, contributing to produce knowledge that can be shared with a broad variety of stakeholders” (Gagliardone et al. 2015, 57).

CONCLUSION

The cases discussed in this chapter have demonstrated how disinformation and rhetoric that is spread through social media in the developing world often meets the Benesch criteria for dangerous speech. It comes from influential sources, which can include family and friends who share it. It plays on audience fears by persuading them that members of their group are being attacked by a rival group. It sometimes dehumanizes other groups and issues direct calls for violence against them. It happens where there are long-standing ethnic tensions and grievances. And where the media landscape is weak or suppressed, social media becomes a primary source of information, making it an especially influential means of transmission.

There are several characteristics shared by developing countries, particularly those with a recent history of conflict and/or government repression, that make them more vulnerable to dangerous speech spread by social media. This includes low media or digital literacy, a lack of available alternative media and the prevalence of untraceable messaging platforms such as WhatsApp.

More research is needed to evaluate how dangerous speech spreads on social platforms, to gauge its role in episodes of mass violence and to measure the effectiveness of policy responses. Social media companies can help with this, not least by making more of their data available to independent researchers. In the meantime, research and experience from other contexts points to potential policy interventions that can be

employed to stem the impact of dangerous speech on social media. However, any interventions that focus on content, such as increased social media monitoring, should be accompanied by proactive interventions that build critical thinking and media literacy skills in the affected audiences. And it is crucial that policy initiatives are conducted with as much involvement as possible from the relevant communities, while maintaining a focus on enhancing freedom of expression.

In its analysis of Facebook in Myanmar, BSR noted that “the Facebook platform and Community Standards rely on certain legal, political, and cultural assumptions (such as freedom of speech and rule of law) that do not hold true in the Myanmar context today” (BSR 2018, 24). It is clear that as social media companies undertook their worldwide expansion, they often did so without understanding the characteristics of other countries that made their services more likely to have dangerous consequences there. The recent outrage over social media’s role in deadly violence in Myanmar, India and other volatile and developing contexts has finally focused attention on these issues. Companies have begun to adjust their policies in response, and we can expect more changes will be forthcoming. However, if social media is to live up to its potential as a tool for connecting societies and enhancing human rights, tech companies and policy makers must not just react to headline-grabbing catastrophes, but work proactively to prevent damaging uses of these technologies in the long run.

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23

PATRIOTIC TROLLING: A SURVEY OF STATE-SPONSORED TROLLING WORLDWIDE

NICK MONACO AND CARLY NYST

Describing novel forms of human rights abuse is the first step toward empowering individuals and societies to work to prevent them. The term “genocide” was coined in the twentieth century, in reference to the Holocaust that had recently ravaged the Jewish population of Europe (Online Etymology Dictionary n.d.). While the reality had existed before this neologism, reifying the concept in a single word empowered societies and individuals to more quickly identify and combat the horror when it emerged after 1944.

In this chapter, we explore a phenomenon that has been referred to by certain authors as “patriotic trolling,” which describes the use of government-sponsored or government-endorsed hate mobs to harass and silence perceived opponents of the state (Geybulla 2016; Etter 2017). In the modern era, these campaigns can take on the scale and speed of the

modern internet with pinpoint personalization from troves of personal data afforded by cheap surveillance technologies and data brokers. It is the humble hope of the authors that by describing what we see as a new form of human rights abuse and proposing a scale of attribution, individuals and societies will be in a better position to more quickly spot and combat the egregious use of patriotic trolling campaigns.

There is debate over the role that disinformation and government-orchestrated smear campaigns villainizing the Tutsi ethnic group had in contributing to the Rwandan genocide. It is undeniable, however, that disinformation and hate campaigns at scale are a means of sowing seeds of discord that can form a fractured and fractious populace and, ultimately, lead to larger conflicts. In this light, state-sponsored trolling campaigns can be viewed as akin to hate and smear campaigns leveraged against particular ethnic groups in the twentieth century, Rwanda being one such example. Producing research to help illuminate the phenomenon can hopefully help inform solutions to such divisions and obviate potential atrocities, such as the genocide in Rwanda 25 years ago.

INTRODUCTION

As a former congresswoman and the daughter of a former president, Martha Roldós was familiar with the reputational affronts and underhanded tactics that accompany political ascendancy in Ecuador. But the attack upon the investigative journalist that began in January 2014 was like nothing Roldós had previously encountered. The vehicle for the attack was the publication by a state newspaper, *El Telégrafo*, of private emails between Roldós and the US National Endowment for Democracy concerning potential philanthropic funding for Roldós' investigative journalism outfit. The newspaper claimed Roldós was effectively an agent of the CIA with the aspiration of overthrowing democratic governments in the region. Heavily laden with historical import, the sensationalist article was an archetypal example of Latin American disinformation.

Yet the article was the nadir, not the climax, of the attack on Roldós. Following its publication, Roldós was immediately besieged by a barrage of tweets and messages, including memes and disfigured representations,

claiming not only that Roldós was an American agent, but that she had been involved in the alleged assassination of her own parents (who died in a plane crash whose cause is unknown). This online trolling campaign was accompanied by an offline one, in which Radio Pública and government television channels perpetuated the false claims against Roldós. A week after the original publication, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa congratulated *El Telégrafo*'s publication of Roldós's correspondence (and by implication the newspaper's illegal acquisition of private communications) and repeated the newspaper's claims (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador 2014).

The attack on Roldós was not simply an instance of disinformation amplified through digital platforms. Categorizing the onslaught of harassment as the reverberations of disinformation understates its significance. Rather, Roldós's experience is better understood as a state-sponsored trolling campaign against an outspoken critic of the Ecuadorian government. The publication of false claims against Roldós triggered a sustained and coordinated government-backed operation against her. This campaign was later explicitly praised and encouraged by then-President Correa, who declared: "People cannot insult or defame in the name of freedom of expression...if they send out a tweet, we will send 10,000 tweets calling you a coward" (BBC News 2015).

This Ecuadorian case illustrates that disinformation is often only one element of a broader politically motivated attack on the credibility of dissenting voices: journalists, opposition politicians and activists. While disinformation may exploit inherent characteristics of digital infrastructures, emerging as a perverse by-product of the business models of major digital platforms, it is also a phenomenon that can be exploited. These campaigns mobilize ordinary internet users as well as amateur and professional "cyber militia" to defend state interests, using disinformation in tandem with online harassment. Such attacks appear organic by design, both to exacerbate their intimidation effects on the target, and to distance the attack from state responsibility. However, in the cases we studied, attributing trolling attacks to states is not only possible but critical to understanding and reducing the harmful effects of this trend on democratic institutions.

In this chapter we begin by surveying the digital political landscape, which has provided a fertile breeding ground for trolling as a state tool for suppression of dissenting ideas. We observe the tactical move by states from an ideology of information scarcity to one of information abundance, which sees “speech itself as a censorial weapon” (Wu 2017). This era of information abundance has enabled states to sponsor and execute trolling attacks using ordinary internet users as well as volunteer, amateur and professional trolling institutions. Under the heading “The Anatomy of Patriotic Trolling,” we outline salient patterns from more than 15 case studies across seven countries illustrating the common tools and tactics in state-sponsored trolling attacks. Drawing on campaigns across Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Ecuador, the Philippines, Turkey, Venezuela and the United States, we are able to establish the existence of a broader trend within which national variations occur. We then offer a framework for conceptualizing the responsibility of states for such attacks. We argue attribution is critical to elucidating remedies to state-sponsored trolling. As long as the role of governments in instigating or leveraging such campaigns is obscured, it will be impossible to advance effective technological or regulatory solutions. We conclude by offering some preliminary policy proposals, hoping this chapter will prompt a further debate about effective and necessary interventions.

THE DIGITAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Whereas others have sought to understand the current digital landscape from the perspectives of the media, technology or citizenry, viewing it through the lens of state and political control enables unique insights. Understanding how states have sought to control the information revolution catalyzed by the internet and emerging digital technologies from the 1990s allows for a more complete understanding of state-sponsored trolling campaigns.

With information and knowledge being well-established vectors for power, shaping and restricting information has long been the pursuit of those in or aspiring to power. The Soviet Union’s Cold War disinformation tactics were an extension of the Catholic Church’s seventeenth-century efforts to propagate its ideology, which gave birth to the term

“propaganda” (Jowett and O’Donnell 1992). Throughout history, the powerful have always sought to manipulate and control information in order to mould public opinion and isolate and discredit outlying ideologies.

The internet posed unparalleled challenges to the state pursuit of information control. The very nature of information — its velocity, volume and diversity — changed dramatically, demanding new forms of information control. In the three decades following the introduction of the internet, we have witnessed two generations of state information-control practices.

The imposition of information scarcity was the first iteration of information control in a digitally connected world. States adopted offensive approaches to restrict access not only to certain information online but, in some cases, to the internet itself (Goldsmith and Wu 2006). Examples of the information scarcity approach abounded in the early 2000s, namely in various content blocking strategies around the world (BBC News 2010; Noman and York 2011; Orłowski 2003). In parallel, states pursued broadly drawn cybercrime laws designed to prevent the dissemination of certain content and advocated for filters designed to block obscene material, in some cases extending regulation in the online environment beyond that applicable offline.

Although such practices continue to abound in many countries, democratic and not, the past decade has seen the emergence of a different state mentality: that of information abundance. Realizing data that individuals create and disseminate online itself constitutes information translatable into power, states try less to curtail online activity and more to profit from it. The proliferation of the commercial surveillance technology industry has enabled even the poorest governments to equip themselves to monitor their citizens, revealing new and more effective possibilities for state control (Deibert 2013; Granick 2017). At the same time, states have realized that the internet offers innovative opportunities for propaganda dissemination, which obviate the need for censorship. This approach, as described by Tim Wu (2017), is one of “speech itself as a censorial weapon.”

Governments are increasingly in the business of information generation. States are using the same tools they once perceived as a threat to deploy information technology as a means for consolidation and control, fuelling disinformation operations and disseminating government propaganda on a greater scale than ever before (Weedon, Nuland and Stamos 2017).

The new digital political landscape is one in which the state itself sows seeds of distrust in the media, fertilizes conspiracy and harvests the resulting fake news and disinformation to serve its own ends (Ball 2017; Marwick and Lewis 2017). Those ends chiefly include straightforwardly political ones: Freedom House (2017) reports disinformation tactics have been deployed in elections in 18 countries over the past year, with states deploying digital tools to fabricate grassroots support for government policies — “a closed loop in which the regime essentially endorses itself, leaving independent groups and ordinary citizens on the outside.” But these tools are also being deployed in pursuit of societal and cultural objectives. States are not only advancing their own agenda, but silencing the agendas of others, particularly those belonging to progressive or liberal causes.

Against this backdrop, state-sponsored trolling campaigns have emerged. Not content to merely observe online environments in which conspiracy, fake news and incivility marginalize critical voices, governments have deployed tools of digital repression to silence critical voices altogether. Using this information abundance strategy, states harness online hate mobs to harass, intimidate and discredit journalists, activists and academics perceived to be a threat. The approach is uniquely designed to the digital ecosystem, taking advantage of the viral qualities of social media to amplify state messaging, and deploying bots, hashtags and memes to disguise industrial campaigns as organic groundswells.

THE ANATOMY OF PATRIOTIC TROLLING

Existing analyses of this phenomena tend to take a one-dimensional view of what Freedom House calls “online content manipulation,” which sees disinformation, fake news and harassment campaigns tied together in an

untidy knot for which technology companies, states and individual citizens all bear the burden of untangling.

We surmise, however, that there is a distinct set of attacks that rise beyond general exploitation of digital infrastructures to the level of state-sponsored attack. Others have used the term “patriotic trolling” to refer to these campaigns in order to capture the shape of such campaigns, which often obscure, by design, the state’s role therein (Geybulla 2016; Etter 2017). The term mirrors that used to describe the state hacking campaigns carried out under the guise of independent hackers in an effort to mask their provenance (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010).

In our analysis, these patriotic trolling attacks around the globe share common features. Below, we describe these features, drawing on examples from more than 17 cases we studied over the past 18 months.

CRITICS IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Patriotic trolling attacks can be first identified by their targets and the actions by which they are triggered. Journalists, activists and others who criticize the government or its affiliates are prime targets. Journalists Marc Owen Jones, Martha Roldós, Arzu Geybulla and David French have all been subjected to trolling campaigns connected with the Bahraini, Ecuadorian, Azerbaijani and American governments, respectively. Media figures are often the targets of campaigns waged by the Turkish government. Often, media figures subjected to state-sponsored harassment are those reporting on patriotic trolling; this was the case for Maria Ressa, founder of Filipino media outlet Rappler, who suffered patriotic trolling after reporting on her government’s misuse of social media (Etter 2017; [Rappler.com](https://www.rappler.com) 2017). Human rights defenders such as Bahraini activist Maryam Al-Khawaja are also targeted by state-sponsored trolls.

THE LANGUAGE OF TROLLS

Although state-sponsored trolling attacks represent an innovative manipulation of new technologies, they largely fall back on well-established messaging tactics to seed distrust in mainstream media and turn public opinion against journalists and activists. This includes claims

of accusation of collusion with foreign intelligence agencies: Martha Roldós was accused of having a CIA affiliation, while Azeri journalist Arzu Geybulla was called an Armenian spy. Bahraini activist Maryam Al-Khawaja and her family were labelled terrorists and Iranian agents by government spokesmen, and Selin Girit was called an “English agent” by Turkish trolls. State-sponsored trolls also accuse targets of treason — for example, Venezuelan trolls labelled businessman Lorenzo Mendoza a traitor leading an economic war against the country. Government-backed bloggers in the Philippines attempted to trend #ArrestMariaRessa after Rappler published a transcript of the first phone conversation between US President Donald Trump and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (Posetti 2017). The campaign mirrored that previously waged against Senator Leila de Lima, recognized by Amnesty International as a “human rights defender under threat,” who was ultimately arrested after an online campaign urging #ArrestLeiladeLima (Etter 2017).

State-sponsored trolls overwhelmingly deploy overwhelming doses of violent hate speech. Female targets of government-backed harassment routinely receive rape threats and suffer from sexist and misogynistic language. Turkish journalist Ceyda Karan received explicit rape threats, with attackers threatening to “penetrate” her with a broken bottle, and Filipino journalist Maria Ressa received, on average, 90 hate messages an hour during one attack, including a call for her to be raped repeatedly until she died (Arsenault 2017).

In an interesting illustration of the high degree of manipulation embodied by state-sponsored attacks, trolls often accuse their targets of the very behaviours the state is engaging in. In numerous countries, for example, trolls make claims that targets are affiliated with Nazism or fascist elements. Politicians and their proxies use claims of “fake news” as a form of “dog whistle” to patriotic trolls, whose claims are then repeated and amplified by supporters.

Elaborate cartoons and memes are often used in trolling campaigns in Bahrain, a pattern seen in nearly all cases and across all countries.

BOTS AND ALGORITHMS

Demonstrating a savvy appropriation of emerging technical tools, state-sponsored trolling campaigns have used bots and gamed algorithms to amplify the effect of attacks. Bots, which serve not only to amplify attacks but to change their character — making a campaign seem more organic and widespread — have come to feature heavily in patriotic trolling attacks. They are more broadly deployed by political parties and movements to attack or drown out critics, boost follower numbers and magnify the messages of political candidates (Confessore et al. 2018; Howard and Woolley 2016). In Mexico, political bots were so commonly deployed by President Enrique Peña Nieto’s government that they were labelled Peñabots. In Ecuador, such bots were part of the campaign against journalist Martha Roldós. Bots also featured in campaigns in Turkey, where at least 18,000 bot accounts tweet in favour of President Erdoğan (Poyrazlar 2014).

Trolls “game” the algorithms of social media sites in order to increase pervasiveness of their messaging. For instance, trolls hijack hashtags in order to drown out legitimate expression. Trolls have co-opted hashtags at events where Maryam Al-Khawaja was speaking (Halvorssen 2011). This tactic was also used against Arzu Geybulla when she spoke at an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) event in Warsaw (Geybulla 2016).

ELECTION ANTECEDENTS

The infrastructure for patriotic trolling attacks in numerous countries have grown out of, or built upon, mechanisms established during election campaigns. Candidates and parties develop resources such as databases of supporters, committed campaign volunteers, social media influencing arms and dedicated communications channels that are deployed during elections to advance a party’s platform and undermine the opposition. Once a candidate or party is successful, these same resources are often used to consolidate and extend power; like a muscle trained to perform a particular task, once in government, politicians continue to campaign, using the same aggressive and often harmful tactics.

We have observed this pattern in a number of countries, including the Philippines, Ecuador and the United States. In Ecuador, former President

Correa's 2012 re-election campaign saw the candidate's first foray into social media manipulation, with the campaign establishing a dedicated email address and communication channel to tell supporters how to amplify campaign messages on social media platforms. The "Correistas" email list was part of a "social media manipulation plan" devised by a private public relations firm, Inteligencia Emocional, contracted by Correa. Leaked documents establish that Correa intended to use social media to promote positive messages and attack opponents (Ecuador Transparente 2016; Associated Whistleblowing Press and Ecuador Transparente 2015). After his election, Correa continued to use Correistas, along with another social media channel, Somos+. In announcing the channel, the president indicated his intention to deploy patriotic trolls in response to online dissent, saying: "People cannot insult or defame in the name of freedom of expression...if they send out a tweet, we will send 10,000 tweets calling you a coward" (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador SECOM 2015).

Filipino President Duterte admitted to paying trolls during his election campaign (Ranada 2017b). Analysis conducted by Filipino media outlet Rappler demonstrates that of 26 troll accounts key to Duterte's election campaign, many have remained active during his presidency; 12 million internet users have been co-opted into amplifying pro-Duterte trolling campaigns as a result (Etter 2017). The Duterte government has even elevated bloggers and social media influencers acting as trolls to governmental positions: blogger and actress Mocha Uson has been promoted to assistant communications secretary, and R. J. Nieto, who runs the influential pro-Duterte site Thinking Pinoy, has been hired as a consultant to the Department of Foreign Affairs (ibid.).

EMPLOYMENT OF "BLACK" PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRMS

So-called "black" public relations (PR) firms have also played an important role as hired proxies for state-sponsored trolling attacks, notably in Bahrain. These firms often offer "reputation laundering" services, which take many forms, including blogs maintained by fake personalities, using fake social media accounts and publishing hyper-partisan blogs and op-eds. The Bahraini government has spent \$32 million in contracts for at least 18 PR firms in the United Kingdom and United

States to improve its image domestically and abroad (Bahrain Watch 2013).

It can be tempting to dismiss reputation laundering as old hat — Western lobbyists and PR firms have lobbied for countries with abysmal human rights records for decades (Brogan 1993). However, their role in the online era is vastly more insidious. The work of black PR for governments can involve libellous attacks on perceived opponents, which in turn can provide fodder for patriotic trolling attacks at scale.

The work of two PR firms in Rwanda serves as a poignant example. In 2011-2012, BTP Advisers was revealed to have created an internet “attack site” to counter opponents of the government, and Racepoint similarly formally proposed erecting a “wall of defence” on the internet to “undercut” and “blunt” those opposed to Kagame’s regime (Newman 2011; York 2012).

Similarly, Olton, a British firm that has marketed itself as “specialis[ing] in the exploitation, collection, collation and fusion of Open Source Information,” is known to have contracted with Bahrain, and at least one of their employees has contracted with Bahrain’s Ministry of the Interior, the office housing the country’s domestic security apparatus (Desmukh 2011; Messieh 2011; Jones 2013). We surmise that attacks by black PR firms on targets will continue in the future, growing ever more invasive and precise, given the availability of cheap surveillance technology, ease of publishing online and an ever-increasing pool of data available on individuals. Experts have already highlighted the dangers that will exist in the future with the exploitation of publicly available data (Hu 2016).

MECHANISMS OF STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Attributing responsibility for actions in the online realm is at best imperfect and at worst impossible. Policy makers struggle to determine the source of cyber attacks, and analysts fall into the trap of “attribution fixation.” This attribution problem is even more difficult with harassment campaigns that take place primarily on social media platforms. Such campaigns appear spontaneous and organic by design, and thus even identifying the occurrence of a patriotic trolling attack is a challenge, let

alone isolating its origin and attributing responsibility for it to a particular actor.

We agree with the Atlantic Council that, for the purpose of policy making, the question of “who did it?” should be trumped by the question of “who is to blame?” (Healey 2012). Thus we prefer to categorize state-sponsored trolling attacks along a spectrum of state responsibility. We see four often overlapping mechanisms by which governments become responsible for online harassment campaigns.

STATE-EXECUTED CAMPAIGNS

In many contexts, harassment campaigns originate directly from state apparatus. State-funded and -directed “cyber militia” execute strategies designed by the government to disseminate propaganda, isolate dissenting views and drown out or remove anti-government sentiment.

Three broad forms of cyber militia are used by governments: volunteer, amateur and professional. Most commonly, governments use volunteers to undertake social media messaging and campaigns, in exchange for social capital and the protection of government allegiance. For example, in Azerbaijan, party-affiliated and government-funded youth groups act as a front for patriotic trolling initiatives. One such organization, Ireli, aims to “produce young people who can take an active part in the information war,” and volunteer youth group participants are enticed by the belief that posting a large amount of content will increase the likelihood of advancing into government positions (Geybulla 2016; News.az 2011). Similarly, the Turkish government maintains a volunteer group of 6,000 “social media representatives” spread across Turkey who receive training in Ankara to promote party perspectives and monitor online discussion (Albayrak and Parkinson 2013). Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte groomed a volunteer cyber militia of around 500 volunteers during this election campaign, eventually promoting key volunteers to government jobs after his election.

Some countries provide remuneration to their cyber militia, although members are still drawn from the general public; in China, for example, members of the “50 Cent Army” are paid nominal sums to engage in nationalistic propaganda (King, Pan and Roberts 2016). India’s Bharatiya

Janata Party Information Technology cell, a mix of volunteer and paid amateur trolls, tasks members daily with a messaging task and maintains a “hit list” of mainstream journalists who must be attacked (Chaturvedi 2016).

In countries such as Russia, patriotic trolling has been professionalized, with “troll farms” operating in a corporatized manner to support government social media campaigns. There are reportedly scores of such “farms” all around the country (Chen 2015; Soldatov and Borogan 2015).

STATE-DIRECTED OR STATE-COORDINATED CAMPAIGNS

In both Ecuador and Venezuela, we see governments directing or coordinating but not executing trolling attacks. State-coordinated campaigns use coordination channels to message committed supporters and volunteers, and outsource harassment campaigns to private actors. Venezuela is an example of the former approach; the Venezuelan Ministry of Communications and Information and its dependent office, the Bolivarian Integrated System of Content Generation in Venezuela, deploy telegram channels as a central messaging service, instructing participants and subscribers to disseminate certain messages, memes and hashtags. For example, in a campaign against Lorenzo Mendoza, CEO of Polar Foods, the Chavez en Red telegram channel directed supporters to troll Mendoza using the hashtag, #LorenzoEsEscasez (“Lorenzo is Scarcity”).¹

The Ecuadorian government has similarly used social media channels such as Somos+ to counter what the state cast as a “systematic smear campaign” by users who “abuse the anonymity and freedom that the social networks provide.” Ecuador also outsourced social media campaigns to private entities; one investigation revealed that private company Ribeney Sociedad Anonima was awarded a government contract for the operation of a troll centre (Morla 2015).

STATE-INCITED OR STATE-FUELLED CAMPAIGNS

Perhaps the most pernicious state-sponsored trolling campaigns are those in which the government maintains an arm’s-length distance, but nevertheless instigates and profits from attacks. Such methods rely on the

manipulation of internet users' psychology to ignite and sustain a campaign, and on the virality of online campaigns. Governments use high-profile proxies and other government stand-ins to signal state support for a particular attack, having long ago planted the seed in the minds of citizens that the patriotic trolling methodology was one the government supported.

The strategy of inciting or fuelling trolling campaigns has been witnessed in the United States, where hyper-partisan news outlets, such as Breitbart and sources close to President Donald Trump, signal to trolls who to target. This was the case with Erick Erickson, who, after being called “a major sleaze and buffoon” by President Trump on Twitter, was the subject of a Breitbart article that triggered an online trolling campaign. In Venezuela, former Vice President Diosdado Cabello, who currently hosts television show *Con el Mazo Dando* (“Hitting with the Sledgehammer”) on the Venezuelan state-owned TV channel VTV8, used the show and a telegram channel associated with it to encourage Twitter attacks on opposition politician Luis Florido using the hashtag #FloridoEresUnPajuo (“Florido, you’re a lying idiot”). Attacks on Florido lasted for days; they were vitriolic and crude, and frequently accused him of being a traitor to Venezuela.

In Turkey, journalist Ceyda Karan was subjected to a three-day trolling campaign in which two high-profile media actors played a key role: pro-Erdoğan journalist Fatih Tezcan, who has over 560,000 followers, and *Milet* newspaper editor-in-chief Bayram Zilan, a self-declared “AKP journalist,”² with 49,000 followers. Both played a central role in a campaign that saw more than 13,000 tweets against Karan, involving 5,800 Twitter users.

STATE-LEVERAGED OR STATE-ENDORSED CAMPAIGNS

As patriotic trolling attacks become more common, they also become seemingly more remote from state institutions. In perhaps the most cynical manipulation of online behaviours, governments point to the existence of seemingly independent groundswells of public opinion to justify and legitimize state positions. In doing so, they signal to internet

users their tacit approval of harassment campaigns and implicitly promise impunity for perpetrators.

We have seen this tactic in China, where the Chinese state pointed to online abuse of a French journalist to justify a conclusion that the journalist was “hurting the feelings of the Chinese people” and refusing to renew her visa (Phillips 2015; Su 2016). Indian Prime Minister Modi follows at least 26 known troll Twitter accounts, and hosted a reception attended by many of the same trolls (Chaturvedi 2016, 43; *The Quint* 2015). Similarly, Filipino President Duterte has given bloggers active in online harassment campaigns accreditation to cover presidential foreign and local trips (Ranada 2017a).

DEVELOPING POLICY INTERVENTIONS

In creating our conceptual framework for assigning state responsibility, we have tried to transcend outright denials by states and begin to assert state liability for online harassment campaigns. But establishing that states are in the business of patriotic trolling, a significant obstacle in itself, is only one part of a much larger challenge: prescribing policy solutions for state-sponsored trolling campaigns.

We hope this chapter constitutes an important first step in addressing that challenge by adding some additional colour to a previously one-dimensional discussion, by first establishing that it is possible to identify instances in which states are taking targeted action to weaponize online information against specific individuals. Further, we believe this phenomenon should be addressed through policy interventions originating in a diverse range of policy communities. Namely, we see the possibility for effective policy responses coming from international human rights law, US law and technology companies.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Understandings of international human rights law need to expand and evolve to recognize that state-sponsored patriotic trolling attacks amount to a violation of states’ obligations.

The fact that such attacks happen online does not mean human rights law has no relevance to them; the major international human rights policy-making bodies have recognized all human rights apply equally online as they apply offline in the Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Internet 2011 (UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression et al. 2011; 2012). The weaponization of information in the form of patriotic trolling attacks thus constitutes an interference with individuals' right to freedom of expression and opinion,³ which encapsulates a right not only to impart but also to seek and receive information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers (UN General Assembly 1948; UN Human Rights Committee 2011; UN General Assembly 1966; Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights 2013; Organization of African Unity 1981; Organization of American States 1969; Council of Europe 1989).

International human rights law is not a rigid legal code and it permits restrictions on the right to freedom of expression in accordance with strict conditions. Permissible limitations on free expression are those that are provided by law, necessary to meet a legitimate objective and proportionate to that objective.⁴ Under international law, the only legitimate objectives restrictions can be aimed at are to respect the rights or reputations of others or to protect national security or public order (*ordre public*), or public health or morals.⁵

International human rights law does not permit states to restrict the individual right to freedom of speech and access to information in order to levy online campaigns designed to minimize and silence dissenting speech or to remove critics from the public stage. It does not permit the purposeful dissemination of fake news and the harnessing of bots and other digital tools to drown out progressive liberal-minded information and to intimidate journalists and activists. It does not allow states to harass and intimidate individuals through the use of violent speech and imagery.

On the contrary, human rights law requires states to take positive measures to protect individual human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Somewhat controversially, international human rights law also requires states to take action to prohibit, by law, forms of expression generally known as “hate speech.” Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.” The Inter-American Convention on Human Rights contains a similar provision,⁶ but the European Convention on Human Rights does not. Hate speech is nevertheless equally prohibited under European human rights law, and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has dealt with its conflict with freedom of expression rights by deploying Article 17 of the Convention, which prohibits the destruction of human rights.⁷

The purpose of Article 17, the Council of Europe has argued, is “to prevent the principles enshrined in the ECHR from being embezzled by [for example, purveyors of hate speech], at their own advantage, whose actions aim at destroying those same principles” (Weber 2009, 23). To this end, the ECHR⁸ found that Article 17 excludes from human rights protection the establishment of totalitarian political doctrine,⁹ expression that constitutes the denial or justification of crimes against humanity, such as the Holocaust, linked with incitement to religious discrimination,¹⁰ incitement to racial discrimination,¹¹ and incitement to religious discrimination.¹²

The ECHR’s approach lays bare an important distinction: not all forms of hate speech are unlawful. The term is too vague to use in any meaningful way, given lack of agreement about what constitutes hate speech, its frequent situation-specific redefinition and evolving societal attitudes toward equality and discrimination. As a result, general prohibitions on “hate speech” may be used to silence or censor legitimate speech. Rather, the prevention and restriction of hate speech must take place only in

contexts in which the speech rises to the level of incitement to hostility, discrimination or violence (Article 19 2015).

Although a comprehensive exploration of what constitutes prohibited hate speech under international human rights law is beyond the scope of this chapter, generally speaking, the definition of hate speech that may be suppressed or prohibited excludes from its application speech that is offensive, disturbing or shocking, blasphemy or “defamation of religion,” and defamation (ibid.). Its fundamental elements include intent (the perpetrator must have intended to incite hatred), incitement (there must be a nexus between the statements and the proscribed result) and context (a critical element; what was the likely impact of the statement in the particular context in which it was made?) (Mendel 2010).

Even under this higher threshold of hate speech — one which requires a connection between hate speech and incitement to violence or discrimination — there is a strong argument that the types of expression embraced by states in patriotic trolling attacks should not enjoy the protection of freedom of expression, but rather that they constitute hate speech that should be prohibited. This is particularly the case in state-sponsored campaigns that embrace incitement to violence against targets on the lines of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

The European Union has recently taken steps to curtail the proliferation of online hate speech by developing a code of conduct for illegal online hate speech, to which a number of tech companies and platforms have made a series of commitments (European Commission 2016). These commitments include putting in place effective processes to review notifications regarding illegal hate speech on platforms in order to remove or disable content expeditiously; the review of notifications of illegal hate speech within 24 hours and removal or disabling of content; the establishment of “trusted flagging” mechanisms, whereby experts and civil society organizations have an elevated ability to flag illegal hate speech; identifying and promoting counter-narratives and encouraging critical thinking; and countering hateful rhetoric and prejudice at scale. The initiative, while well intentioned, illustrates the difficulty of regulating

hate speech online, and has garnered widespread criticism from free-expression advocates in Europe.

We agree with some but not all of these criticisms. It is certainly true that placing responsibilities on private sector entities to remove or disable content according to ill-defined definitions of illegal hate speech, definitions that differ across jurisdictions and cultures, could incentivize the regulation and restriction of legitimate online speech with negative consequences for free-expression rights. However, it seems to us that the old adage of fighting hate speech with more speech is rendered ineffective by modern social media platforms, whose algorithms do not provide an equal playing field for all online speech. Those platforms do not constitute an empty page on which every internet user has an equal right to write; they manipulate the dissemination of information according to commercial imperatives, prioritizing high-engagement, often controversial material. Developing measures designed to rectify the imbalance by requiring platforms to detect and, in some cases, remove hate speech, harassment and disinformation, seem to us to be a legitimate demand on social media platforms. Provided such measures are implemented in a transparent and accountable manner that respects due process and reinforces human rights, they could make the online sphere more hospitable to a plurality of voices.

US LAW

It is no accident of jurisdiction that the major technology companies are domiciled in the United States. Social media platforms are both a product and beneficiary of the First Amendment, one of the world's most permissive free speech regimes. The US Constitution "demands that content-based restrictions on speech be presumed invalid."¹³

At the risk of simplifying the status of hate speech under US law (with respect to which there is a rich and extensive jurisprudential history not examined here), expression cannot be prohibited even when it advocates the use of force or violence, except where such speech is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such an action.¹⁴ This amounts to a far higher threshold for

prohibiting hate speech than that which exists under international human rights law, as it requires a link between the speech in question and immediate injury or harm; expression that can be restricted includes “conduct that itself inflicts injury or tends to incite immediate violence.”¹⁵

We are not US legal experts and do not seek to opine on the possible legal routes for bringing state-sponsored trolling that occurs on US-based social media platforms and other intermediaries within the scope of exceptions to the First Amendment. Rather, we only highlight possible options for reconciling the First Amendment with online harassment campaigns, as suggested by others.

In his essay, “Is the First Amendment Obsolete?” Tim Wu (2017) addresses head-on how “the rise of abusive online mobs who seek to wear down targeted speakers...directly employed by, loosely associated with, or merely aligned with the goals of the government or particular politicians,” renders the First Amendment and its jurisprudence “a bystander in an age of aggressive efforts to propagandize and control online speech.” Wu suggests two opposing ways through this impotence:

- Accept a limited First Amendment, and advocate instead for increased liability on the part of technology companies, “the most important speech brokers of our time,” equivalent to the norms and policies traditionally associated with twentieth-century journalism.
- Find a way for the First Amendment to adapt to twenty-first-century challenges such as patriotic trolling. In this regard, Wu sees a few possible adaptations. These include:
 - Utilize the First Amendment’s accomplice liability doctrine to establish that online harassment campaigns that involve governments or politicians as a form of state action, which limits constitutional scrutiny of actions taken by the state.
 - Expand the state action doctrine to encompass the conduct of major speech platforms, an option that strikes Wu as unpromising and undesirable.

- Build upon existing hate speech prohibitions that are permitted by the First Amendment, such as the federal cyberstalking statute.

In line with Wu’s final suggestion, Tim Hwang argues for a “well-calibrated modification” of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996 (CDA 230), a provision that shields social media platforms from legal liability for the actions of third-party users of their services (Hwang 2017). Whereas under European human rights law internet intermediaries become liable for the speech of their users under certain circumstances,¹⁶ no such obligation exists under US law, an omission that has been seen as a driver of innovation in online services. Hwang, considering how the active spreading of political disinformation (including, but not exclusively, by state-sponsored actors) can be countered, discounts efforts such as requiring disclosure and verification of real identities on platforms, or restricting the access of perpetrators of political disinformation to advertising platforms, as short term — and ultimately ineffective — salves. He also advocates against exempting the dissemination of falsehoods, defamatory statements or invasions of privacy from CDA 230. Rather, he supports creating exceptions to the CDA for a number of existing laws and possible new regulations, such as:

- portions of the Federal Election Campaign Act that prohibit foreign interests in engaging in activities to shape elections;
- new regulation to require data brokers to enable citizens to scrutinize and opt out of their personal data being used for microtargeting;
- new regulation requiring those involved in the collection of voter data to disclose data processing to individuals; and
- exceptions for fraudulent activity in order to target unlabelled bots or paid agents purporting to be genuine users.

By removing the application of CDA 230 in these and other limited circumstances, platforms would have a legal obligation to ensure compliance by users with the aforementioned laws. Such modifications, Hwang argues, “may go a long way in helping to give the public and civil society a fighting chance by encouraging platforms to stabilize and

balance the marketplaces of ideas they own and operate. Of particular importance is the reduction or elimination of techniques of distribution that — regardless of the truth or falsity of the messages channelled through them — erode trust in public discourse and democratic processes” (ibid.).

The prospect of amending and evolving electoral regulation holds particular promise, even outside of the realm of CDA 230. Given the prominence of patriotic trolling attacks during and after the election, targeted policy making in the field of electoral regulation could have a significant impact on the prevalence of state-sponsored harassment campaigns, particularly those that occur cross border. This would critically require ensuring that activities conducted on social media platforms that cannot be easily categorized as political advertising are brought within the ambit of regulation that restricts the amount of investment in political campaigning and that speaks to the origin and destination of campaigning funds.

Debates are already underway about how electoral regulation both within the United States and outside of it may evolve to take into account the new realities. In the US Congress, *The Honest Ads Act*, a bipartisan bill, is aimed at ensuring political ads sold online comply with the same rules and transparency obligations as those that apply to television and radio advertisements (Romm 2017). The British data regulator, the Information Commissioner’s Office, has already announced an investigation into “the use of data analytics for political purposes,” responding to concerns raised about the role of foreign actors and companies in the Leave campaign for Brexit (Booth 2017).

TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

The slow pace of legal change means that the possible changes in law and regulation suggested above are unlikely to effectively stem the practice of patriotic trolling in the short term. In the long term, it is likely that any regulatory adaptations will once again be outpaced by technological advancements. If the law catches up, states will find new ways to weaponize digital technologies against critics and dissenters. As a result, technology companies bear not only the shared responsibility but the sole

ability to curb the practice and effects of state-sponsored harassment campaigns.

Social media platforms have long resisted the imposition of liability, and what responsibilities they have voluntarily assumed, they have assumed begrudgingly. Defenders of online freedoms have been reluctant to pressure platforms to take a more proactive role in moderating and shaping the content they host, fearing that platforms will take a heavy-handed or cautious approach to content moderation, or become compromised as a tool for state control or censorship. But at this chapter illustrates, social media networks are already captured, curated and controlled: by the algorithms that underpin them; and by actors operationalizing them for pernicious means. Whether they like it or not, platforms are no longer intermediaries; they take a position on the types of behaviour and information they promote or suppress, either through their acts or their omissions.

As social media networks acknowledge their transformation from neutral platform to publisher, they can ensure their position is no longer defined by their omissions but by their acts. Those acts should include measures designed to identify and de-amplify state-sponsored harassment and hate campaigns. To this end, such companies should consider the steps below.

Detect and Identify State-linked Accounts

If technology providers were to assist users in identifying when an account or message originates from a state-linked or promoted account, they would assist internet users in a number of respects. A key feature of patriotic trolling campaigns is their seemingly organic and informal nature, which both co-opts unsuspecting internet users into supporting the campaign, and also amplifies the effect of the attack on the target, who perceives a seemingly spontaneous groundswell of public opinion against them. Platforms could develop the capability to detect when an attack has its origin in a government actor or government proxy, or when a certain set of activities has links to political actors or resembles similar events, and flag such attacks for users.

Detect and Identify Bots

Detecting and identifying the existence of bots on their networks would be a simple but effective means of diluting the impact of patriotic trolling campaigns. Bot detection, although an inexact science, is technically possible and holds great promise for liberating online platforms from the grasp of those who wish to weaponize it. Furthermore, the sheer volume of messages is a tool that silences targets of such campaigns, and if that volume could be reduced by developing a means to filter out bots and automated messages, the impact of state-sponsored attacks would be further limited.

In this vein, another simple fix would be for platforms to design their infrastructure to require bots or automated accounts to be identified as such by the user. Under such a proposal, bots would have a marker or warning that they are automated accounts. This would have minimal negative impact on the free flow of information, while equipping social media users to take a critical approach to content shared by an automated account. Wikipedia has notably already used a similar approach (Gorwa 2017).

Improve Reporting Mechanisms and Responsiveness

Social media platforms are under continuous pressure to improve mechanisms for reporting inappropriate and illegal content. We wish to add to that pressure by reiterating that patriotic trolling targets are reliant on social networks to remove content that has been flagged expeditiously. We recognize automatic removal of flagged content is not consistent with internet users' free expression rights, and that there is necessarily a lag between reporting and removal. However, platforms could go further by identifying content as "flagged" or "reported content" immediately, such that other users can identify it as such during the period between reporting and removal. This would also assist in potentially countering fake news and disinformation; platforms could develop a means for allowing users to contest the veracity of online content that would immediately notify other users that there has been a claim of falsity that must be verified.

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1 Data and case study for Venezuela were provided by Marianne Diaz, a contributor at *Global Voices* and director of the non-governmental organization Acceso Libre.

2 AKP stands for the Justice and Development Party, which is the ruling party in Turkey.

3 Enshrined in article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, as well as the *European Convention on Human Rights* (article 10), the *European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights* (article 11), the *American Convention on Human Rights* (Article 13), the *African Charter on Human and People's Rights* (article 9) and the *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration* (article 23).

4 This test has been restated in numerous international human rights instruments, notably in the Human Right Committee's General Comment No. 34.

5 Article 19 (3).

6 A similar provision is found in article 13 of the *Inter-American Convention on Human Rights*.

- 7 “There is no doubt that any remark directed against the Convention’s underlying values would be removed from the protection of Article 10 [freedom of expression] by Article 17 [prohibition of abuse of rights]” (*Seurot v France*, Application no. 57383/00, decision on the admissibility of May 18, 2004).
- 8 And its predecessor, the European Commission on Human Rights.
- 9 *B. H, M. W., H. P. and G. K. v Austria*, Application No. 12774/87, decision of the Commission, October 12, 1989.
- 10 *Lehideux and Isorni v France* [GC], judgment of September 23, 1998.
- 11 *Glimmerveen and Hagenbeek v the Netherlands*, Application Nos. 8348/78 and 8406.78, decision of the Commission, October 11, 1979.
- 12 *Norwood v United Kingdom*, Application No. 23131/03, decision on admissibility, November 16, 2004.
- 13 *Ashcroft v American Civil Liberties Union*, 542 U.S. 656, 660.
- 14 *Brandenburg v Ohio* (No. 492), USSC, Decision of June 9, 1969.
- 15 *R.A.V. v St. Paul, Minnesota*, 1992.
- 16 *Delfi AS v Estonia*, Application No. 64569/09, European Court of Human Rights (GC) judgment of June 16, 2015.



24

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESPONSE AS SEEN THROUGH THE SYRIA CONFLICT MAPPING PROJECT

CHRIS MCNABOE

INTRODUCTION

Social media use has formed an essential part of nearly all major social movements of the past decade — the Arab Spring in particular. In the case of many of these movements, what began as peaceful protests quickly transformed into violent conflict. The use of social media both facilitated and changed the way in which social movements and armed insurrections developed.

With this change came an opportunity because of the quantifiable nature of online engagement. Online interactions leave traces — data trails for researchers. For political scientists and conflict analysts, the

interrelationship between social movements and social media content presents an excellent opportunity for observing these social changes.

The use of social media over the course of the Syrian conflict has been so prevalent that there appear to be more minutes of video posted online than there have been minutes of real time.¹ In addition to these videos are countless tweets, blog posts, Facebook posts, activist reports and more. Combined, they offer an unprecedented view of ongoing conflicts. Mediators and humanitarian organizations wishing to respond to the conflict have been able to map and monitor the changing front lines, evolving relationships between actors, the status of vulnerable civilians, the flow of weaponry, atrocities and, more recently, violations of ceasefire agreements.

Just as new media was not a panacea for conflict response, a social media lens is not without its imperfections. There are biases related to socioeconomic status, age, infrastructure and political affiliation. Additionally, while new media in modern conflict provides an unprecedented amount of new information, its very existence changes the way in which conflicts develop. These imperfections notwithstanding, the growing use of social media has changed the way the world engages in and responds to conflict.

IMPERFECT REFLECTIONS

For researchers, one of the most readily available social media databases (and therefore one of the most widely used) is Twitter. Tweets contain only a small amount of unstructured content, but contain a remarkable amount of structured information. A single tweet contains information on who sent it, who retweeted it, who “liked” it, who commented on it, how those various users are connected and, of course, the information in the tweet and comments themselves, which can contain hashtags, URLs, photos, videos and more.

Twitter is also mobile-friendly and allows users to include geographical information in their tweets. This fact, combined with a thriving community of users interested in current affairs, makes Twitter data all the

more appealing to researchers interested in understanding current events and ongoing major developments, such as mass protests. Making this database even more attractive are the numerous companies and academic institutions that are constantly archiving Twitter data, ensuring a constant supply of historical and real-time data — so much so that the full stream of Twitter data is appropriately called “the Firehose.”

An unfortunate side effect of this treasure trove of data is that the temptation to use it often results in what is commonly referred to as “the streetlight effect.” The effect is named after an old joke, in which a drunk, having lost his keys in a stupor, is found looking for them under a streetlight. A helpful passerby joins in his search, but after a few minutes of fruitless hunting, asks the man, “Are you sure you dropped them here?” To which the drunk responds, “No, I lost them in the pub!” Confused, the passerby asks, “Then why are you looking out here?” To which the drunk responds, “Because the light’s better here!” The story, a favourite among data scientists, recognizes that we often have a tendency to look for information where it’s readily available, regardless of whether or not it’s the most likely place to find what we’re looking for.

Such is the case with Twitter data in a conflict zone. A database of time-stamped, geo-located conversations about an ongoing crisis, complete with information on how users are connected sounds like just the place to look — but are those under fire really all that likely to be tweeting? And if one party to the conflict controls access to utilities and the internet, would they disrupt the provision of these services to those with whom they are fighting? What about relevant socioeconomic divisions? Not everyone has a Twitter-capable smart phone, internet access or is computer literate, and it is often those very people who are most affected by conflict. Perhaps most important, does a representative sample of the population feel safe enough tweeting information about an ongoing violent conflict, or will they self-censor?

On occasion, the biases in a given database are so stark that they begin to be useful again. Such is the case with Twitter data from Syria. Approximately one percent of the full firehose of Twitter data is geo-tagged (meaning it contains a precise latitude and longitude) (Morstatter

et al. 2013). Despite this low percentage, given that a database can span a long period of time, patterns begin to emerge. For example, a map of geo-tagged tweets from 2012, superimposed with areas of opposition activity at the start of the battle for Aleppo, which began in July of the same year, shows a clear divide in the city (see [Figure 1](#)). Nearly all geo-tagged tweets emanated from areas of government control.

A map of Damascus during the same time period shows an almost identical pattern (see [Figure 2](#)). With the conflict in full swing by January 2012, not a single geo-tagged tweet was recorded in the opposition strongholds of Duma, Irbin or Darayya, or the entire eastern countryside.

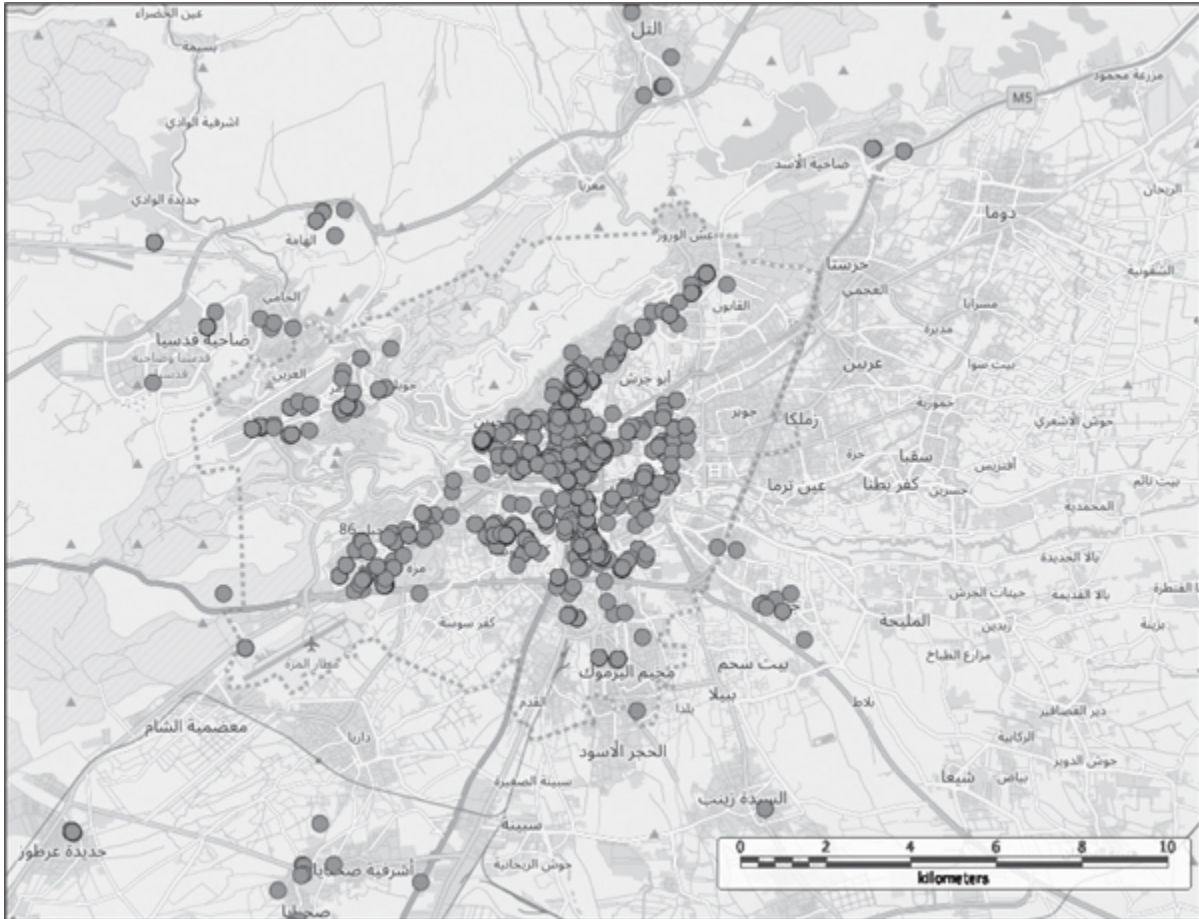
The starkness of the divide in the case of both Aleppo and Damascus is shocking. In the capital city of Damascus, tweet density is high enough to return a near-perfect map of areas of control in the capital. Although front lines have shifted somewhat over the course of the conflict, this snapshot taken early in the conflict would prove prophetic. Years later, the Syrian capital of Damascus and Syria's most populous city, Aleppo, are still divided along almost the exact same lines as seen in the Twitter data of 2012.

Figure 1: Aleppo, Geo-tagged Tweets (2012)



Source: Author. Visualization made using software provided by Palantir Technologies.

Figure 2: Damascus, Geo-tagged Tweets (2012)



Source: Author. Visualization made using software provided by Palantir Technologies.

TWITTER SOCIAL NETWORKS

This clear bias in geo-tagged Twitter data means that researchers hoping to analyze changes in narratives or sentiment over time must be aware that they are likely viewing an unrepresentative subset of the conversation. However, while there were no geo-tagged tweets from areas of opposition control, there were — and still are — a large number of opposition fighters and activists engaging on Twitter. Even though biases exist in the geographical distribution of tweets, as mentioned previously, there are a multitude of other ways to view Twitter data. One approach is to conduct an analysis of social networks on the platform.

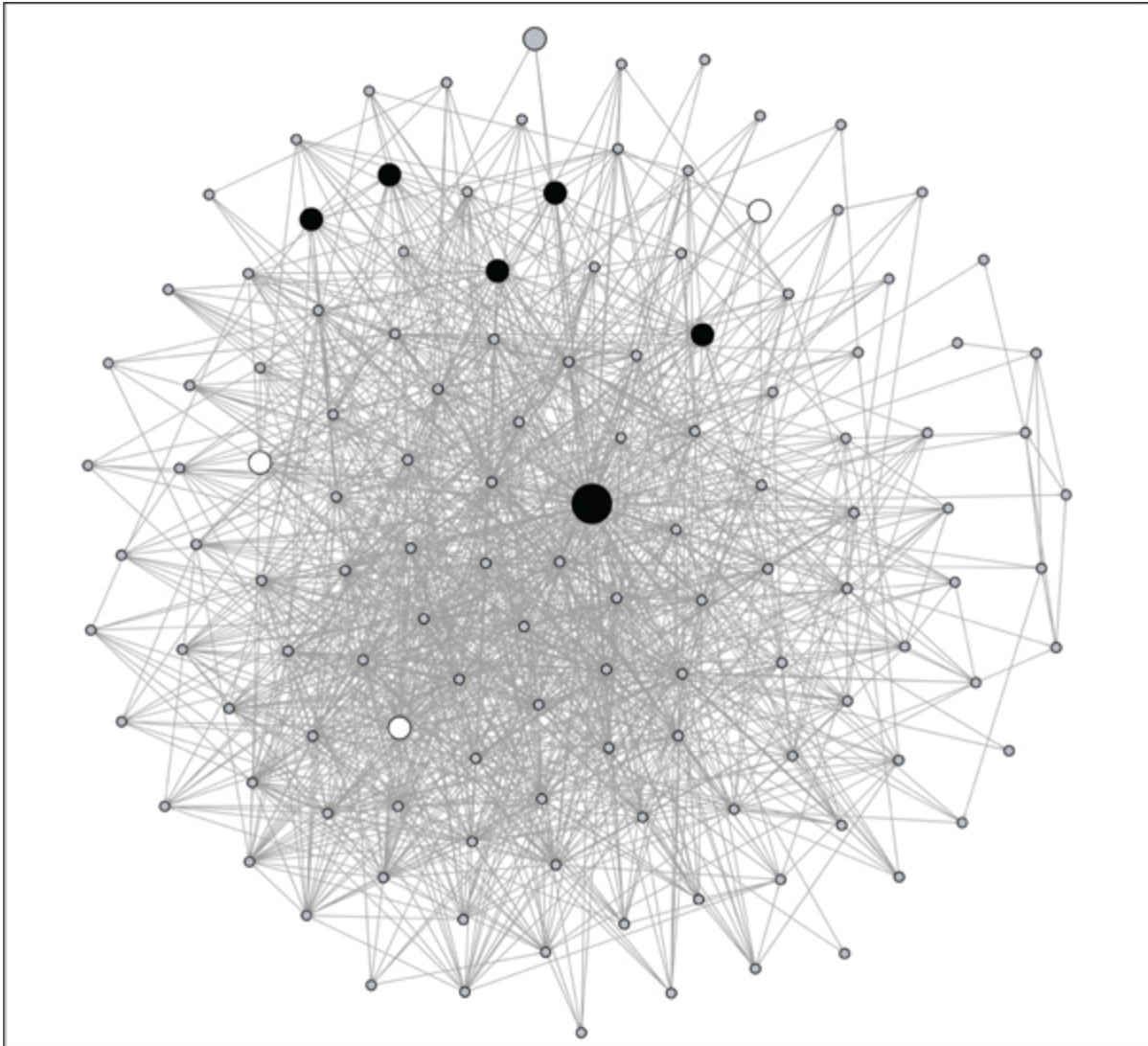
Who does an armed group follow on Twitter? With complete lists of “follow-follow” relationships being publicly available on Twitter, answering this question becomes a simple matter of connecting the dots —

literally. Twitter's interface allows researchers to download structured information on relations between Twitter accounts, which can then be visualized and explored with relative ease. As the first major battles broke out in Syria, a growing number of armed opposition groups began to announce themselves and report openly on their activities.

In the central Syrian city of Homs, one such armed group became widely known for its role in holding the southern district of Baba Amro during a prolonged siege by the Syrian military. The group, which was one of the larger armed opposition formations at the time, maintained close ties with the nascent opposition's leadership, had been in close contact with the UN Observer Mission, and enjoyed a strong local support network. They also followed more than 70 accounts on Twitter and amassed a large following of their own.

A network graph (see [Figure 3](#)) shows a visual representation of the connections made by this armed group. Seventy-two small grey nodes represent Saudi or Kuwaiti Sunni activists — many of whom had been jailed by their respective governments for outspoken sectarianism or political action. Three large white nodes represent Twitter accounts that belong to public figures: one belonging to the editor of *al-Quds al-Arabi*, the second to a London-based Palestinian academic and Islamist, and the third belonging (seemingly randomly) to an Iraqi pop singer. A single large black node in the diagram belongs to the Qatari Ministry of the Interior, and the five smaller black nodes represent three pro-opposition news-focused accounts and two individuals whose identity could not be positively identified.

Figure 3: Twitter Accounts Followed by Intentionally Unnamed Syrian Armed Group (July 2012)



Source: Author.

Nearly all of the individuals “followed” by the armed group were of fundamentalist Islamist persuasions, and those that weren’t were clearly on the periphery of the network. Many of the Islamists were scholars of Islamic jurisprudence in Saudi universities or imams of mosques. Most of the individuals are closely linked with each other as well.

Again, given the public nature of Twitter, it was readily apparent that the network of individuals was primarily interested in discussing issues facing Muslims worldwide, specifically focusing on Egypt, Yemen and Syria. Many of the individuals expressed often virulent anti-Shia stances, and nearly all openly advocated funding the Free Syrian Army.

Indeed, despite the many commonalities between the individuals that the Homs-based armed group chose to engage with, the primary attraction to this network of individuals appeared to be the potential for funding. It was also apparent that the administrator of the armed group's account went about building the network with obvious intent. Once a connection was made, the administrator would thank the new connection for "returning the follow" and then ask if that person could put them in contact with yet another individual. In some cases, these requests were publicly accepted, with a note to expect a direct (private) message from their new contact.

Several of these core connections were in charge of charitable foundations and nearly all people in the network advocated funding Syrian armed groups or actively bragged about doing so. They hosted private fundraising parties, publicly posted bank account numbers through which individuals could contribute to the cause and even photographed themselves on trips to the region. Before long, a fair number of the individuals in this network formed a new fundraising organization and were soon photographed alongside armed group commanders while visiting their beneficiaries.

While the connections between these armed groups and seemingly more sectarian-minded individuals in the Gulf were apparent, what remained unclear was the intent behind them. The motivations of the Saudi and Kuwaiti connections seemed apparent — they were evangelists for their cause — but did the armed group's link to them equate to an endorsement of this more sectarian narrative? The primordial leadership of the Free Syrian Army at the time was declaredly secular — was this evidence to the contrary or simply an attempt to secure desperately needed funding?

Comparative analyses of other armed groups' networks showed none of the same connections. Many contemporary armed groups only seemed interested in connecting with local activists, prominent Syrian voices and the growing "local coordination committees" that were organizing opposition activism. However, in following the network of Saudi and Kuwaiti funders, many of whom had since formed themselves into the "Committee for Popular Zakat,"² they were obviously reaching out to, and funding, a growing number of armed opposition groups throughout Syria. Whether or not the armed opposition movement in Syria began with

sectarian intent, the growing influence of sectarian actors was readily apparent less than a year into the violent conflict.

Despite the heavy biases built into Twitter data, these early investigations shed some light on a rapidly changing and complex conflict. But the presence of this information raised as many questions as it answered. Was new technology allowing analysts to view that which was previously opaque or was it changing the nature of the conflict itself? Would these connections have been made if the actors involved did not have access to Twitter? Would the crowdfunding approach employed by the Committee for Popular Zakat have been possible if not for social media? Whatever limited information about the conflict that could be gleaned from these imperfect databases was also tainted as a result of the observer's paradox.

Regardless of the intent behind the establishment of these connections online, it became readily apparent to armed groups that active engagement with social media could only help their cause. It served as a soapbox from which to promote their efforts, a forum for communicating with activists and a channel for connecting with potential supporters. True, engaging openly on social media put people at great risk and, as a result, some paid the ultimate price for it. But, even given these risks, the benefits were clear. These early lessons meant that the Syrian conflict, and indeed most other conflicts that have begun since, would be waged as much in the digital world as the physical one.

YOUTUBE DEFECTIONS

In the Syrian conflict, even before armed groups began building support networks online, there were a large number of opposition figures taking to social media to promote their cause. As the military was called in to break up the growing protests across the country, soldiers began defecting in protest. These soldiers and officers did not simply walk away from their posts and join the ranks of the opposition — they took to social media to make their defections widely known.

The first few soldiers to announce their defections via YouTube did so in a very formulaic way. They gave their name, rank and division before describing where they had been operating, why they were defecting and

what they planned to do afterward. To confirm their defection, these soldiers held up their identity card to the camera — close enough to be easily read, flipping it around to show the front and back of the document. This format quickly became a standard means of defecting and was widely adopted across the country.

What started with a trickle of individual defections soon became a flood. Both individuals and groups of soldiers started to consistently announce their defections, beginning in the summer of 2011 and continuing well into late 2012. By early 2012, entire units of more than 500 soldiers began defecting en masse. Nearly all of these defectors structured their announcement in the same way as the earliest defectors — and continued to show their identity cards in all but the largest of defections.

Taken as a whole, the amount of raw information provided by defectors was almost unmanageably large. Information on the ranks and divisions of defectors was so common that it could be used to reverse-engineer the structure of the Syrian military, and to learn which divisions had been accused of firing on protesters, which had defected en masse, which were being deployed to which areas, and so on.

Just as with Twitter data, this information was not comprehensive and certainly not without its biases. Even so, the sheer amount was staggering. A manually collected database of publicly available defections and armed group formations announced during the first ceasefire attempt showed nearly 14,000 fighters between March and August 2012 alone (see [Figure 4](#)).

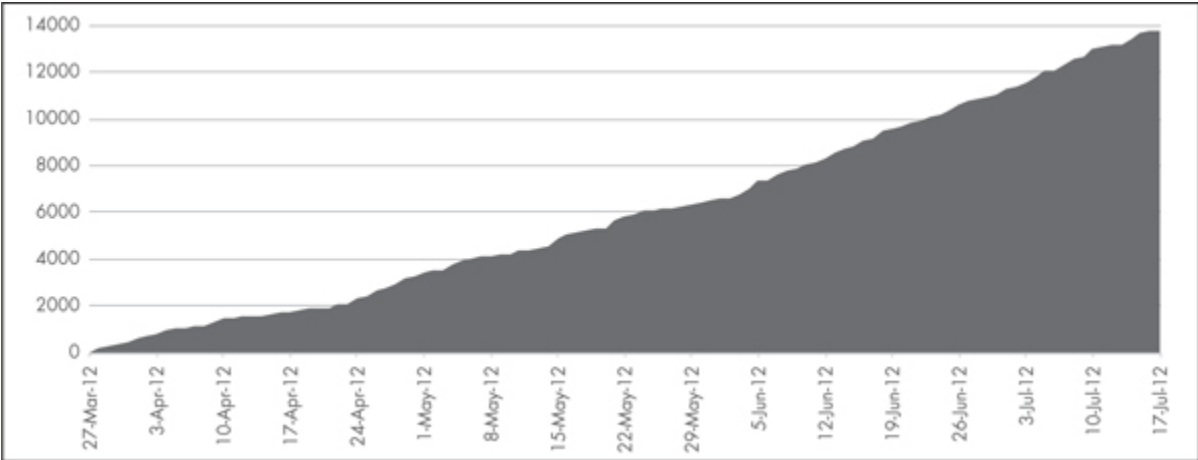
This wealth of new information showed that not only was the armed opposition growing at a rapid rate, but it also appeared to be completely unaffected by political or military developments — a factor that contributed to the failure of the ceasefire in late May of the same year.

While the nationwide growth in opposition forces during this time period was almost completely linear, it was not uniform. Different regions of Syria saw vastly different rates of growth in opposition forces (see [Figure 5](#)). Similarly, the rate of defection of high-ranking defectors appeared to be closely tied to political developments: when something occurred that

made the position of the Syrian government untenable, more generals were seen to defect (see [Figure 6](#)).

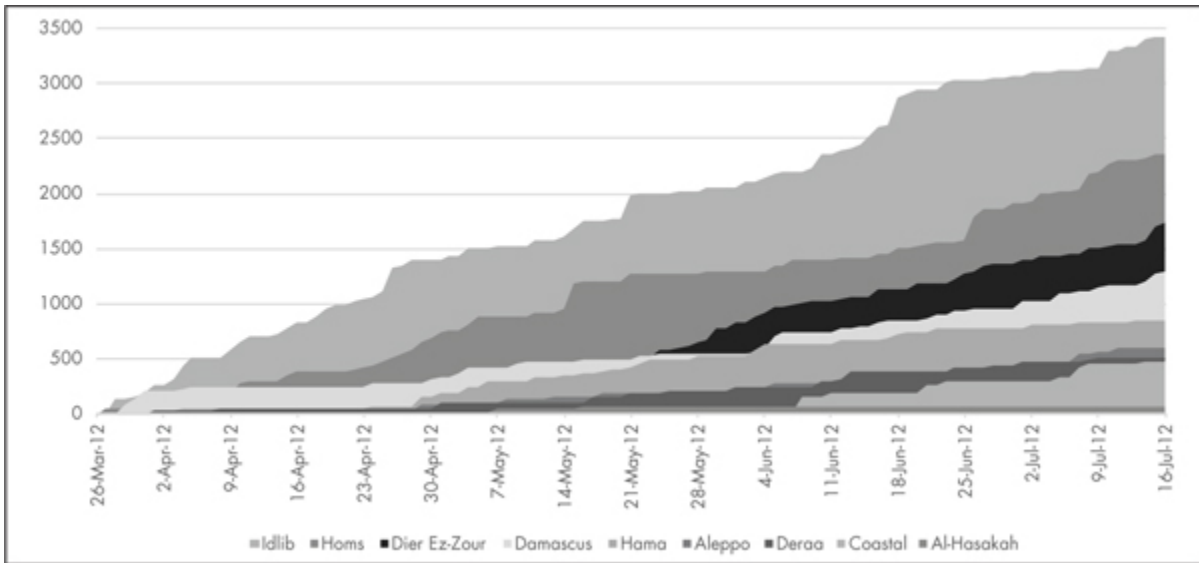
Reports derived from this newly available data were shared with envoy Kofi Annan and his team, warning of a growing internationalization of the conflict as well as a continued rise in militancy throughout the country. The success of these initial research efforts led to the Carter Center forming the Syria Conflict Mapping Project in an attempt to glean what information it could from the growing sea of social media data.

Figure 4: Number of Fighters Seen in Defection and Armed Group Formation Videos (March 27, 2012, to July 10, 2012)



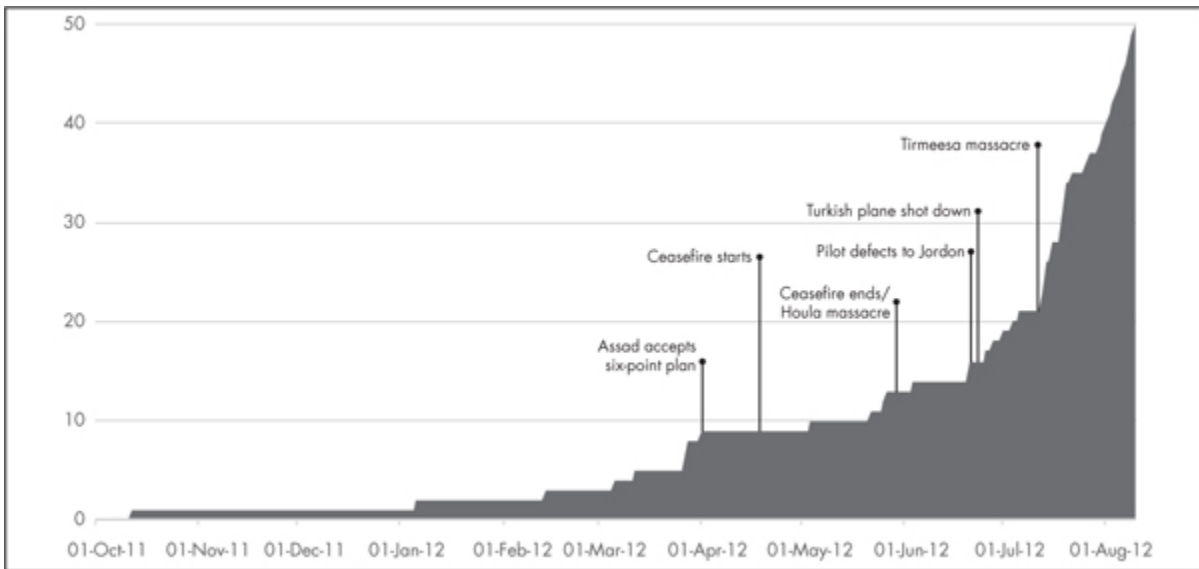
Source: Author.

Figure 5: Number of Fighters Seen in Defection and Armed Group Formation Videos, by Region (March 25, 2012, to July 15, 2012)



Source: Author.

Figure 6: Number of Known Defections of Generals (October 2011 to August 2012)



Sources: Author.

ARMED GROUP FORMATIONS

As defections continued, larger and larger opposition groups began to form. Building off the precedent set by defectors, these armed groups announced their formation via YouTube, and, like the defectors, provided an incredible amount of useful information. Soliciting the help of a small

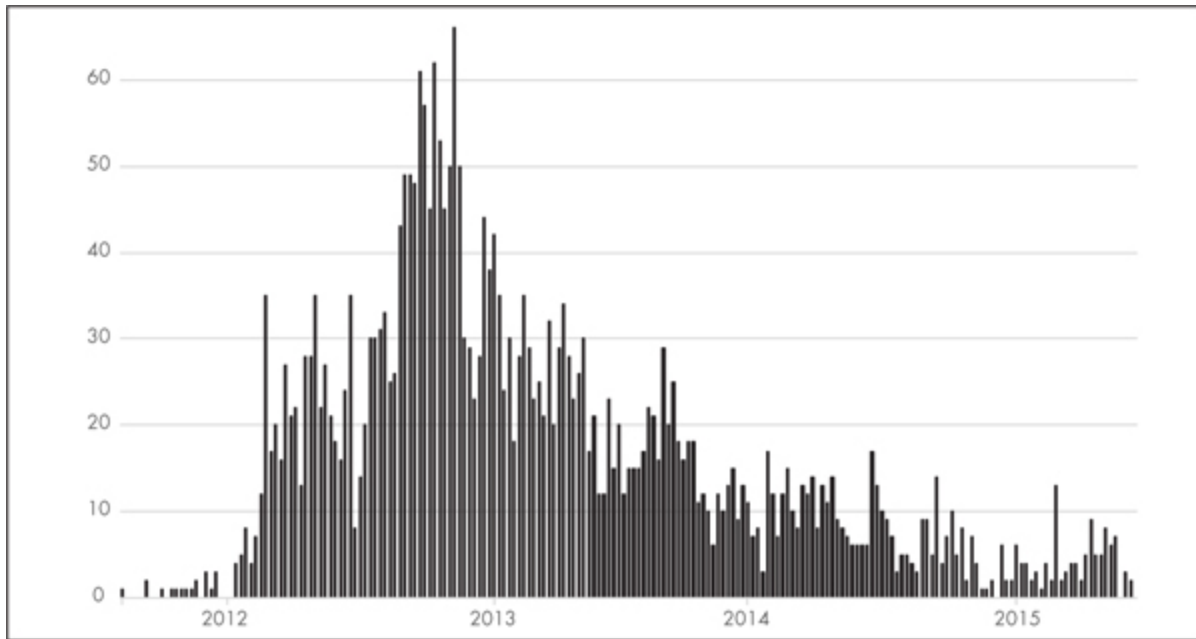
team of researchers known as the Syria Conflict Monitor, the Center began collecting information on armed group formations. For each armed group formation video recorded, the Carter Center documented approximately 70 attributes, including information on how many people were seen in the video, the geographical area, whether a group's members were defectors or civilians, which part of the military defectors came from, what equipment or weapons were seen and, most important, what connections the group had with other actors in the conflict.

Over the course of the conflict, the Carter Center has tracked the formation of approximately 7,000 uniquely named armed units, in which more than 100,000 individuals have been seen.³ This database, converted into a structured network diagram, has allowed analysts to visualize and watch, in near real time, the network of armed groups evolve as new data was entered.

The importance of such a tool, in the early stages of the conflict in particular, is difficult to overstate. Armed group formation continued at a breakneck pace for the first full year of the conflict, peaking at approximately 230 new armed group formations per month by November 2012 (see [Figure 7](#)). Not only were armed group formations averaging seven per day, but relations between existing groups were in constant flux.

Making matters worse, competing command structures' claims of control were often greatly overstated. For example, in early 2013, at the recommendation of a Western government official, Carter Center representatives met with the leader of a major armed faction. During the meeting, the commander claimed to represent approximately 70 percent of the armed groups on the ground; however, based upon the declarations of those armed groups themselves, no more than a third of the armed factions in the country could be said to be connected to one another.

Figure 7: Armed Group Formations in Syria (weekly from mid-2012 to mid-2015)



Sources: Syria Conflict Monitor and the Carter Center.

When analyzing this phenomenon, we are once again faced with the observer's paradox. Information on the existence of, and relations between, these armed groups was only available because of the existence of social media. But did the existence of this new lens change the nature of the developing conflict? As noted previously, the existence of social media appeared to facilitate the funding of many armed groups. Did this phenomenon also lower the threshold for entry into the conflict?

Also, just as with Twitter data, the biased nature of this information limited the scope of analysis that was possible — or at the very least complicated it. Finding information on new formations proved relatively easy; even if a group did not publicly announce itself, it would be referenced in the formation announcements of other groups, in ad hoc coalitions or in information about conflict activities.⁴ However, groups were much less willing to post information online when their new formation failed. Very few announcements were made discussing the failure of a union between groups, the disbanding of a unit or (in some cases) its capture, or the death of a group of fighters. With growing complexity in armed group networks, knowing which groups were no longer relevant required a dramatic expansion of the Carter Center's work.

MONITORING CONFLICT EVENTS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to determine which groups are still active, as well as the geographical scope and timeline of their activities, a much broader means of data collection needed to be undertaken. Luckily, as armed groups formed, they did not limit their involvement on social media to merely announcing themselves. All successful operations were bragged about online, often with video of the operation itself. In addition to armed groups reporting on their own actions, the Syrian conflict was heavily reported on by citizen journalists and activists, many of whom put themselves at great personal risk to report on conflict events around them.

While the content of these videos and activist reports represent an incredible resource for analysts, the sheer volume of information is prohibitive. As mentioned previously, for every minute the Syrian conflict has endured, more than one minute of video has been recorded. Unlike Twitter data, however, this information is almost completely unstructured. An uploaded video contains a title, a time uploaded and very little else that can be used for analysis. Using cues in the video itself, an analyst familiar with the Syrian conflict and video-verification methods can often determine the location where a video was shot, what appears to be happening in the video and who or what was seen in the video. Unfortunately, this process can take a long time, and corroborating information is often necessary to fully verify a video, effectively making a video-based analysis of countrywide developments impossible for even the largest of research teams. Crowd-sourced information can go a long way toward making sense of such a large amount of information, but it can be difficult to maintain a high degree of engagement among a large group of people, and much harder to direct that energy toward conflict and humanitarian response efforts.

Alongside these videos is a somewhat more accessible wealth of information from activist networks. Sometimes shared on Twitter, sometimes on Facebook, private webpages, blogs or through news agencies, this information is reflective of the collective efforts of activists wishing to document the abuses of one party or another. Although largely text-based — and thus easier to ingest than video data — the information

presented its own problems for analysts. It was unstructured, nearly impossible to verify on its own, and, thanks to constant digital attacks, often ephemeral in nature. The multitude of social media platforms used to disseminate this information also presented their own problems. For example, Facebook, which is a preferred platform for many activist networks, made a minor revision to the way in which posts appeared on users' timelines in late 2014. The revision meant that only a month's worth of posts would be visible on a user's page; scrolling back beyond one month would only show major or highlighted posts. While this went unnoticed to most users, the change effectively removed a huge proportion of all activist reports from the public record.

Recognizing the need to preserve this information, the Carter Center began to archive reports coming from these activist networks in late 2012. Events reported through networks were recorded, geo-located and structured to allow analysis of the actors involved, weapons used, targets and much more. As of early 2017, the Carter Center had recorded and structured information on approximately 80,000 conflict events since nationwide collection began in mid-2013. Although much of the information shared through these networks can be automatically archived, it cannot be automatically analyzed, meaning each of the 80,000 events recorded by the Syria Conflict Mapping Project has been manually entered into the Center's database.

While conducting this brute-force data collection effort, the Center joined a large community of academics, practitioners and companies interested in developing tools to help deal with large quantities of unstructured data. Among the many tools developed by this collective of organizations, two in particular stand out as having the potential to dramatically alter the field of social media analytics. Both tools look to tackle the particularly difficult issue of video analytics, but from wholly different perspectives.

The first tool came out of Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science, and uses computer learning to analyze large quantities of video data. The tool, called E-Lamp,⁵ looks at the contents of a video (as opposed to metadata fields, such as the video's title or description) and attempts to recognize "people, scenes, objects and actions" that may be

present. Given a large data set (the system was tested on a database of 200,000 videos), a user can search for very specific objects or events and then train the program to improve its search functions. For example, when searching for videos containing helicopters, E-Lamp will return likely matches, which a user can rate for accuracy and “teach” the program to better recognize helicopters in the future. After three or four iterative searches, the tool will have learned to recognize videos containing helicopters and can confidently identify them in future data sets. The tool itself is not an artificial intelligence, but by allowing a user to sort an exceptionally large database into smaller subsets, it greatly facilitates human analysis.

The second tool, developed by Google Ideas, eschews the computer learning approach and instead works to enable collaborative human analysis. Called Montage,⁶ the tool was released publicly in the spring of 2016, and embeds itself in Google’s Chrome browser. Users can create collaborative playlists of videos uploaded on YouTube and then tag each video with additional information. As with E-Lamp, this approach allows users to break down a larger data set into manageable pieces. Additionally, Montage facilitates geo-location of videos by allowing users to view the video alongside recent satellite imagery from Google Maps.

Despite the development of tools to facilitate video analysis of conflict data, major obstacles still exist. E-Lamp, while promising, is only useful if given a pre-existing database of videos, and does not have the capacity to scrape the internet for content. Downloading and archiving videos can be problematic for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it is not legal. No content can be legally downloaded from YouTube or many other video-sharing fora without explicit permission granted by the uploader. Even if permission could be attained from all who have uploaded relevant or potentially relevant video footage, the computing and storage capacity required to manage such a large amount of information is prohibitive.

SOCIAL MEDIA EVIDENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY SUPPORT

Because of these limitations, rather than attempting to tackle the monumental task of analyzing all video data from the Syrian conflict, the Syria Conflict Mapping Project has focused its attention on smaller subsets of video that can realistically be analyzed comprehensively. One such subset, as discussed previously, is armed group formation announcements. Another slightly larger and more difficult data set is weapon sightings.

By analyzing video content from Syria, the Center has documented thousands of sightings of sophisticated weaponry in the hands of opposition forces that, before the outbreak of conflict, was not present in Syria's arsenal. In some cases, groups bragged about their sophisticated arsenal of weaponry — stoking fear in the enemy and rallying sympathetic fighters to their cause. In other cases, the use of social media was actually mandated by the supplier of the weapons as a means of monitoring their usage. Such was the case with US-supplied BGM-71 TOW.

The BGM-71 TOW is a tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) anti-tank missile that was first seen in Syria on April 15, 2014. The TOW appeared at a time when the United States was reportedly looking to expand its efforts to support the Syrian armed opposition. When it first appeared, the BGM-71 TOW generated a lot of interest for two reasons: first, it was a US-made weapon, making it unlikely to have been provided to groups in Syria without at least explicit consent from the United States; second, the number of videos of its use uploaded to social media sites was staggering.

Not only was the quantity of video content noteworthy, but the structure of the videos themselves appeared odd to many observers. Nearly every video was shot from two different perspectives: one showing the weapon unit and another showing the trajectory of the missile. The videos would generally start with the weapon being readied, during which the narrator would state the name of the armed group and the location where the video was being shot. Then, the path of the missile would be shown until it made contact with its target. It soon became clear that the intended audience of these videos was broader than just the Syrian opposition community. Intelligence operatives responsible for the distribution of the weapons

were mandating that any missile use be filmed to prove it had been used and used against a legitimate military target. In order to be re-supplied with additional missiles, an armed unit needed to return with spent missile tubes and a full playlist of videos accounting for each missile fired. Once again, social media video became integrated into the conflict as much as any physical weapon — so much so that a TOW has almost never been used without a camera being used alongside it.

Social media-based information can tell us more than just which countries are involved in supplying arms to participants of the Syrian conflict (or other contemporary conflicts, for that matter). By tracking the location of weapon sightings, and which parties to the conflict are seen with them, the Carter Center has gained invaluable insight on the geographical spread of weapons as well as the spread of weapons through armed group networks.

This information has served to highlight key actors in armed group networks, to uncover which networks of armed actors are supported by which foreign countries, and to better understand front-line developments.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

All of the analysis discussed so far has been the result of passive observation of social media-based information. With hundreds of thousands of people active online, however, active engagement with online communities can help fill whatever gaps remain in one's understanding of a conflict. This is, essentially, the traditional method of conflict analysis — finding trusted sources of information and building an understanding of the situation based upon their responses. The added connectivity of social media, and the smartphone in particular is, however, beginning to change the field.

A photo taken with a regular camera is just a photo, but a photo taken with a smartphone contains much more. Most smartphones automatically tag photos with valuable metadata such as the time the photo was taken, the location, the device used to take the photo and more. To an investigator or social media analyst, this information is invaluable.

The first people to take advantage of the additional sensory tools of smartphones, however, were not conflict analysts but civil rights activists. Concerned about violations of civil liberties, a growing number of organizations began to develop applications that would help witnesses preserve the valuable metadata recorded with their phones. For maximum impact, these applications also preserve a digital “chain of custody” for each photo or video, enabling them to withstand extreme scrutiny — including in a court of law.

These applications, most notably EyeWitness,⁷ which was developed by the International Bar Association, began being deployed to activist networks in conflict zones in 2016. The applications, unfortunately, have not caught on. Despite the extraordinary efforts that many activists have put into ensuring the world is informed about ongoing atrocities or conflict developments, most are understandably afraid to put themselves at risk by providing such detailed information. With only a handful of people using these tools, the risk of an individual being personally identified is extremely high should the information leak.

While Syrian citizens have been unwilling to engage at this level, many are more than willing to provide much needed, non-conflict-related information to humanitarian organizations. Beginning in the spring of 2015, the Carter Center employed a team of researchers to begin soliciting information on living conditions and civilian displacement from people inside Syria. Starting with personal contacts, the research team slowly expanded its network to include individuals living in most areas of Syria — with all communication being made possible by social media.

When they are able, individuals are asked to provide information about the cost of basic food items, the availability of water and electricity and, most important, whether or not civilians are moving into or out of the area. No information is solicited or accepted regarding the location or activity of armed actors and all individual respondents are made anonymous before ever entering a database. Despite being limited to only three of Syria’s 14 governorates (or provinces), this effort has tracked the movement of more than a million people to date.

Information on these civilian displacements and living conditions are sent immediately to humanitarian organizations operating on the ground in Syria, and they also serve to help corroborate information received from other sources. For example, if the Carter Center records an activist report of clashes in a specific town, there will often be a parallel report of people fleeing the fighting. This corroboration of information ensures that there will be multiple sources of information on nearly all major conflict developments.

BUILDING TOOLS TO FACILITATE ACTION

As analysts and researchers have worked to overcome problems surrounding data collection in modern conflict zones, difficulties have arisen related to handling such large amounts of data. With thousands of actors, tens of thousands of conflict events, and millions of civilians on the move, simply having access to information is not enough. To be truly effective in responding to conflicts and humanitarian disasters, an organization has to be able to manage and analyze massive quantities of information in near real-time.

The first reports released by the Carter Center's Syria Conflict Mapping Project took nearly a month to produce. As analysis of the data dragged on, the situation on the ground changed rapidly, necessitating revisions and, ultimately, a disclaimer that the information displayed was only accurate up to a certain date. For in-depth political analysis, a delay of this type may be acceptable, but humanitarian and conflict response necessitates rapid analysis.

Shortly after beginning work, the Center was lucky enough to partner with Palantir Technologies, whose software allowed an integration of the Center's network, geospatial and qualitative information into a single integrated platform. This has enabled collaboration within a growing team, improving the efficiency and timeliness of data analysis. Advanced software tools, in particular those from Palantir, have been deployed to an increasing number of crisis and humanitarian situations. These tools have helped lead the charge in updating the capacity of response efforts,

enabling humanitarian organizations to take advantage of the growing amount of data available to the field.

Palantir has not only provided software to organizations, but has deployed a growing team of “philanthropy engineers” to build new tools and help make an organization’s data have as great an impact as possible. Working with these engineers, the Carter Center has been able to share its data in near real-time with a growing number of recipients by developing a few new platforms and tools.

UNDERSTANDING AREAS OF CONTROL

One of the most persistent issues faced by conflict analysts and humanitarian organizations is staying up to date with the shifting areas of control on the ground. In the Syrian context, for example, front lines can change multiple times in a day. Traditionally, this would require an analyst to draw a new map for each change by hand, a time-consuming process that makes sharing and updating information difficult. Because the Carter Center had been tracking conflict events in a great level of detail, however, it was able to change the way that information is stored on areas of control and, by using Palantir’s tools, automate much of the map-making process.

Instead of creating resources by hand, the Carter Center plotted all cities, towns and neighbourhoods throughout Syria onto a map, and colour-coded them based on who controlled each location. Using Palantir’s software, the Center was able to automatically update the information on who controlled each location whenever a front-line change was recorded. Thus, without drawing any new maps, information on areas of control can remain up to date and is available as soon as new data becomes available.

Tracking front-line changes in this manner also enables further research on the conflict. Information on shifts in areas of control is no longer hidden in a series of maps drawn by analysts at inconsistent intervals, but instead can be quantified and used for future analysis. Palantir’s tools have enabled the Carter Center to scroll back and forth through time and quantify the rate of change over time. This knowledge helps analysts

understand how areas of control may change in the future and can highlight major trends in the conflict.

Additionally, this type of database can form the basis for research on questions such as who is responsible for the majority of deaths? How has the provision of sophisticated weaponry affected front lines? And what combination of conflict events generally precedes a change in front lines? It is also hoped that in a post-conflict period of reconstruction, information on which cities and towns have changed hands multiple times may help direct reconstruction and peacekeeping efforts toward the areas that need them most.

EARLY WARNING TOOLS

The ideal outcome of conflict monitoring efforts is the ability to forewarn of impending violence or humanitarian issues — to become proactive instead of reactive. Again, using tools developed with Palantir Technologies, the Carter Center has been able to provide an early warning system to highlight noteworthy developments in the Syrian conflict. Additionally, this tool provides immediate access to information that can be used in responding to the humanitarian fallout of new conflict events.

By tracking conflict events throughout the country, the early warning mapping system can highlight areas that have witnessed an increase in conflict, a change in conflict type or the introduction of a new actor. When conflict increases in a given area beyond what has been recorded in recent weeks (or any other customizable time period), the increase is highlighted. For each area affected, the platform also displays a history of recorded civilian displacements in the region, meaning that an aid organization wishing to respond to conflict will have a good idea of where people may flee to if high levels of violence persist.

It is important to note that the output of this early warning system is only as good as the information entered into it. In a conflict zone, this is particularly difficult to assess, as the rate of reporting often decreases when conflict increases. This is simply because those who would normally submit reports cannot operate as easily during periods of active conflict. By combining multiple sources of information and evaluating historical

information on the conflict, the Carter Center is currently working on refining its early warning algorithms to address this difficulty. It is hoped that by combining enough information from contributing organizations, the accuracy of the early warning system can be sufficiently improved to make a meaningful impact on the lives of civilians in the conflict.

CEASEFIRE MONITORING

In the lead-up to the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) in Syria on February 27, 2016, the Carter Center was encouraged by many to contribute to the ceasefire monitoring effort. Having already established a system for tracking and classifying conflict events, it was a relatively simple task to structure and present this information in a platform to assist with monitoring ongoing developments.

Working again with Palantir, the Center developed a platform to display reports of conflict between signatories to the CoH. Users could explore reports of conflict events, filtering by region, time periods and responsible parties, in order to better assess what was happening on the ground. The system, displayed in the following screenshot, was provided to humanitarian organizations and the United Nations to contribute to their own monitoring efforts.

IMPLICATIONS

The very thought of using social media-based information to monitor the cessation of hostilities in a major, multi-sided conflict, as in Syria, shows just how integrated it has become in modern conflict — and in our everyday lives. Granted, social media data is not without its biases, as discussed previously, but it has proven incredibly useful in supplementing existing monitoring efforts and, at times, providing invaluable information that cannot be found elsewhere.

This fact was not lost on the participants of the conflict, either. The implementation of the CoH caused another major change in the way in which people engaged online. Before the CoH, groups throughout Syria regularly posted videos of their activities as a means of bragging about their exploits. Once the CoH began, however, information that was once

abundant became scarce. Groups realized that by posting about their exploits, they were voluntarily giving up information on violations of the ceasefire. Reports continued to circulate from activist networks, but groups themselves did not post anywhere near as much content. As the CoH began to erode, video content from armed actors began to cautiously increase once more, but actors were more acutely aware of the lasting implications of their online engagement.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The way in which both combatants and conflict responders interact with social media in future conflicts will depend on the legacy of the Syrian conflict. What lessons will conflict responders learn for dealing with subsequent conflicts? How will combatants themselves interact with social media? Will the Syrian conflict, with its near free flow of information, become the norm for subsequent conflicts? Or will future conflicts see a more controlled, curated engagement on the part of the belligerents themselves?

The answers to many of these questions depend on how the Syrian conflict ends. Only then, when the dust has settled and peace eventually emerges, will the full ramifications of social media in a conflict zone become apparent. Even without knowing what shape peace will take, there are a few concrete lessons that can be learned from modern conflicts that can help the world respond to and prevent future violence.

DOCUMENTATION FOR PROSECUTION

In past conflicts, negotiators ending the bloodshed have sought a balance between peace and justice. In many conflicts (or at least those that did not end with the total victory of one side), deals were brokered that granted amnesty to combatants in order to encourage them to lay down their arms. Efforts at justice are likewise focused on restorative justice instead of retributive justice. How, though, can such a campaign of amnesty or restorative justice be implemented in Syria when so many people have access to videos of atrocities actually taking place?

Never before has there been such a wealth of evidence available, making future prosecution almost inevitable. Justice initiatives have already archived hundreds of thousands of videos and are building strong cases for prosecuting human rights violations, war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law. This fact will undoubtedly complicate negotiations to end the conflict. Too much damning evidence may lead combatants to spoil attempts at peace in fear of the justice that will follow.

Despite this, the world needs to document as much evidence as possible with an eye toward the prosecution of future violations. Those who engage in violence must be sent a clear message that the days of secrecy and impunity are over. Today's world is awash with cell phones, satellites, cameras and growing internet connectivity. These signalling devices have the potential to ensure that no atrocity goes unnoticed and should be seen as tools that empower civilians everywhere.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO SAFE DOCUMENTATION TOOLS

Civilians in conflict zones have already begun using cell phones, cameras and internet applications to document abuses and atrocities — often putting themselves at great personal risk in doing so. If the international community truly wishes to address the abuses of war and conflict, we must do everything we can to further empower these civilians.

In this area, a considerable amount of work has already been done. Civil rights-focused apps, as previously discussed, are increasingly being developed and improved upon. With user safety at their core, they stand to become invaluable tools in future conflict zones. The outstanding issue, however, is that tools such as these are entirely voluntary and far too scarce. With only a handful of users, the risks associated with violation documentation tools increase to the point of making them unusable.

This issue collides with ongoing debates around encryption. Should unbreakable encryption exist — and is it a net benefit or risk? Too often this discourse has focused on the risks of terrorism and too rarely on the potential to empower millions of everyday civilians to fight the pervasive abuses of governments and non-state armed groups.

BUILDING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

As online engagement has grown over the years, companies have worked to improve the user experience for those who use their products. This is rarely more apparent than in the case of online search tools. Despite the enormous amount of information on the internet, a simple search through Google or any other similar tool will generally return the results that are best suited for you. Search histories help companies understand what a person is more likely to enjoy, while the ability to identify where someone is located helps filter and target relevant results and, as more and more online engagement is channelled through a handful of applications (Facebook, Google, WeChat and so on), the ability of companies to pinpoint what a user is interested in has only sharpened.

In most instances, this is an excellent feature. People can find what they're looking for online, companies can find potential customers, money is made, usability improves and most people are happy. In a divided society, however, this presents serious problems. Someone who watches a video from an opposition group in Syria will receive suggestions to watch more content from similar sources. Linking up with a pro-government Twitter account will prompt Twitter to suggest that you follow other pro-government users or content. Friend and content suggestions on Facebook often reference existing connections or content that a user has engaged with. In a divided society, this means that the very algorithms that govern our digital space increase the polarization of our real-world communities.

To better address and prevent future conflicts, this phenomenon must be more closely examined. For the first time, enough evidence exists to begin to evaluate the effects of online engagement in divided societies. As the case of Syria and other modern conflicts have shown us, digital engagement can have a major impact on how people and social movements interact with one another in the real world. We have the knowledge, and with it, more power than most people realize. How then, can we build a digital world that brings out our best?

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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- 1 This estimate is based upon information shared with the Carter Center by a handful of Syrian organizations who have archived hundreds of thousands of videos.
 - 2 *Zakat* is the Arabic word for charitable donations. Directly translating to "that which purifies," it forms one of the five pillars of Islam, and calls on Muslims to donate a percentage of their income to those less fortunate.
 - 3 Not all of these 7,000 armed groups were independent of one another; indeed, most of them were clustered together in groups that ranged anywhere from 1 to 50 units. When tallying the total number of armed groups, however, determining where to draw the line between independent organization and subunit becomes difficult. Does a group cease to be a distinct entity when it announces it is subsidiary to another? How much control does a parent organization have to exert over its subunits for the network to be counted as a single entity? And how can this be determined? The questions are almost innumerable. For this reason, the Carter Center focused on counting all uniquely named units, regardless of size or status in relation to other organizations. As the conflict progressed and relations continued to shift between units, this approach proved crucial for understanding the internal relations and politics of the armed opposition.
 - 4 The information obtained on the 7,000 groups referenced came from only 3,500 formation announcements.
 - 5 See www.cs.cmu.edu/~lujiang/0Ex/icmr15.html.
 - 6 See <https://montage.storyful.com/welcome?next=%2Fmy-projects>.
 - 7 See www.eyewitnessproject.org.

A dark, textured brushstroke background, resembling a thick application of black paint or ink, with visible grain and uneven edges. The stroke is roughly rectangular and oriented diagonally from the top-left to the bottom-right.

PREVENTION



25

ADVANCED DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES PREVENTION

STEVEN LIVINGSTON AND ALICE MUSABENDE

In a critical review of the failure of the United Nations to respond to early signs of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke (1996) point to several factors, including the Western news media's inattentiveness to the deepening crisis: "The media, with some exceptions, played an irresponsible role in their reporting on Rwanda. The overall failure of the media to report accurately and adequately on a crime against humanity significantly contributed to international disinterest in the genocide, and hence to the inadequate response." Scholars are not alone in reaching this conclusion. André Ouellet, a former foreign affairs minister in Jean Chrétien's government, said, "CNN was not there [in Rwanda], unfortunately. Had they been there, maybe the genocide would have been avoided" (Black 2010).

There is an implicit theory of foreign policy processes in these criticisms (Center for Theory of Change 2017). The common assumption is that policy makers are either pressured into action by public sentiment arising from media coverage or, alternatively, they are spurred to action by their own direct personal exposure to compelling coverage.¹ To explore the logic behind the belief that media coverage affects policy outcomes, we review two conceptually related social science research literatures. The first is state-media relations theory, found in communication studies; the second is transnational advocacy theory, found in international relations scholarship.

We argue that little solid evidence exists in support of the assertion that non-state actors, including the news media, have the capacity to instigate an immediate intervention in an unfolding crisis or conflict. This assessment is then reconsidered in light of more recent developments in information and communication technology. By considering these research literatures, we avoid relying on competing anecdotes and ungrounded assumptions concerning the complex interactions among the many variables affecting foreign policy decision making.

Might new technology offer reasons for a different conclusion? The answer is ambiguous.

STATE-MEDIA RELATIONS THEORY

Putting aside for a moment the question of whether media attention to a brewing crisis affects policy outcomes, we should first consider whether it *ought* to have such an effect. George Kennan, a realist foreign policy intellectual and diplomat, rejects the notion that foreign policy decisions ought to be influenced by what he regards as mere ratings-driven television sentimentalities. Clearly understood national interest must trump emotion and soppiness.

In the late fall of 1992, as US Marines landed in Somalia, Kennan (1993) wrote, “It is clear that with a very large part of the American public, but particularly with that part of the public that speaks or writes on public affairs, and — not last — with the political establishment, there is general

support for this venture.” Not only did the intervention come without much public discussion or congressional deliberation, noted Kennan, the policy failed to address the underlying cause of the famine. Somalia was in chaos and its people starving because of the absence of an effective government. Protecting feeding centres and distribution routes would not address the underlying cause of the famine. What explains, then, President George H. W. Bush’s decision to intervene on a short-term mission that, at best, addressed the symptoms and not the causes of the crisis? Kennan points to the effects of media coverage on elite policy decision making. “There can be no question that the reason for this acceptance lies primarily with the exposure of the Somalia situation by the American media, above all, television. The reaction would have been unthinkable without this exposure. The reaction was an emotional one, occasioned by the sight of the suffering of the starving people in question” (ibid.).

We see in his statement the same implicit logic invoked earlier with the disappointment over the lack of CNN coverage to the Rwandan genocide. While Kennan saw such an emotional effect as unfortunate, Adelman and Suhrke lament its absence in Rwanda. The idea that media-inspired emotion might catalyze policy change has been called the CNN effect. The CNN effect refers to the supposition that media coverage of a foreign policy crisis might affect the agenda priorities of US foreign policy; accelerate the pace of policy deliberations to match the news cycle; or impede the pursuit of policy goals by undermining public support, especially when costs — such as combat deaths — are highlighted (Livingston 1996a; Robinson 2002). We are interested in the first possible manifestation of the CNN effect: policy agenda setting.

As it turns out, Kennan’s casual observations were flawed; systematic empirical analysis reveals that nearly all Western press coverage *followed* Bush’s decision to send US military forces to Somalia, first C-130 cargo planes and support crew in the summer, followed by 26,000 troops in November (Livingston and Eachus 1995; Robinson 2002). According to the CNN effect, content must logically *precede* a policy decision. Yet there was little media coverage of the Somalia crisis prior to Bush’s decision to intervene in 1992. Not only was the volume of coverage negligible, there was no single emotive report, photograph or film that might have triggered

a response. As much as some policy makers and journalists insist media coverage stimulated Bush's decision, the evidence does not support the claim. Why, then, did Bush intervene? Lobbying by key members of Congress and diplomats in the State Department is the most compelling answer (Livingston and Eachus 1995; Strobel 1997). Once Bush announced the troop deployment in November, media coverage skyrocketed.

This finding is in keeping with the expectations of the indexing model of state-media relations theory. It emphasizes the White House's outsized capacity to influence the media agenda (Bennett 1990). Other mainstream models of press-state relations reach similar conclusions (Entman 2005). Put simply, policy decisions lead to coverage, and not the other way around. In a world awash in conflict, disasters, political crises, famines, environmental catastrophes and refugee crises, the conventional news media must sort out what to cover, for how long and in what depth. Even the most dedicated and well-resourced news organization cannot manage to cover everything. As a consequence, most events, regardless of severity, receive only passing coverage, if that (Hawkins 2008). In triaging the possibilities, news organizations rely on official cues — briefings, statements, background briefings, speeches and other signals of importance (Sigal 1973; Hallin 1986). Furthermore, news organizations, despite their freedoms in liberal Western democracies, operate according to professional norms that tend to privilege official discourse. For the most part, at the time of the Rwandan genocide, news was a political product produced by processes closely aligned with the state (Cook 1998). This, of course, is not to say that intrepid and resourceful journalists never break important stories. They obviously do. But they tend to not be sustained in the absence of official involvement.

Although Kennan would be encouraged by this conclusion, those who place hope in the media's ability to effect change would be disappointed. Yet, as conventionally understood, there is little reason to expect news organizations, operating independently and in an entirely self-directed manner, would affect policy agendas. Furthermore, the effects that do exist are probably conditioned by anticipated costs. Media pressure is arguably more likely to drive change when risks are understood as

negligible, as Michael Barnett (2005) has argued. Seen in this way, the question is not so much whether media affects policy but when, how and under what conditions might media content affect policy in particular ways. Media effects are highly contingent on political circumstance.

TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS

At about the same time political communication scholars were exploring state-media relations, international relations scholars were investigating the role of non-state actors in global governance. We lack the room to offer a complete review of the several schools of thought surrounding the question of what determines outcomes in global governance. Our attention will instead focus on *structuralism* and *constructivism*. The structuralist school of thought (also known as neorealism) argues that the anarchical structure of the international system itself compels states to behave as they do. The norms or the characteristics of the units — the states — matter not at all in this view. Democratic peace theory, the proposition that democracies do not go to war with other democracies, is dismissed as a misguided investigation of state characteristics that have little effect on behaviour in an international system defined by anarchy (Rosato 2003). Structure is defined as the anarchical ordering principle of the international system. Lacking an overarching authority capable of resolving conflicts among units in the system, the international system of states is characterized by power balancing (striking alliances based on self-interest and survival) and relative capabilities (Mearsheimer 2001).

Whereas structuralists assume that anarchy leads inevitably to conflict, constructivists contend that conflict is not inherent in the international system, but is instead a construct of the states currently in the system. “Anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 1992). Features of the system are not inherent to it, but are rather given their form by *continuing processes of social practice and interaction*. Put differently, structures of human association are determined by shared *ideas* rather than material forces. Most important, constructivists argue that non-state actors play a major role as norms entrepreneurs: that is, as key players in the processes that shape the international system. This includes civil society groups, such as human rights organizations, and news media.

In describing transnational advocacy, a part of the social process and interaction that defines the nature of the system, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) speak of information politics, which consist of the tactics used by norms entrepreneurs in transnational advocacy networks as they pressure abusive states into greater compliance with broadly shared norms. This involves an ability to “quickly and credibly generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have the most impact.”² “Networks strive to uncover and investigate problems, and alert the press and policymakers. One activist described this as the ‘human rights methodology’ — ‘promoting change by reporting facts.’ To be credible, the information produced by networks must be reliable and well documented. To gain attention, the information must be timely and dramatic” (ibid., 451–54).

According to the logic of this model, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), such as Amnesty International, as well as news organizations, rely on domestic NGOs for accurate, credible information about abuses and war crimes. Keck and Sikkink highlight information exchange between local and international NGOs as a key element of what they refer to as a “boomerang model,” so called because shared information between local NGOs and INGOs redounds to its local origins in the form of political pressure. Where NGOs are blocked from presenting grievances to their home government, they reach out to powerful international NGOs that partner with international organizations and powerful liberal states to pressure non-compliant “State A” into compliance with broadly shared norms. In this way, atrocities can be prevented through interventions by transnational advocacy networks.

Transnational advocacy research is criticized for cherry-picking cases that tend to support the hypothesis (Bob 2005; 2012).³ “In the dominant view,” notes Clifford Bob (2012, 3), “NGOs are a counterweight to state repression and corporate greed, succoring the needy and uplifting the downtrodden.” Much less attention is given to countervailing conservative advocacy networks, despite their significant political clout concerning reproductive rights issues, gender politics and gun controls. Rather than a harmonious convergence on eventually shared values, transnational

advocacy is more accurately characterized as a contentious engagement of rivals.

Contrary to Kennan's fear, evidence does not seem to support the notion that non-state actors have the capacity to set a superpower's foreign policy agenda or realign illiberal states. Yet such a conclusion might be challenged by more recent developments in the ability of non-state actors to monitor and document atrocities. Digital technology might offer hope to those who believe ideas and information can be marshalled to prevent catastrophe. Both the CNN effect research literature and the transnational advocacy literature was written before the digital era. Media coverage, especially pictures and "film," were dependent on a corps of dedicated foreign correspondents who risked life and limb to get the story out to the wider world (Livingston 1996b, 68–89). War correspondents often suffered great personal costs in the process, including psychological trauma and even death. Over time, communication technologies have made it easier to get images out of a war zone. In the late 1990s, Ku-band satellite uplinks were big and cumbersome, and usually transported on the back of specially outfitted trucks (Livingston and Van Belle 2005; Livingston and Bennett 2003). By 2003, INMARSAT uplinks were highly mobile, eventually shrinking to a laptop-sized device and a camera that broadcast video live from most places on the planet. Today, the planet is enveloped by high-resolution commercial Earth observation satellites, linked by broadband and telephonic networks (Livingston 2011). From almost any place on the planet, local residents can share compelling images from a warzone. Might more advanced technologies affect the conclusions of state-media theorists and bolster the positive conclusion of transnational advocacy scholars? If, as Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue, effective human rights advocacy involves "quickly and credibly generat(ing) politically usable information and mov(ing) it to where it will have the most impact," the digital revolution might very well offer reason to adjust the more pessimistic conclusions outlined above.

TECHNOLOGY AND WAR CRIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE DOCUMENTATION

Since the turn of the century, digital technologies of various types have expanded their reach to the most distant parts of the planet. Indeed, with commercial remote sensing, almost any place on Earth's surface is visible, although cloud and groundcover sometimes hinders it. The logistics of newsgathering from remote locations in the analogue era prevented news organizations, especially television news, from covering all but a handful of stories. The point of the balance of this chapter is to explain how this might be changing in the digital era.

In particular, two clusters of digital technology might alter the rather pessimistic assessment of the effects non-state actors and information have on policy making. We organize relevant technologies according to their “affordances.”⁴ A *digital affordance* is a “type of action or a characteristic of actions that a technology enables through its design” (Earl and Kimport 2011, 132). Online petitions, for example, allow signatures to be collected without the necessity of temporally synchronized physical interactions. In their study of social movements in the twenty-first century, W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2013) describe interactive digital affordances that enable different kinds of personal political expressions, such as “features or functionalities (of a website) that enable people to do things pertaining to engagement with the protests beyond the basic affordances of reading web pages or navigating the sites.”

We consider two types of digital affordances:

- **Geospatial affordances** involve the use of commercial remote sensing satellites, geographical information systems (GIS), unmanned aerial vehicles, and geographical positioning satellites (GPS) and receivers to track events on Earth, even in the absence of direct physical access. Geospatial affordances provide opportunities for virtual, panoptic and precisely measured access to limited access areas.
- **Digital network affordances** involve the use of digital platforms to link individuals in dispersed locations who are working toward a common goal, such as looking for digital evidence of human rights

violations. Digital network affordances function on two levels: first, they often involve *crowdsourcing* the collection of data over digital networks; second, they might involve *social computation*, the analysis of data by volunteers using digital networks.

The overall argument of this chapter is that technology, in particular digital affordances, opens and enables new possibilities for realizing outcomes that would otherwise be improbable, and perhaps impossible. CNN or any other news organization, no matter how dedicated it might be, cannot hope to monitor the entire planet. The continent of Africa alone presents insurmountable obstacles, as anyone who has travelled about it knows.

GEOSPATIAL AFFORDANCES

Geospatial affordances are realized by remote sensing satellites, GIS, drones and GPS, and receivers. They enable panoptic awareness and virtual presence, even in limited access areas — places that are too distant or too dangerous for investigators to travel. Since the launch of the world's first commercially owned and operated high-resolution sensing satellite in late 1999, dozens of satellites have been put into orbit by corporations and countries around the globe.

According to one market analysis, between 2016 and 2025, manufacturers are expected to produce about 1,935 remote sensing satellites for 58 separate programs (Henry 2016). Industry leaders include DigitalGlobe, the European Pléiades satellite constellation, the Indian Cartosat system, BlackSky, Hera Systems, UrtheCast and Planet Labs.

The current industry standard is DigitalGlobe's WorldView-4 with 30-cm resolution in the panchromatic range, which means that, from space, WorldView-4 is capable of distinguishing home plate on a baseball diamond. A second important feature of remote sensing is temporal resolution, which is designed to assess the interval between revisits to the same spot above Earth by the same or a comparable satellite. Generally, shorter revisit intervals are valued for their ability to monitor rapidly changing events. In this area, research and design are accelerating at a fast pace: in 2016, Hera Systems unveiled plans for a constellation of 48 one-

metre or smaller resolution satellites, while BlackSky, another US-based company, intends to have a constellation of 60 high-resolution satellites in orbit by the end of 2019. With so many satellites to take images or monitor areas of interest, the temporal resolution will be measured in hours and spatial resolution in centimetres. These companies, all delivering critical geospatial insights, allow investigators to acquire synthesized data from a wide range of sources.

Further, the cost of imagery, once a barrier to its use by less well-resourced NGOs, is dropping precipitously. This has opened up the use of high-resolution imagery by human rights groups to monitor and document possible war crimes and abuse. To document Boko Haram's destruction of a village in northern Nigeria, for example, Amnesty International relied on DigitalGlobe 31-cm resolution satellite images. In images taken on January 2, 2015, one can see a cluster of dwellings that are clearly intact. In a second set of images of the exact same spot, taken five days later, one can see that the buildings have been destroyed.⁵ This helped confirm what had been, until then, rumours of atrocities committed by Boko Haram in a remote part of northern Nigeria.

Satellite imagery also has the advantage of offering something of a time machine, allowing investigators to look back on previously undiscovered events.⁶ For example, DigitalGlobe's WorldView-4 collects 1,200,000 km² of images of Earth each day. To put this in perspective, from the start of the Syrian civil war in March 2011 to March 2017, DigitalGlobe collected 11,973,033 km² in its public, time-lapsed imagery library. With a total landmass area of 185,180 km², the total area of Syria was collected 64.65 times.

As early as 2003, human rights organizations began using satellite imagery on an occasional basis to explore its potential for documenting events in otherwise hard-to-reach areas. In January 2006, Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) launched its Science for Human Rights (SHR) initiative.⁷ In partnership with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, SHR launched with 15 pilot projects involving South Ossetia/Georgia, Chad, Darfur, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria,

Pakistan, Somalia and Sri Lanka (Amnesty International Secretariat 2011). The stated objectives of the SHR program offer an example of what we refer to as geospatial affordances: the creation of a panoptic view of otherwise limited access areas. Conclusions of an internal evaluation conducted by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London concluded the SHR program was able to “access areas and information that would have been difficult to collect otherwise in regions such as Darfur, Sri Lanka, South Ossetia and Kyrgyzstan” (ibid., 14). Beyond the fact that it was able to identify official or unofficial mass graves in places such as Sri Lanka, SHR enabled researchers and human rights advocates to quantify the destruction of infrastructure in several locations that were otherwise out of reach, to document the targeting of civilian populations and even to identify the nature of weapons used in those regions (ibid., 14).

The same evaluation report concluded that remote sensing offered access to 19 closed or limited-access countries on Amnesty International’s list (ibid., 28). In Sri Lanka, for example, aid agencies, journalists and human rights investigators were denied full access to the conflict zones and displaced persons camps. As an Amnesty researcher noted about his efforts to monitor Kyrgyzstan, “It’s very expensive to go [there] and it’s far away...ideally we’d go twice a year, but we don’t always manage because there’s other countries in Central Asia as well that we go to visit and we have a very small budget” (ibid.). In Eritrea, one of the most repressive countries in the world, Amnesty had not conducted an in-country investigation since 1999. The International Secretariat evaluation concluded that the SHR program “opened access to many countries in which Amnesty had hitherto very limited or no access and the tools allowed Amnesty International to cover greater ground than traditional methods of research” (ibid.).

There are several other examples where AIUSA’s use of satellites allowed for the documentation of atrocities and human rights abuses. In Nigeria, AIUSA documented Boko Haram’s responsibility for the destruction of 3,700 buildings and the deaths of hundreds, if not thousands, of persons in the first week of January 2015 (Amnesty International 2015). In Burundi, Amnesty International released a report detailing the discovery of mass

graves on the outskirts of Bujumbura, the country's capital, in January 2016 (Amnesty International 2016). On December 15, 2015, Nigerian soldiers opened fire on residents of the city of Zaria. In September 2014, satellite imagery and testimony gathered by Amnesty provided compelling evidence that the Kremlin was involved in the fighting in Ukraine (Amnesty International 2014).

Despite the benefits satellites offer human rights investigations, there are shortfalls. Obviously, satellites cannot monitor torture behind prison walls or catch all arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings. It is limited to gathering evidence associated with mass exterminations, forced migration and the destruction of physical infrastructure and crops. Also, determining that a mass grave is located somewhere in the world does not necessarily tell us much about the victims, or much at all about those who gave the orders or pulled the triggers, although other digital technologies sometimes do.

DIGITALLY NETWORKED AFFORDANCES

Digital network affordances allow coordinated actions toward a common goal without individual “co-presence” in physical time and space. Individuals linked by their respective engagement with one or more digital platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter or a purpose-built website) contribute to the realization of a common goal without being in the same physical location or point of engagement. Digital network affordances either use “crowds” to assist in the analysis of existing complex data or in the collection of data. We refer to *social computation* when referring to the use of crowds to analyze existing data and *crowdsourcing* when referring to the use of crowds to gather data.

With social computation, a multitude of networked volunteers accessing a shared digital platform perform small, incremental tasks that contribute to the analysis of large, complex problems. This is sometimes referred to as social computation. Individual costs per task are kept low and sometimes even made to be entertaining, as when tasks are put in a game format (Burke 2014). If not entertaining, a sense of virtue and accomplishment is thought to motivate those who participate in online activities of this sort

(Benkler 2006). Examples of crowdsourced data analysis would include Tomnod, a social computation platform hosted by DigitalGlobe, where volunteers are invited to scan satellite images for evidence of various kinds of events or processes. One Tomnod project invites volunteers to find permanent and temporary dwellings in DigitalGlobe imagery of South Sudan.⁸ Users can zoom in to each of the grid squares to see a high-resolution image of the terrain captured within the grid. Each square represents just a small area of land so as to not overburden the volunteer. There have been several high-profile Tomnod projects, including an effort in 2014 to find evidence relating to Malaysia Airlines flight 370 that vanished without a trace over the Indian Ocean. According to Carmen Fishwick (2014), more than eight million people used the site to look for signs of the wreckage. These and many other examples of “citizen science” rely on the existence of digital platforms (such as a website) and massively distributed incremental tasks that invite contributions by mostly amateur volunteers (Franzoni and Sauermann 2014).

Crowdsourcing, on the other hand, involves gathering information inputs by broadly distributed sensors (often a person with a mobile phone). Syria Tracker offers an example of crowdsourced monitoring of events in a warzone. Using crowdsourced text, photo and video reports, Syria Tracker creates a “live map” of the Syrian conflict (Humanitarian Tracker 2017). When looking at a digital map of Syria, one sees red dots with varying numerical values. The totals within each dot represent the number of reports — data inputs — for that specific geographical location. Each report is filtered according to categories of specific kinds of events: killings, missing people, rape, use of chemical weapons and refugees. One can zoom in on a location and see the reports disaggregate into more precise geographical spaces. Eventually, one is taken to individual reports. As of November 2016, only six percent of the 150,000 crowdsourced reports had been included on the map. This low percentage underscores the strict standards for determining the validity of crowdsourced information received by Syria Tracker. It even helped report 47 massacres not recorded by the media or other humanitarian organizations. Remote sensing satellites allow human rights groups to look in on a limited-access area, while digital networks allow those inside conflict zones and other limited-access areas to reach out to human rights organizations. They provide

fragments of information — a picture, tweet or text — that are stitched together with other fragments of information and arrayed on a GIS platform to present a panoptic view of events occurring in an area otherwise out of access.

DISCUSSION

The implicit theory of change, found in both Adelman and Suhrke's lament concerning the lack of an intervention in Rwanda and in Kennan's concern about Somalia intervention, is that media coverage of atrocities has the capacity to affect policy outcomes. More precisely, the expected effect involves a triggering of a superpower intervention into a regional conflict. CNN-effect research, however, has found little evidence in support of such an effect in the 1990s, a finding that is consistent with the expectations of broader state-media relations theory. Yet international relations constructivists' transnational advocacy case studies find evidence of policy effects, although some critics see case selection bias in the studies. In light of the increased digital capacities now available to non-state actors, both state-media relations theory and advocacy theory must be reconsidered. Has the digital revolution changed the basic dynamic of international response to atrocities? Is there evidence in support of the belief that greater awareness (even broad public awareness) leads to international intervention in genocide?

It is hard to provide an answer in unequivocal terms. One cannot isolate some part of the planet from the reach of digital technology to create a control condition that would then be compared to similar cases understood as an experimental condition. If such a thing were possible, one could make meaningful comparisons between a control condition and an exposure condition, and surmise the relative impact of digital technology. Several recent studies have tried to accomplish something like this statistically. Some of those studies have found a link between growth in mobile telephony and a *propensity* to violence (Bailard 2015; Dafoe and Lyall 2015; Pierskalla and Hollenbach 2013; Weidmann 2015), while other studies have found just the opposite result (Shapiro and Weidmann 2015; Warren 2015). There is, of course, always the possibility that as information and communication technologies penetrate more deeply into

remote areas, the ability to record violent events increases, thus leaving the impression that it is the presence of the devices that explains an apparent increase in reported violence. This is an expression of what Ann Marie Clark and Kathryn Sikkink have called the information paradox (Clark and Sikkink 2013).

There is no doubt that technology has improved the ability to document war crimes and human rights abuses, even in otherwise inaccessible locations. The world now sees, often in close to real-time, atrocities that would have been lost to the world only a handful of years ago. But does knowing necessarily translate into doing? Whether such access can be directly linked to changes in international policy-making processes remains undecided. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that changes in the technical capacity to gather evidence have had negligible effect on states' willingness to intervene in mass atrocity events. Syria, for example, has been mapped, photographed and crowdsourced in detail for (as of this writing) seven years, yet the war there is expected to continue for years more (Hubbard and Patel 2018). Reported war crimes have so far had no clear, unequivocal effect on policy. The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian military underscores the point.

In February 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron said he was concerned that chlorine gas was used in multiple attacks against Syrian civilians in the opening weeks of 2018 (Associated Press 2018). As one victim of the attacks was quoted as saying, "All types of weapons have been used on us for seven years, and the whole world is watching" (Barnard and Saad 2018). A keen observer of the Syrian war in 2018 would have recalled that in August 2012 then-President Barack Obama declared, "We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation."

Obama's statement was unscripted and described as a source of consternation to his advisers. Yet the next day, the White House spokesperson said this: "As the President said yesterday in terms of Syria, we're watching very closely the stockpile of Syrian chemical weapons;

that any use or proliferation of efforts related to those chemical weapons is something that would be very serious and it would be a grave mistake. There are important international obligations that the Syrian regime must live up to in terms of the handling of their chemical weapons. And the officials who have that responsibility will be held accountable for their actions and will be held accountable for living up to those international obligations” (Kessler 2013).

Obama’s declaration, coming in light of clear and strong news reports of the use of gas by the Syrian military, seemed to declare weight. What happened as a result? Over the next year, Bashar al-Assad’s regime acknowledged its massive chemical weapons program and allowed international inspectors to gather and destroy Syria’s stockpile of chemical weapons. By October 2013, international inspectors had removed 1,300 tons of chemical weapons. Obama’s red-line statement, coming on the heels of a reported atrocity, seems to have had a clear, positive effect. Yet despite these measures, Assad’s forces continued to use chemical weapons against civilian population centres, including the Ghouta attack in the suburbs of Damascus in August 2013 and the Khan al-Assal attack in the suburbs of Aleppo in March 2013. In April 2017, the Khan Shaykhun attack provoked a US military action against the Syrian government-controlled airbase at Shayrat.

Meanwhile, competing “open-source” citizen journalist collectives and state-supported media have gone back and forth as to whether satellite imagery and video captured by locals confirms this or that conclusion as to which military force was responsible. For a time, Assad even claimed that the attack on Khan Shaykhun did not happen, an argument that was amplified by American right-wing conspiracy websites and YouTube channels such as Alex Jones’ now suspended InfoWars. Jones claimed it was a “false-flag” operation intended to bolster support for war against Syria. Jones also offered a version of the story that claimed it actually did happen, but that it was orchestrated by the White Helmet first responder group and funded by liberal billionaire George Soros. Both the White Helmets and Soros are frequent targets of conspiracy theorists. The end result is a muddled understanding of an already complex war. Countless satellite images of mass graves and even executions, and tens of thousands

of crowdsourced reports, have had an obvious effect on the conduct of one of the bloodiest conflicts since Rwanda. Yet, in the end, it would seem that knowing is not the same as doing.

Advances in technology have put us at a crossroads. It is no longer feasible for leaders to claim ignorance of atrocities in even the most remote locations. The world is now too wired for that assertion. Instead, the raw truth of the global response to most atrocities is clearer. Most states, most of the time, intervene according to the sort of strategic calculations Kennan saw as essential. Beyond that, as Barnett (2005) has observed, interventions, when they do occur, are driven by a sense of negligible cost and risk. So far, technology has not altered that basic calculus.

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- 1 On this latter understanding of the effects pathway, see Babak Bahador (2007). Also, in 1996, after watching a television news report concerning the refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien is thought to have initiated a round of Canadian-led diplomacy to address the issue (Hay 1999).
 - 2 See also Susan Burgerman (2001); Daniel Thomas (2002); James Ron, Howard Ramos and Kathleen Rogers (2005); Sanjeev Khagram, James Riker and Kathryn Sikkink (2002); Ann Marie Clark (2001); and Richard Higgott, Geoffrey Underhill and Andreas Bieler (2000).
 - 3 See also Charli Carpenter (2007).
 - 4 See also Joanna McGrenere and Wayne Ho (2000) and Donald A. Norman (1988).
 - 5 "Boko Haram Baga Attacks: Satellite Images Reveal Destruction," Amnesty International. www.amnesty.org.uk/nigeria-boko-haram-doron-baga-attacks-satellite-images-massacre.
 - 6 This capacity is not uniform. Some places on Earth are sensed on a much more regular basis than are others. Also, cloud cover is more common over some areas, making it harder to find an archived image of the place and time of interest that is free of clouds.
 - 7 It was first known as "Satellites for Human Rights."
 - 8 "South Sudan: Food Security—Tracks Between Dwellings," Tomnod. <https://forum.tomnod.com/t/south-sudan-food-security-track-s-between-dwellings/2517>.



26

RADIO AS A TOOL IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: CASE STUDY OF THE LAKE CHAD BASIN AND BOKO HARAM

DAVID SMITH

Media can be a tool in countering violent extremism, but it only works if it disseminates inclusive civic and moral values. This chapter is about the need for media to be an agent of positive change in perceptions, governance, religious tolerance and education dedicated to the prevention of all forms of violent extremism. Radio Ndarason Internationale (RNI), broadcasting to four countries surrounding Lake Chad — Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon — in partnership with a regional organization, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), is our test-tube baby.

Ignorance of the political, social and economic benefits of an inclusive, progressive society fuels much of the violence that racks the Lake Chad area. In the four countries comprising the Lake Chad region, lack of a political will to provide just governance has been an issue for decades. In

the immediate environs of the lake, there is virtually no visible infrastructure in place.

Lake Chad is no government's priority in the capital cities — Abuja, Yaoundé, N'Djamena and Niamey — apart from environmental concerns about the rapid disappearance of the lake and fear of the spread of the religious fanaticism of Boko Haram. To put an end to the violence, military action is necessary. To prevent its recurrence, political and religious good governance is crucial.

Today, the region is without an operative judicial system. There are few employment opportunities; agriculture, fishing and livestock resources are barely subsistence occupations; state-provided basic education is limited to only a few centres and is of negligible quality. Communication links with the rest of the country are unreliable. Diverse ethnic groups and religious sects espouse exclusiveness rather than cooperation. All of these factors combine to evoke a fractured society of extreme poverty, bitterness and resentment toward those who appear to be less affected, whether distant government leaders or slightly better off neighbours. Widespread sentiment that individuals and, by extension, their immediate community, are victims, having neither control over their lives nor hope of future improvement, is a volatile mix requiring little effort to inflame. There is no lack of proponents adhering to the philosophy expressed in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* that great evil can be perpetrated as long as people can be convinced it is for the greater good. Political and religious groups are sparking conflagrations worldwide wherever these circumstances exist, and although the great evil is evident, the corollary is not. The need to change approach is clear.

In order to contribute to positive change in the region, RNI is adapting lessons learned through previous experience in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to current circumstances. It aims to be a regional voice of, for and by the dispossessed, guaranteeing a two-way communication channel between local communities and those wielding political and religious authority.

The premises of RNI programming are that violent extremism can be successfully and sustainably defeated when the reasons it exists are

understood, and that practical solutions will be found through consultation among all affected parties.

It may be a long and slow process, demanding intellectual comprehension, empathy with both victims and perpetrators, and the political and religious will to provide justice for all. The challenges are enormous, but I am convinced that without taking them on, most of those who claim to be countering violent extremism will not succeed.

First, let's consider some historical lessons relating to how violent extremism, un-corked, can evolve into genocide.

South African investigative journalist Jacques Pauw (2013) has written the story of a Rwandan, Kennedy Gihana, tracing the Rwandan genocide from seeds sown under colonial rule in the early 1900s up to the savagery of 1994. All the requisites of genocide existed long before the balloon went up, so what was the great catalyst to Tutsi and moderate Hutu extermination?

THE POWER OF RADIO AT ITS WORST

Hate propaganda spewed from the transmitters of Rwanda's Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM). The goal of the hate-mongers was to convince Hutus to kill Tutsis. The hate speech was subtle at first — they had to build an audience. RTLM broke the stodgy state broadcaster mould by playing popular music and specifically targeting disillusioned youth. Once the audience was hooked, the messages became less subtle and a one-way rhetoric of hate bombarded listeners. Had RTLM allowed free and open discussion on its airwaves, the expression of dissenting views might have deterred the frenzied slaughter that took place.

Words are important. The use of a single word can change the destiny of a country; it can decide the fate of thousands of people. Had then US President Bill Clinton agreed to call the events of April 1994 in Rwanda genocide, the UN peacekeeping mission could have been strengthened with a mandate that might have stopped the slaughter, even at that eleventh hour.

In 1994, there was no political will to stop RTLM. Two decades into the new millennium, most of the factors that plagued the continent during the past century are still prevalent.

Politics that promote unjust power over others exacerbate natural divisions within a society. These power politics are the precursors preventing the goals of “Never Again” from becoming reality. I believe the root cause of much of the violence our world faces is the divisive influence of power politics, whether in a dictatorship or a democracy. Bad governance, the twin of power politics, encompasses the perpetuation of inequality, the disregard of basic human rights, including education, health care, housing, employment and — significantly — dignity and spiritual worth.

Where governance is weak, state control of media is often strongest. Yet in order to achieve peaceful change, media must work with the government in power, gaining its support, without forfeiting its freedom to report opposing views.

Media is at the front line in an engagement to expose the truth. And truth is not always welcome: the messenger is constantly coming under fire, and those pulling the trigger are often firing from positions of power. So what kind of communications strategy can media put in place when an honest media may be perceived by all sides as part of the problem?

Let’s start with an assumption that prevention is better than a cure. In order to prevent an unwanted event, the development of the factors leading to conflict has to be reported and alternative actions promoted. Rioting children shot down in Soweto is a headline; segregating pupils into overcrowded, ill-equipped, substandard schools can’t compete as an “event” unless the media decides to upgrade its coverage to promote prevention rather than sensationalist results.

When independent media engages to combat violent extremism, it also has to navigate the minefield comprising government regulations, fear, paranoia and restrictions. Realistically, there is not much that can be done at this point to deter terrorism or genocide. The die was cast while the media was sleeping and now, it can only report on the crisis — if permitted to do so!

The effect of written journalism in most of the crisis zones of our times is limited to a relatively scant readership. As a case in point, consider the streets of Chad's capital, N'Djamena, which offer a wide choice of newspapers including several with an extremely antigovernment editorial line. On the surface it looks as if opposition to the political powers flourishes and is accepted. However, Chad is a predominantly rural country with a higher than average rate of illiteracy. Once one leaves the capital city, distribution of newspapers drops dramatically. The only source of information for many rural dwellers is the state broadcaster.

Nigeria's northeastern Borno State, the birthplace of the insurgent group Boko Haram, has a state broadcaster that covers only the area of the state capital, Maiduguri, and its immediate environs. This lack of development of communications infrastructure means that even if there are good intentions to interact with communities in crisis zones, the means to do so have not been made available.

The Lake Chad area is an area of extreme poverty. The narrative of an "Africa Rising" does not apply here. Africa's highest rate of illiteracy is found here (Mercy Corps 2018). The few schools found in the region are unlikely to be staffed by qualified teachers. Memorizing the Qur'an is the main activity for the few children receiving anything resembling an education. And the number of children is rising fast in a zone that cannot support those already living in it. The region's population growth rate is among the highest in the world, currently at 3.5 percent (Jack 2016). The situation is going to get worse before it gets better. There are virtually no jobs available. Transport and communications infrastructure is almost nonexistent; it can take well over a week to travel several hundred kilometres between villages in the region, providing a solid four-wheel-drive vehicle with extra fuel reserves is used, and that's not taking into account the security dangers along the route.

The largest group of people living in this region belong to the Kanuri ethnic group. There are roughly 10 million Kanuri living in the four countries of the Lake Chad area, including more than one million Kanembu, a subgroup of the Kanuri, in Chad. Together, they form a significant community, yet in each of their respective countries they are a

minority, a minority that receives little attention from their respective national capitals, apart from the security forces mobilized at the advent of Boko Haram. While most members of Boko Haram are ethnic Kanuri, most Kanuri are not members of Boko Haram.

Kanuri, especially in Nigeria, are often accused of being members of, or at least sympathetic to Boko Haram simply because of their ethnicity. Such profiling is an attack on their dignity and an attack on their humanity. Media can play an important role in changing this perception.

The origins of Boko Haram are rooted in the long-standing situation of extreme poverty and lack of development in northeastern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, southeastern Niger and the central western part of Chad. Young people, women and girls in particular, already holding inferior status in the traditional community, are further marginalized because central governments devote few state resources to the area. Illiterate, without livelihoods and ignorant of the religious teachings they espouse, this increasingly large population is an easy target for any person or organization inciting violence as a means to a better future.

Just over a year after RNI took to the air, the traditional leader of the Kanuri, the Shehu of Borno, Abubakar Ibn Umar Garbai, summoned me to his palace in Maiduguri. The reason for this request was to express gratitude for restoring dignity to the Kanuri language. The Shehu told me that the Kanuri are accustomed to receiving bad news, often in the form of violence. He added that rarely is there a positive development affecting the wider community. Listening to broadcasts in his mother tongue qualified as an extremely positive development.

What was in fact an emotional outpouring by the Shehu is the sort of interaction that has been repeated on numerous occasions throughout the region with members of the Kanuri community, ranging from hereditary leaders to general labourers. They listen to RNI because it is theirs.

They listen because they are proud of their history. Kanuri historians document Kanuri settlement in the Lake Chad area since the year 800 AD. Centuries before European powers carved up the region into Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, the Kanem-Borno Empire was the dominant

power along the shores of the lake. The Maiduguri-based Kanem-Borno Cultural and Historical Foundation documents the history of the region from the time the first Kanuri allegedly arrived from the Arabian Peninsula. The reign of each Shehu is inscribed on each of the four walls of the foundation's board room. The Kanuri are proud of this heritage. They are equally proud of their belief that Islam was introduced to Africa south of the Sahara by their ancestors. This is a narrative Boko Haram seized as part of its *raison d'être* — protecting and promoting what it terms pure and original Islam — although their out-of-context verses hijack the tenets of traditional Islam.

Ascribing Boko Haram's existence to solely religious reasons is a dangerous trap and leads us astray of the wider, longer-term problem, which is how to change the conditions on the ground in order to ensure that violence, for any reason, is not seen as the means to a just end. Presenting an opposing narrative to the one that promotes violence is a start. But a narrative on its own is not enough, since a narrative indicates a point of view, one that can be challenged. And it must be challenged, through dialogue and discussion involving all the actors.

Only radio is able to make this happen. The people of Lake Chad are *already* listening to the radio. Illiterate goat herders have access to inexpensive shortwave radios that they use to listen to international broadcasts on the BBC, RFI, Deutsche Welle and the Voice of America.

I am often asked if *everybody* has a radio. Of course the answer is no. However, *virtually everybody* has *access* to a radio. Listening to the radio in the Lake Chad area, as is the case throughout much of the continent, especially in rural areas, is a community affair. Most radio sets are in the hands of men, and few women get to own the radio, but there is no restriction when it comes to listening.

While few people under 40 in most of the developed world know what shortwave is, in places like Lake Chad it is a lifeline. Shortwave is to these listeners what the internet is to young people in the cities. This will change, but it hasn't yet.

Hausa is the most listened-to international radio language service in the Lake Chad area. That's because Hausa is the second language of millions of people living around the lake and until the advent of RNI it was the only radio broadcast available across large swathes of the region.

Given a choice, most people, wherever they are, prefer to be informed and entertained in their mother tongue. The Kanuri are no different. Once RNI began its Kanuri-language broadcasts, there was no need for a marketing budget to inform potential listeners — word spread like wildfire.

WHY DIDN'T IT HAPPEN BEFORE?

The state could have created Kanuri-language radio stations years ago, or dedicated representative amounts of air time relative to the listening audience for whom Kanuri is the mother tongue, but it didn't. Such a service could have created a sense of belonging and community and, quite possibly, prevented the development of a perception of isolation and neglect. Priorities for spending were and remain elsewhere. State broadcasters in all four countries are little more than loudspeakers for the status quo. Quality programming that sometimes is produced in the capital city rarely makes it to the most isolated parts of the country because of the lack of broadcast infrastructure. When content does reach these areas, it is usually broadcast in a language that is not the mother tongue of those listening.

I'll go into further detail on the development of a Kanuri-language radio service shortly. Expecting the state to develop such a service is likely to end in failure, thanks to an ingrained suspicion that stations will promote opposition platforms. *Freedom* of expression is not as free in rural minority areas as it is in capital cities where broadcasts may be closely monitored. The private sector hesitates to step in because of the expense of installing equipment and the risk that authorities may not approve the licencing for such an operation.

AN OPPORTUNITY ARISES

In 2001, a window of opportunity for media freedom appeared in the DRC. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) sent me to Kinshasa to set up a radio network. At the time, the country was at war and divided into three distinct zones. There was no single voice in the media mix that did or could speak for the entire country. RTNC, the state broadcaster, was controlled by the various factions in charge of large chunks of the national territory, including rebels controlled by their masters in neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda.

A clause within the statutes that allow a UN peacekeeping mission to operate inside a sovereign space provides for the creation of a broadcasting service. The value of UN peacekeeping radio at individual missions can be debated elsewhere. In the DRC, a pioneering effort involving a partnership with a non UN entity¹ led to the creation of what would become the country's de facto national broadcaster. Radio Okapi went on the air in 2002 as a network with headquarters in Kinshasa and regional studios in most major urban centres.

Within days of Radio Okapi's launch, the head of the UN mission told the Security Council that Radio Okapi had *electronically* dismantled the front line in the DRC's war. The use of the country's four national languages as well as French gave the station a local feel right from the start. Today, Radio Okapi remains the radio of reference in the DRC.

It could not have happened without the unique circumstance afforded it as part of an internationally approved peacekeeping mission. Neither the government in Kinshasa nor the rebel enclaves elsewhere in the country would have allowed an independent radio service to set up shop and broadcast objective information from and through their territories.

It is this unique model that is being used by RNI around the Lake Chad basin, where a window of opportunity presented itself via the creation of an African Union-mandated stabilization force.

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a five-country (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria) military operation headquartered in N'Djamena and administered politically by the LCBC, which is made up

of Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR) Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria. The force, tasked with bringing an end to the Boko Haram insurgency and stabilizing the region, has a presence, including sector headquarters, in each of the four countries bordering the lake.

Okapi Consulting, a Johannesburg-based organization specializing in media projects in conflict zones and fragile states, and implementer of the RNI project, signed an agreement with the LCBC allowing for the positioning of radio stations within each of the sector headquarters.

Much as Radio Okapi was able to build regional studios wherever the United Nations mission in the DRC had a local headquarters, RNI is able to set up studios and transmitters in all four countries.²

RNI is very much a work in progress. It is being invented along the way, using lessons learned from Radio Okapi while taking into account local concerns as well as the necessity of moving forward despite not having the support of a large and well-funded UN peacekeeping mission.

The big-picture hope is that the African Union will recognize the value of regionally supported communications initiatives as powerful tools for countering violence and promoting economic development and good governance. It is a big hope, but not an impossible one. While the African Union has its weaknesses (it is, after all, a club containing many members who face the same challenges), there is an expressed desire for it to function along the lines of either the United Nations or the European Union (from where it gets much of its funding).

As founding members of the LCBC and the MNJTF, the four countries surrounding the lake are committed not only to finding a way to end the violence in the region, but also to improving the quality of life of those who live there through management of the ecosystem.³

The big picture described above is not going to happen through wishful thinking.

The partnership between RNI and the LCBC is as much about capacity building within the regional organization as it is about providing a voice for the Kanuri. Regional civil servants and military officers — the backbone of the LCBC and MNJTF — tend not to be the strongest communicators. My years at the United Nations taught me that most international functionaries, including their military counterparts, are often not very keen on sharing information. This is especially true with soldiers, who follow a chain of command and don't speak unless they have been told to do so.

A primary aim of RNI is to get all parties in the conflict talking to each other. Among other things, this means bringing senior military officers, including the force commander, into the studio and engaging directly with the people who are the victims or potential victims of the insurgency. It is safe to say that there is no person in the Lake Chad area who is unaffected in some way by violent extremism or the reactionary violence that extremism begets. The military wins field battles against Boko Haram, but the foe is insidious, and each hiatus has been followed by new attacks. It is imperative that the military be able to win the trust and confidence of the population. This can only be done by promoting honest discourse and information sharing between mutually respected protagonists, and this is one of the major roles RNI has taken on.

A lesson learned at Radio Okapi in the DRC is that, once convinced, Blue Helmets, including the force commander, look forward to entering the studio and engaging with listeners within their theatre of command. Peacekeepers receive a better welcome in places where the local population understands why there are soldiers among them.

RNI is encouraging the MNJTF to follow on a proven route of engaging with local populations through dialogue. The force commander understands this implicitly, and, through ongoing capacity building, this ethos is working its way down the command chain.

The same is true on the civilian side with the LCBC. The commission has been in existence since 1964, yet few people in the Lake Chad region understand what it does. Using radio as a tool to link the commission (and other humanitarian actors in the region) with the local population, all

parties are, at the very least, able to voice concerns and needs to each other. It is from these humble beginnings that enduring homegrown solutions are found.

RNI, however, is neither a military radio nor a mouthpiece of the establishment, nor an organ of any political movement.

A big part of Radio Okapi's continued success is its editorial independence. Getting there was hard, and it took long and painful discussions with the United Nations' department of legal affairs in New York. But agreement was reached and the end result was beyond expectations. RNI works on the same principle; it is editorially independent and operates according to best practices for journalistic excellence and objectivity. It has to. Credibility is difficult to attain and easy to lose.

RNI is the voice of all parties interested in creating a stable and eventually prosperous Lake Chad region: humanitarian agencies directly linked to the United Nations and NGOs both international and national, carrying out a wide range of community development programs focusing on health, education, gender equality and many other areas of need; the MNJTF; local communities; and, not to be ignored, the insurgents themselves. This is difficult terrain to cover for obvious reasons, not least being security concerns for all involved.

A campaign focusing on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) is being developed by MNJTF personnel that will include bringing ex-combatants into studio and allowing them to engage with listeners. One of the most difficult phases of DDR is convincing communities to take in ex-combatants. For the most part, they don't want to. It's not that dissimilar to convincing employers in the developed world to give jobs to former inmates who have served their prison terms. We're confident that through a long-term dialogue, including on-air conversations with former members of Boko Haram, the discussion will move to a human level that will eventually create some common ground.

Once again, looking at the Radio Okapi model, programs in Kinyarwanda were introduced in the eastern DRC to convince Rwandan combatants to

turn in their weapons and return home. When these programs were introduced, the strongest opposition came from Congolese who objected to hearing the language of the Rwandan oppressor on their radio station. An information campaign slowly but surely convinced Congolese listeners of the need for such a program. Kinyarwanda broadcasts have been part of Radio Okapi's format for well over a decade. We anticipate the same success with Kanuri-Kanembu language programming.

An open discussion with all parties concerned, using radio as the means to bring people together, stressing their similarities rather than their differences, worked. That's the lesson learned and the format applied at RNI.

SECURITY CONCERNS

Danger is everywhere. Serious risks exist because there is a crisis. Governments are threatened; there is no justice because the importance of the rule of law is ignored; human rights are disregarded and extremist sectarianism has replaced religious tolerance. Who can doubt the urgency of peacekeeping and peace building and the need to bring people together, not in confrontation but in consultation? Nevertheless, altruism doesn't preclude danger, and RNI is aware that the road to peace is long and complicated and involves many actors.

Risk is mitigated wherever possible. Placing RNI studios within the confines of MNJTF sector headquarters is one important means of mitigating risk. Journalists, technicians and radio management work in modified containers located behind the fortified walls of the military compounds. It is not necessarily an ideal situation, but it is a practical one. Practicality extends not only to the security situation, but to logistical concerns as well. The Lake Chad area is one of the least-developed regions on the planet. Co-locating within MNJTF facilities provides access to electricity and water, commodities that cannot be taken for granted in a region where electricity is, for the most part, only available to those with access to a generator and where water is a diminishing resource, thanks to the southern advancement of the Sahara in an area that is already dry for most of the year.

To be from the Lake Chad area is to be aware of security concerns. RNI personnel receive security training on a regular basis. The truth is, they tend to know more about survival techniques than those who belong to international security firms who make a living teaching people how to stay safe.

Staying safe short term means you have to keep your head down. Staying safe long term means getting involved and changing the status quo. That's the prevailing attitude among RNI staff; they know they are game changers and they know they are pioneers. Living with the status quo is not acceptable, and that's a big part of the motivation for why they join the team. Kanuri-language radio presenters have become, to a large extent, local heroes, not to mention local stars.

Three years after the first broadcast aired in January 2015, I'm pleased to be able to write that RNI has experienced no casualties. This, of course, could change. At Radio Okapi, two journalists have been assassinated since the station began operating, and all those who work there know there could be others. What is also understood by those working there, as well as at RNI, is that they are making a difference. Resignations do not follow such incidents. Extreme danger exists — whether or not one works as a journalist at a radio station committed to peace and progress. It should also be understood that commitment to the job is widespread throughout the media industry across much of the continent. Journalists in Angola, Burundi, South Arica and Uganda, and dozens of other countries, risk life and limb daily to inform the public. And, with few exceptions, it's not because they are getting rich doing so.

For those directly involved in radio services such as RNI, part of the risk mitigation is the long-term expectation of contributing to better living conditions.

WHAT GOES ON THE RADIO?

The aim of RNI is to facilitate the creation of conditions that will stabilize the region and help move it toward a period of progress. This means that the lines are open to all parties, from the head of state down to the fisherman in his pirogue. RNI is dedicated to promoting understanding and

empathy, through discussion. Why is the status quo not working? What solutions can be found to reorder society for the benefit of all, from elite power blocks to minority ethnic groups? Understanding what isn't working and why it isn't requires access to unbiased information. The cornerstone of content on RNI, and most serious media outlets, is coverage of current events (for example, where is the Médecins Sans Frontières vaccination clinic being set up?) and provision of background details to current "hot news." A network of Kanuri-speaking correspondents is being trained and deployed throughout the region. Virtual town hall meetings are held under trees, including town hall meetings held exclusively by local women.

The population pyramid for Lake Chad is very wide at the bottom and narrows to the top very quickly; the population is young and getting younger. Youth is the biggest target group. Sport, music and education are important parts of the program mix. Radio doesn't only have to attract listeners; it has to keep them. If RNI was to focus only on the crisis, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to hold the attention of the young majority over an extended period of time.

Community building and regional solidarity is an outcome RNI works on achieving through the network approach. The network headquarters in N'Djamena takes in content from the regional stations in much the same way as the network headquarters of the CBC, RFI, BBC or National Public Radio take in content from around the country or around the world for broadcast to a wide audience. At the same time, the regional stations break away from the network programming twice a day to focus on local issues for listeners located within the footprint of the local FM transmitter. The station in N'Djamena plays the unique role of providing the network with content related to the LCBC and the MNJTF, because both organizations are based in the Chadian capital.

Content is developing as RNI grows. The languages used at regional studios will be adjusted as demand warrants. For example, a regional station on the north shore of the lake at Baga Sola will introduce the Buduma language to serve a community in the area that lives alongside the

Kanuri. The community is victim to Boko Haram-related violence and often implicated by other groups as supporters of Boko Haram terrorism.

REACHING THE AUDIENCE

There's no point creating a communications tool if the intended target has no access. The crisis in the Lake Chad region is development related. The way of life of thousands, if not millions, of people living in this area has changed very little in the past century. Communications strategies developed for Europe or Asia will not work here. Cellphone usage in the Lake Chad area consists mainly of small units whose only additional utility is a flashlight. Few users have the means to purchase a smart phone or to buy the data to make it work. And even if they could, vast swathes of territory have, at best, a 3-G signal, and at worst, no signal at all.

That's why shortwave is the blanket means of signal delivery. Shortwave signals travel everywhere. There is no part of the Lake Chad basin that does not receive the RNI signal. There are also few people in the region without access to a shortwave radio, which is still a big seller in local markets and less expensive than any form of digital technology, including cellphones.

FM transmitters are installed in places where infrastructure makes it possible. This is another reason for locating RNI inside MNJTF compounds. The military facilities offer access to electricity and security in places where such commodities are almost nonexistent. The shortwave radios widely available and used in the area also receive FM broadcasts.

Appropriate technology is equally important for content gathering. While the average listener may still be years away from owning a smart phone, RNI correspondents use them to interview newsmakers, record vox pops with locals and edit and send their reports to studio. Social media makes this possible, easy and inexpensive. In the Lake Chad region, and throughout most of Africa, phone applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook get more use for delivering text and voice than the voice and text services of cellphone networks; that's because it tends to cost less, if anything at all.⁴

The biggest contribution the cellphone has made to the radio world is the ability to make radio instantly interactive. RNI receives text and voice communication from listeners in Kanuri in real time, creating a bond with the target audience and ensuring that RNI is not only a broadcaster, but a receiver as well.

LONG-TERM PLAN

Addressing the issues of violent extremism requires a long-term strategy of education. In fact, it requires a permanent strategy. Without an appreciation of the interdependence of communities, and the benefits to all that are provided by a stable, secure and productive environment, the conditions that have allowed groups such as Boko Haram to form will persist. This is a change in mindset that will result only from an education stressing altruism.

RNI exists today because of the generosity of international funders. The current main contributors are the governments of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Their interests are clear: they understand the role the media plays in countering violent extremism and, moreover, they also recognize that a stable and prosperous landscape is less likely to be a breeding ground for terrorist movements or a region from which economic migrants flee in search of a better life overseas. Government authorization permitting RNI to broadcast in its national territory may well be a sign that priorities are changing and action to improve conditions throughout the region may follow.

I would like to be wrong, but the current donor interest is likely to be deflected long before the Lake Chad region is transformed into an economic powerhouse. Unless the RNI initiative is to die from a dearth of donors, a Plan B for sustainability is vital. Plan B is commercial sustainability. RNI, with the support of its funders, is working on building business capacity into the operation. In Africa, radio is king. In the Lake Chad region, there is no Kanuri-language competition to a growing network (RNI) with a potential audience of roughly 10 million.

The target audience is not wealthy, but it does have big numbers. Several million people with the smallest incomes still purchase soap, food, drink

and air time, not to mention occasional access to entertainment services such as music or sports events. Add to this the growing number of humanitarian agencies that are already sponsoring content on RNI in order to effectively reach their target populations in isolated areas, and the possibility for life post-donor looks feasible.

A successful and credible regional radio service contributes to the stability of the region, helping to build confidence in local capacity to deal with local needs and to find constructive local solutions.

MOTIVATION

Much of the motivation behind this pioneering and admittedly risky effort is the belief that, while intentions may be good, most current peacekeeping efforts have been failures. Peacekeeping tends to take the form of a short-term militarily imposed stability fix without adequately addressing the reasons conflict broke out in the first place.

I have worked in positions of senior responsibility in media projects in zones of conflict for three decades, including peace and security operations mandated to missions run by both the United Nations and the African Union. In all cases, including my first media position in South Africa,⁵ neglect or denial of the underlying causes were central to the conflict.

Any long-term solution to a crisis involving extreme violence must involve addressing the issue of good governance manifested in its most basic forms: provision of justice for all regardless of position, class, economic status, creed, education, sex or age and universal recognition of human rights for all citizens. Good governance is the elephant in the room and is often ignored for the simple reason that those expected to provide solutions to conflicts are often part of the problem. It's a bit like UN peacekeeping operations: missions arrive, especially [Chapter 7](#) missions, those with a mandate to use force to enforce peace, and create a semblance of relative stability during the period that their troops are deployed on the ground. Once the mission ends, the same or similar ruling elite assumes

power and, more often than not, the same problems that prompted a UN intervention in the first place start to manifest themselves once again.

The CAR is a good case in point. There has been some kind of international peacekeeping or observation mission in that country since the mid-1990s. The current mission, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, is operating in a security environment that is less stable today than it was 20 years ago.⁶ The issues on the table at independence in 1960 remain; central government has little if any presence beyond the capital city. Infrastructure, health care, education and employment opportunities beyond the capital are almost nil. Peacekeepers at best keep some members of warring factions apart. Not surprisingly, the local population tends to have little confidence in either their local officials or the foreign forces who arrive in their country for what they know is only a temporary deployment.

THE MODEL NEEDS CHANGING

It's not an easy task. If we want a more stable and prosperous world, especially in fragile states already plagued by insurgency, extreme violence and migration issues, then new thinking is necessary. RNI is not the panacea, but it is a valuable support tool for people to find their own new model of an inclusive and cooperative community, immune to hate rhetoric from any source.

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- 1 Fondation Hirondelle, a Swiss organization that grew out of a radio project in eastern DRC targeting Rwanda immediately post-genocide, partnered with the DPKO to establish Radio Okapi.
 - 2 In Chad at N'Djamena and Baga Sola; in Nigeria at Baga (as well in Maiduguri); in Cameroon, Mora; and in Niger, Diffa.
 - 3 The LCBC mandate includes sustainable and equitable management of the Lake Chad waters and other transboundary water resources of the Lake Chad Basin; preservation and protection of ecosystems of the catchment area; promotion of integration, and the preservation of peace and security in the Basin.
 - 4 In an increasing number of countries in Africa, including in the Lake Chad area, cellphone networks offer limited versions of social media such as Facebook without data consumption, making use of the service free.
 - 5 My first media position was as a journalist at a Bantustan-based radio station in South Africa during the apartheid era. Apartheid is an extreme case of racially motivated bad governance.
 - 6 One of the only positive legacies of the UN's peacekeeping mission to the CAR in the 1990s is a radio service that remains on the air two decades later and continues to be recognized as a credible source of information — Radio Ndeke Luka (originally called Radio MINURCA).

RADIO AND RWANDAN REBELS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

BERTINGELAERE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of a research project undertaken with the objective of understanding the radio-listening habits of Rwandan rebels in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The intent was also to understand the impact and appreciation of an educational soap opera called *Musekeweya*, which dramatizes messages on conflict prevention and reconciliation. This radio theatre play is broadcast by Radio Rwanda, the Rwandan state broadcaster. In total, 101 ex-rebels of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) were consulted during several weeks of fieldwork in 2009.

The FDLR was officially established around the year 2000 and emerged from the remnants of militia, the so-called “Interahamwe,”¹ and the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) that fled Rwanda following the 1994

genocide after being defeated by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the rebel movement headed by current Rwandan president Paul Kagame. The organization behaves as a “state within the state” in the Kivu region of eastern DRC and is experienced as an occupation force by the local Congolese population (Pole Institute 2010, 10). They are responsible for gross human rights abuses, including rape (Ingelaere and Wilén 2017). The military strength of the FDLR was estimated at approximately 7,000 forces (and thousands of civilian dependents or sympathizers) in 2007 (Romkema 2007, 47). Their numbers continued to decline to an estimated 1,200 to 1,500 forces in 2013 because of losses incurred during military operations, defections to and repatriation in Rwanda (Elbert et al. 2013). Some 8,815 FDLR combatants demobilized and returned to Rwanda in the period 2001 to 2014. Did radio play a role in this process?

We attempt to shed light on this question by examining the impact of a radio theatre play called *Musekweya*. The program is produced by La Benevolencija Humanitarian Tools Foundation, an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on societies and individuals targeted by hate speech resulting in large-scale violence. The organization makes use of radio to broadcast educational media programs and soap operas. This soap opera is meant to identify positive and negative models in Rwandan society and to establish and promote positive role models. Exemplary personalities can be identified in the episodes, of which some of the most prominent are actively promoting peace in the conflict between two fictional villages, “Bumanzi” and “Muhumuro.” Although there is no explicit reference to ethnic identities in the soap opera, it is clear — to us and also to the Rwandan audience — that these villages and the nature of their interactions resonate with the Hutu-Tutsi distinction that marks the Rwandan social landscape. The conflict between the villages reverberates with the ethnically polarized and conflict-ridden history of Rwanda.

The storyline develops against the background of crisis, drought and hunger, and the drowning in a river of the daughter of Rutaganira, one of the villagers from Muhumuro.² These conditions open the way to destructive leadership. Rutaganira casts blame on the other village for all of the things going wrong. He manages to become the village headman

and, eventually, stages an attack on Bumanzi. The inhabitants of the latter village are traumatized and angry and retaliate in a similar attack that makes most of the inhabitants of Muhumuro seek refuge outside the village.

The aim of these storylines is to identify the roots of destructive leadership and the consequences of violence. But in the midst of this upheaval, significant attention is paid to countervailing trends and positive developments such as active bystanders undertaking moderating and preventive actions. Some people speak out against violence; others offer psychological care to those traumatized by the events. Notably, fictional characters who are young emerge in roles that question the negative actions of elders such as Rutaganira. Gradually, more storylines emerge that focus on questions of reconciliation between the two villages. Eventually, Rutaganira experiences a complete change of mindset and behaviour. He becomes a facilitator of peace and reconciliation. The main story of the conflict and conciliation of the two villages is developed over a long period of time, with many subplots and interesting characters that can attract a diverse audience of attentive listeners.

In the meantime, large-scale scientific studies have established that the soap opera is not only extremely popular, but also has the ability to create changes in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of people living on Rwandan soil (Paluck 2009; Staub et al 2005; Bilali and Vollhardt 2013). What remains unclear, however, is whether Rwandan rebels who fled Rwanda toward eastern DRC in the aftermath of the genocide have listened to the radio soap serial and, if this is the case, how they experience the soap opera. Further, did listening to the soap influence their decision to return to Rwanda? These questions informed our research activities.

Next in this chapter is a discussion of the data-gathering activities. This is followed by a presentation of the main sources of information and the radio-listening habits of the rebels while they resided in the DRC. Finally, I discuss the impact of the radio soap and conclude with a reflection on the role of radio in shaping ideas and mindsets in a context of extremely polarized societies.

FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In the period between September and November 2009, the research team spent several weeks in the demobilization camp Mutobo and in a rural hill/village.³ The demobilization camp is a transit centre where combatants returning from the DRC need to spend a period of approximately three months before they are reintegrated into their communities of origin throughout Rwanda. During this period, the ex-rebels receive an intense program of mainly information and re-education activities. The bulk of the interviews were conducted in the Mutobo camp. At the start of the research activities there were 315 persons residing in the camp. This number had increased to 396 by the end of our stay.

The camp commander and personnel facilitated the initial introduction of the researchers. A former FDLR officer also residing in the camp and with supervising authority over the ex-combatants was appointed as facilitator in the contacts with the ex-rebels. However, all of the interviews were conducted in private and with only the selected group of participants present. Interviews happened in a closed-off room in the demobilization camp or, if the room was not available, in a remote corner on the camp premises.

In addition, the research activities took place in a local community in the northern region. In order to avoid potential influence of the camp environment on the statements of participants to the study, a significant number of interviews were conducted with ex-rebels who had already passed through their three-month period in the camp and returned to their hill of origin. The community where this part of the research took place is located in the north of Rwanda, an area considered to be the heartland of the former regime. Many ex-FDLR combatants originate from the northern region. Fifty-six reintegrated ex-rebels live in the community where the research was conducted.

Focus group discussions were the main research instrument.⁴ The overall research question — did radio play a role in the rebels' demobilization and return to Rwanda? — informed a more detailed discussion guide. The following themes were systematically explored: the overall radio

landscape in the DRC; the sources of information and communication in the DRC; the listening habits with respect to Radio Rwanda and, more in particular, the *Musekeweya* radio soap; remarkable episodes and characters in the soap opera; the reality value of *Musekeweya*; the defining factors and obstacles when returning to Rwanda; and radio habits after the return from the DRC. The discussions were systematically and verbatim recorded during the discussions. At a later stage, a code book was constructed and the interviews were systematically coded based on a number of variables to identify trends in the responses. This procedure was complemented by a narrative analysis.

With each interview, we provided a general introduction on the origin and aim of the study. We did not mention that the topic under investigation was the *Musekeweya* soap in order not to suggest any answers with respect to the initial question on popular programs. Anonymity and voluntary participation were stressed. As mentioned, all interviews were conducted in quiet and private places. In a few cases, group discussions were conducted in open air, but always in a remote location free from onlookers or possible disturbance. Twenty focus group discussions were organized with a total of 101 participants. Officers and ordinary “soldiers” were interviewed in separate groups in order to avoid the influence of authority figures over subalterns during the discussions.

A caveat is in order. This chapter presents the findings of a series of discussions with ex-rebels who have returned to Rwanda. Some of the FDLR rebels have not returned to Rwanda, at least not yet. The perspective is therefore limited to returnees. The experience and appreciation of the combatants still residing in eastern DRC might be different. Nevertheless, the discussion with the ex-combatants reveals important insights regarding the process of deciding whether to return to Rwanda or not. It can be assumed that all combatants listening to the radio in the DRC, and listening to *Musekeweya* in particular, undergo a similar reflection process, which is our focus here.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND RADIO-LISTENING HABITS

Radio is the primary source of information among FDLR combatants in the DRC. Telephone and visitors are also frequently mentioned as means of communication: “(1) & (2) Radio was our primary source of information. (1) We could also find information over telephone when family members called us. (2) We also managed to find information through people coming to visit us.”⁵

During discussion with the ex-rebels, a total of 37 different radio stations were listed. The most popular radio stations were the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Rwanda and Radio Okapi. News and radio soaps were very popular genres. The most popular programs named by participants were *Urunana* and *Musekeweya*, two radio soaps broadcast by Radio Rwanda. Most of the ex-rebels participating in the group discussions followed the weekly broadcasts of *Musekeweya*.

Radio Rwanda is one of the most popular radio stations among the FDLR in the DRC. Radio Rwanda broadcasts in Kinyarwanda, the language of the Rwandans living in Congo. They listen to Radio Rwanda to follow the developments in their country and to understand what is or might be happening with friends and family members in Rwanda.

(Interviewer) Do you also listen to Radio Rwanda? And if so, why do you listen to Radio Rwanda? (1) I listened to Radio Rwanda because I was able to receive its signal anywhere in Congo. (2) I often listened to Radio Rwanda [while in Congo] since the station is broadcasting in a language I can understand. (3) I tuned in on Radio Rwanda because it’s my country’s radio station, it has good programs. (4) As a Rwandan abroad, I listened to Radio Rwanda to understand what was happening in my country.⁶

(Interviewer) Do you also listen to Radio Rwanda? And if so, why do you listen to Radio Rwanda? (1) We loved to listen to certain types of programs, such as soaps. But we also wanted to know how the [Rwandan] state media reported on the operations of the army. (2) We really wanted to know more about the situation in our country and [Radio Rwanda] is broadcasting in a language we understand.⁷

During all discussions, focus group members referred to radio as an important instrument of communication and source of information but telephone and visitors were noted as more persuasive. Especially for information on Rwanda, the Rwandans living in the DRC rely on information provided by family and friends through phone calls or personal visits. We explore this issue further since it is an important element to understand the motivation to leave the DRC and return to Rwanda. Although information received through radio messages and programs provided the ex-rebels with an overall framework to understand social and political developments in Rwanda and the region in general, personalized contact was a preferred source of information in considering if these reports of developments were to be trusted or not.

IMPACT OF THE RADIO SOAP OPERA

The story of the two villages, Bumanzi and Muhumuro, as it is presented in the *Musekweya* soap is, according to the ex-combatants, the story of Rwanda: “(1) What is played [dramatized] in *Musekweya* looks like reality. (2) One plays what happened during the genocide until [what is happening] now. (3) One talks about war, killings on the basis of ethnicity, the destruction of goods, exile, prison, the refusal to marry because of ethnicity and pardon as is happening during the period after the genocide.”⁸

However, while still in the DRC, most of the participants in the group discussions said they questioned the reality of what is being dramatized in *Musekweya* regarding what was actually happening in the most recent period in Rwandan history, namely reconciliation. It was only at a later stage, they said, when they effectively returned to Rwanda, that they also started to accept this theme as a reference to an existing reality in Rwanda: “When we were in Congo we thought that this theatre play ‘*Musekweya*’ was some sort of propaganda to incite us to return to our country. Because knowing what had happened in Rwanda during the genocide, we were thinking that it was impossible that Hutu and Tutsi could reconcile.”⁹

They relate the conflict between the villages to their own position as combatants in a war between two parties. As much as they were eager to

find out which party was going to win in the soap, they were also wondering who was going to win in the conflict in which they were personally involved. Some make the explicit link with their own situation in the DRC. *Musekeweya* made them reflect on whether they had the “correct ideas” on Rwanda in the DRC. They also wondered whether they could resist the FDLR leadership: “I liked the way we were told that we are the same, that there are no differences between people, that we need to complement each other. Another thing I appreciate is the fact that we are told how to ask for pardon after admitting one was wrong. In Congo, before coming to Rwanda, we always asked ourselves the question: are we right or wrong?”¹⁰

The theme of reconciliation underlies a great number of the most striking episodes mentioned by the ex-rebels. The overall theme of reconciliation between the villages is — according to the former FDLR members — a remarkable element in the *Musekeweya* story. Especially the ex-rebels with a lower rank reveal that the events and characters in *Musekeweya* made them question their own behaviour, position and convictions. The fictional characters Rutaganira and Gahayima are most cited as characters they identify with or would want to play if they had the chance to participate in the theatre play. The behavioural change that characterizes Rutaganira is remarkable to them, and some of the narratives collected explicitly refer to a reflection process some of them underwent in Congo as a result of Rutaganira’s change from instigator of violence to broker of peace and reconciliation: “To me, the most remarkable character is Rutaganira, he resembles many of us.”¹¹ “I would like to be Rutaganira because I am like him. Considering how I hated people who were not on my side and how, now, I am really loved in the community [here in Rwanda].”¹²

A similar type of reasoning underlies the identification with Gahayima. His humour is attractive to them, but the fact that he has a gun also makes him a popular figure. Yet with his gun he shoots bullets of peace, an activity that is not only “funny” but also invites a reflection on their own activities: “Me, I would like to play the role of Gihayima who is shooting

bullets of peace with his gun.”¹³ “I was touched by Gihayima. Because me too, I need to take the ‘peace gun’ because peace will always prevail.”¹⁴

Although there is clear evidence of deeper reflections facilitated by listening to the radio theatre, many of them refer to the humour of the characters, for instance, one of the characters’ greedy love for meat. The situation is a bit different for officers. Discussions with groups of former FDLR officers show that, unlike the ordinary soldiers, a significant number of them were (and are) reluctant to question their own mindsets based on the messages underlying *Musekeweya*. They also listen to the soap but especially for its distracting aspect, the humour and the fact that the stories that are presented resonate with common human sentiments — love, marriage, jealousy and so on: “(1) In the beginning we thought this [the soap] was simply humor. (2) We did not see the hidden lesson. (3) When we were in Congo, for us, unity and reconciliation did not exist in Rwanda. (4) There was a certain ideology [accentuating] that we were all of the Hutu living there in Congo, because we were convinced that all Hutu had been killed. Arriving in Rwanda, I realized I was wrong because I met Hutu like me that had really progressed in life.”

This last statement reveals an important theme that surfaced during the discussion with the officers: not only the importance of ideology within the ranks of the FDLR, but also the extent to which *Musekeweya* should be considered propaganda expressing the ideology of the new powerholders in Rwanda. I return to this issue in the conclusion of this chapter.

RETURNING TO RWANDA

The ex-rebels were asked to enumerate and discuss a range of obstacles encountered in the process of deciding whether or not to return to Rwanda. Apart from the issue of information on Rwanda, a more practical concern is the problem of accessing the demobilization points in the DRC. Frequently, it was mentioned that the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Congolese army, blocks the avenues to the repatriation points of the UN mission in the DRC. The economic advantages acquired during the stay in Congo are also a factor that makes it difficult for ex-rebels to return to Rwanda. It is not easy to leave behind

the natural wealth and wide availability of land in the DRC to return to Rwanda, where land is scarce and the economic situation in rural areas precarious. A return to Rwanda is also hampered by fear. The issue of lacking trustworthy information on actual developments in Rwanda and the clash of ideologies were frequently mentioned during these discussions.

(1) The biggest obstacle for people wanting to return to the country was the inability to access the repatriation areas. (2) There are people that committed genocide in Rwanda and they are afraid to return to the country. (3) Other people have large tracts of land in Congo and have nothing in Rwanda. (4) [The biggest obstacle preventing return is] the propaganda of those who have committed genocide in Rwanda. They actually constitute the leadership [of the FDLR] and are standing in the way of younger members willing to return to Rwanda. (All) [talking together]: the main reason preventing people from returning to Rwanda is the propaganda of the [FDLR] commanders and the impossibility to reach the repatriation points.¹⁵

(1) Among the obstacles to return to the country are the rumors that there are still massacres going on in Rwanda. (2) We were told that no Hutu could find a way of making a living in Rwanda, even if he was educated. (3) There is also the problem of accessing the demobilization areas. [The United Nations] are not established in every zone [in the DRC] to assist people wanting to return to Rwanda. You need to hand yourself over to Congolese military and these soldiers confiscate everything one has. Therefore, people are afraid to return. (1) Sharing of land with the refugees from 1959: this arrangement demotivates people to return. And there is the ideology of the FDLR leadership sensitizing people not to return to Rwanda. (All) [talking together]: the main obstacle preventing the return of all [Hutu] refugees is the propaganda of the FDLR commanders making sure people do not return.¹⁶

FDLR-related issues are mentioned prominently as important factors that made the ex-rebels' return to Rwanda possible. They cited the overall lack of objectives of the movement, conflicts in the FDLR leadership and the incompetence of the FDLR leaders. The war situation and hard life in

eastern DRC and the fact that many among the combatants were separated from their families still living in Rwanda are also frequently mentioned factors.

The changing nature of Rwanda and the availability of “trustworthy” information about those changes have greatly facilitated the return of ex-rebels to Rwanda. It is evident that radio broadcasts have played a major role in the spread of this changed image, but the most persuasive information came from telephone conversations with family members in Rwanda or visitors returning from Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

Although there is no clear evidence that radio or a radio soap such as *Musekweya* played a decisive role in the final decision of ex-rebels to return home, it is clear that the radio soap has been somehow at work in a dynamic of competing ideologies and mindsets. Scott Straus (2015, 330) is convinced that, in the context of mass violence, ideology and ideas shape decision making in “subtle but profound ways.” Ideology played a decisive role in the dynamics that led to genocide against Tutsi and remains important in understanding the post-genocide situation.

The 1994 genocide against Tutsi was sustained by a set of beliefs rooted in theories of racial superiority, the so-called “Hamitic hypothesis” in which Tutsi were presented as outsiders who had conquered and subjugated the majority group, the Hutu. This was complemented by a peasant ideology reinforcing the exclusion of Tutsi since they were portrayed as not real “peasants,” but herders (Verwimp 2004, 2013). Radio was an important instrument to spread these ideas throughout Rwandan society. The narratives discussed in this chapter and the few studies that exist on the FDLR in eastern DRC suggest that this pre-genocide ideological framework is structuring this politico-military movement and animating the mindset of its combatants (Rafti 2006; Hedlund 2015, 2017). Anna Hedlund, who conducted extensive research with the FDLR residing in the DRC, emphasizes how the FDLR remakes the history of Rwanda in general and contests the 1994 genocide in particular. These objectives are

deeply political and part of military strategy. The narratives presented in this chapter underscore this process.

Since the end of the genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) is promoting a radically different interpretation of Rwandan history and aims to reconfigure the political and societal narrative. Central is the notion of “Rwandanicity,” or “Rwandanness,” which asserts that before the arrival of colonialism, Rwandans were one unified people (Republic of Rwanda 2006, 167–85). According to this narrative, the colonial powers divided what had been a harmonious and egalitarian society. This ultimately culminated in the 1994 mass slaughter of Tutsi. This narrative praises the activities of the RPF, stopping the genocide in 1994 and divisionism altogether, and warns for the persistence of this “genocide ideology.” But there is a thin line between re-education and political indoctrination, also on this side of the Rwandan border (Mgbako 2005; Ingelaere 2010). The attempt to change mindsets can be seen as a strategy to achieve hegemonic control (Waldorf 2011; Thomson 2011; Reyntjens 2013; Purdékova 2015).

Media, and radio in particular, played a crucial role in the 1994 genocide against Tutsi (Thompson 2007). The conversations with ex-FDLR combatants demonstrate that radio continues to play an important role in the Rwanda socio-political landscape, especially with respect to the clash of ideologies, the shaping of mindsets and ideas. Overall, the findings suggest that more attention must be paid to this ideational dimension — ideas, beliefs, worldviews, ideology, cognitive structures — in the study of violence and genocide prevention, since this dimension has in recent years been obscured by a dominant focus on economic and situational logics (Gutiérrez Sanin and Wood 2014; see also Straus 2015). Not only the mobilizing capacities of media broadcasts need to be taken into account, but also the ways mindsets of combatants and ex-combatants are to be changed.

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1 Interahamwe was initially the name of a militia associated with the ruling political party (Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement) before and during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This militia played a major role in the execution of the genocide in Rwanda. During and because of the genocide, the label was used for anyone that had participated in the genocide and, in some cases, for all Hutu. Also currently, the FDLR are generally perceived as Interahamwe.

2 Based on Staub et al. (n.d.).

3 We received, through La Benevolencija, permission from the Rwanda Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission to undertake research activities in the demobilization camp of Mutobo located in the North of Rwanda.

4 Together with two Rwandan translators, I conducted all of the focus group discussions. These two Rwandan collaborators also jointly conducted some of the interviews.

- 5 Focus group discussion (FGD) “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 30/09/2009; (1) corporal, male, single, 28 years old; (2) corporal, male, single, 25 years old.
- 6 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 11/10/2009; (1) private first class, male, single, 25 years old; (2) corporal, male, married, 37; (3) private first class, male, single, 28 years old; (4) corporal, male, married, 35 years old.
- 7 FGD group “soldiers” – returned to hill (village) – Northern Province; 13/10/2009; (1) private first class, male, single, 29 years old; (2) corporal, male, married, 43 years old.
- 8 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 08/10/2009; (1) corporal, male, single, 23 years old; (2) private first class, male, single, 32 years old; (3) staff sergeant, male, married, 59 years old.
- 9 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 11/10/2009; corporal, male, married, 37 years old.
- 10 FGD “soldiers” – returned to hill (village) – Northern Province; 12/11/2009; corporal, male, married, 44 years old.
- 11 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 01/10/2009; corporal, male, single, 30 years old.
- 12 FGD “soldiers” – returned to hill (village) – Northern Province; 12/11/2009; sergeant, male, single, 28 years old.
- 13 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 08/10/2009; private first class, male, single, 32 years old.
- 14 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 30/09/2009; corporal, male, single, 24 years old.
- 15 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 10/10/2009 (1) corporal, male, single, 28 years old; (2) corporal, male, single, 27 years old; (3) corporal, male, married, 40 years old; (4) corporal, male, married, 40 years old.
- 16 FGD “soldiers” – demobilization camp “Mutobo”; 01/10/2009; (1) corporal, male, single, 29 years old; (2) corporal, male, married, 40 years old; (3) corporal, male, single, 29 years old.

A dark, textured brushstroke background, resembling a thick application of black paint or ink, with visible grain and irregular edges. The stroke is roughly rectangular and oriented diagonally from the top-left to the bottom-right.

CONCLUSION



EPILOGUE

ALLAN THOMPSON

The grainy video shows two women being forced down a dirt path by men in military fatigues. One of the men is wearing sunglasses and can be heard accusing the women of belonging to the jihadist group Boko Haram and saying, “You’re going to die.”

One woman is wearing a colourful batik dress; a little girl in a skirt walks beside, holding her hand. The man dragging the woman down the track has an automatic rifle slung over his shoulder. He repeatedly slaps her in the face as they walk down the dusty trail, followed by other soldiers and a second woman prisoner, this one in a T-shirt and blue head scarf. There is an infant strapped to her back.

But there aren’t just men in fatigues. Close to a dozen young men and boys carrying sticks and clubs also follow along the dirt path, past a herd of goats grazing outside a mud compound.

The gruesome video was apparently captured by the soldiers themselves as a sort of “trophy” and the man with the camera can be heard calling some of the soldiers by name, cheering them on.

In the final scene, the women, who remain silent throughout, are blindfolded and forced to the ground along with the children. The little girl has her T-shirt pulled over her head. The baby stares blankly at the camera. All four are executed, shot at close range a total of 22 times.

We now know the video was captured between March 20 and April 5, 2015, just outside a village called Krawa Mafa in northern Cameroon. This atrocity occurred less than a kilometre from the town of Zelevet on Cameroon’s border with Nigeria. The video was most likely shared on private networks such as WhatsApp before it surfaced on Facebook and Twitter on July 10, 2018. It immediately went viral on social media.

Within hours, the video captured the attention of professional journalists and news organizations, but also a legion of self-described “open-source investigators” who use online tools to attempt to geo-locate events captured on video, to debunk myths or to hold perpetrators to account.

We now know where the video was taken, when the horrific killings occurred and, equally important, the identity of several of the perpetrators, men the Government of Cameroon claimed, in late 2018, were in jail and facing justice, after initially denying the video had been taken in their country at all.

We know all of this because of a remarkable collaboration between a mainstream news organization, the BBC, and a collection of open-source investigators who never met in person while conducting their investigation, never travelled to Africa, and because some of them remain anonymous, communicated almost exclusively through a Twitter direct message group.

The result of that collaboration, an 11-minute documentary by BBC’s Africa Eye unit called *Anatomy of a Killing* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G9S-eoLgX4) was posted to YouTube, the BBC website and in a Twitter thread on September 24, 2018, causing a sensation. The Africa Eye

report plays excerpts from the original video — with the exception of the gruesome killings — and then meticulously takes the viewer step by step through the online investigation that determined where and when the killings had taken place and who some of the killers were. The result is a remarkable piece of journalism, much of it the work of non-journalists.

It is a quarter-century since some of the first killings of the Rwanda genocide were captured in another grainy video that forced us to experience the death throes of two people on a dirt road in Kigali. Nearly 25 years after British journalist Nick Hughes documented the atrocities in Rwanda, we are confronted by another video of an atrocity — vastly different and yet eerily similar. Another video that tells us about far-off events, but also speaks volumes about how the news media can interact with such atrocities — in the modern example, from thousands of miles away.

The story of the BBC collaboration with open-source investigators that revealed so much about an atrocity in Cameroon is a fascinating tale in itself. And at the end of this collection, the re-telling also provides us some insights into today's nexus between media and atrocity, and perhaps a bit of what the future might hold.

Some of the key players in the BBC's Africa Eye production described in interviews and through online exchanges how the project came together; in essence, as a collaboration between one of the world's most prestigious news organizations and a scattered group of open-source investigators who are proud of the fact that they do most of their work from home, sitting on their couch with a laptop.

Daniel Adamson, the BBC producer who leads the Africa Eye team, sees *Anatomy of a Killing* as perhaps the best example so far of the kind of fusion of traditional journalism, production and storytelling with the “magnificent accountability investigative work done by citizen journalists,”¹ that he hopes provides media a way forward.

Among the first in the group to watch the video after it went public on July 10, 2018, was Benjamin Strick, an Australian web developer who dabbled

in open-source investigations as a hobby, in part because of his military background. He says he self-identifies as an “open-source analyst”² and a member of the open-source community. Strick was ultimately hired by the BBC later that summer to help produce *Anatomy of a Killing*. From his home near Amsterdam, he continues to contribute to the work of Bellingcat.com, the trail-blazing London-based online investigation organization.

Strick says he saw the video not long after it was posted. He was at home, “just doing work and scrolling through Twitter.” He began investigating immediately, first downloading the video from Twitter in an mp4 format, slowing the speed using iMovie and capturing screen shots of the surroundings and distinctive features to cross reference on Google Earth. His assumption from the terrain and the language being used by the soldiers was that the video had been taken in francophone Africa. And almost immediately, there was speculation online that the video had been captured in Cameroon or Mali.

Strick posted a Twitter thread with screenshots from the video — building outlines, tracks, the mountain ridge that can be seen in the background — and asked for help to crowdsource and solve the puzzle.

Strick began to collaborate with an investigator at Amnesty International, as well as several others online, including a Twitter user who goes by the handle “Sector 035.”

Little did Strick know that others were doing exactly the same thing, among them Aliaume Leroy, another specialist in open-source investigations who had recently been hired by the BBC’s Africa Eye unit because of his focus on using social media and open-source information as a verification tool. Leroy, a French national, had been studying political science at McGill University in Montreal when he first encountered Bellingcat and began to contribute to their investigations. He went on to complete an M.A. in the War Studies department at King’s College London, and was in the investigation unit at the NGO Global Witness when the BBC hired him to help set up the open-source unit at Africa Eye.

“We couldn’t ignore that video,”³ says Leroy, who was initially assigned by Africa Eye to verify what he could about the video to assist with news reporting. Because of his existing links with the open-source community, Leroy took it upon himself to broaden his investigation and to keep his producers at BBC informed of the findings, among them Adamson, Africa Eye’s senior producer.

On July 11, 2018, just a day after the video’s release, the Cameroon Minister of Communication Issa Tchiroma Bakary called the speculation that the video had been taken in Cameroon “fake news” and insisted the video had not been taken in his country. “As you can see, there is no doubt about the deceptive nature of this sham,” he said in an official statement.⁴ To underline his point, the minister said the military fatigues worn by the men in the video — green forest camouflage — were not the type worn by Cameroonian troops in that region. He said the weapons that could be seen in the video were not the type issued to soldiers in Cameroon’s army and also insisted that soldiers out on patrol would have been wearing full combat gear, unlike those seen in the video.

The minister’s emphatic denial served only to lay down the gauntlet for open-source investigators. “That’s a crucial story,” Strick recounts. “It’s a government lying about the deaths of two children and two women.”

Just after noon, on July 12, Strick posted on Twitter his contention that one of the weapons used in the killings and seen clearly in the video was a Serbian-made Zastava M21 rifle. He’d used the online application Sketchpad to match the outline of the weapon from the video with the Zastava M21. And he found other footage online of Cameroonian soldiers in the region using M21s. That linked the video to Cameroon.

The logic for the investigators was first to confirm the exact location, *where* the video had been taken. The next piece of the puzzle would be the time frame, *when* the killings had occurred. And finally, identifying *who* the perpetrators were. The identities of the victims were never confirmed.

Within days of the video going viral, Strick and others had identified the distinctive outline of the ridge seen in the background of the video and

began the quest to use Google Earth to match that ridge to an actual location in northern Cameroon. They also highlighted other distinctive features, such as buildings, trees and dirt paths. And they reached out online for help in narrowing down the search. Among close to 20 such tips, one finally came to Strick from a contact who sent him a direct message (DM) via Twitter, suggesting he narrow his search to the town of Zelevet, on Cameroon's northern border with Nigeria, an area of a Boko Haram insurgency.

Amid the flurry of investigations by mainstream news organizations and online "couch analysts," Leroy set up a DM group on Twitter on July 18, bringing together more than a dozen investigators who had already been working on the video. Ethnographers trying to reconstruct how this story eventually came together would quickly realize the disparate DM group on Twitter was the project's closest thing to a newsroom, with editors and reporters replaced by young people sitting at home on their couches, surfing the internet for hours on end.

Narrowing their search to the Zelevet area, they eventually matched the path along which the soldiers had marched their victims, the ridgeline of the mountain range that can be seen in the background, as well as buildings visible in the video. But determined to pin down the location with 100 percent accuracy, they went further.

"We matched up every single tree. I personally did that," Strick recounts. "We only show a few of the trees in the video, but every tree does match. We matched up the path, the buildings, the little ridge lines on the map, they all match. The layer of rocks, things that don't move as well. Then, things that do move, such as large trees, seasonal paths, new and old buildings."

Confident that they knew where the video had been taken, the team set out to confirm the timing. And again, the video itself contained the clues.

One building that is clearly visible in the video can also be found in satellite imagery, but only until it was apparently torn down in February 2016. That clue told investigators the killings happened before that date. The video and satellite images also capture another structure, surrounded

by a wall that appeared in news footage taken in the community in March 2015, but had not yet been built in November 2014. That gave investigators an earliest possible date for the killings. The video reveals a foot path that only appears in aerial photography during the hot dry season between January and April, providing another reference point.

And because it was a sunny day, the soldiers walking in front of the women in one part of the video cast shadows on the ground, like moving sun dials. Through a series of complex calculations, assisted by an app called SunCalc, investigators narrowed the time frame dramatically, concluding that the video had to have been taken between March 20 and April 5, 2015.

Now the focus of the investigation shifted to the *who*, the identities of the perpetrators. Again, vital clues could be found in the video itself. The man holding the camera uses names and nicknames in the video, referring to one man as Tsanga or Cobra, and to another as Tchotcho.

All the while, Strick had been searching YouTube for other video references to military operations in northern Cameroon, training his YouTube algorithm to focus on the kinds of material he was looking for. In most of the videos, soldiers were wearing heavy armour, webbing to carry their ammunition, their grenade pouches and their radios. But the perpetrators in the killing video had none of that gear. “It was a question that some of us were asking, ‘Why are these guys not wearing boots, bulletproof vests, extra magazines, usual patrol wear?’” Strick recounts. The government’s contention was that the men couldn’t be Cameroonian soldiers on patrol in that area if they lacked the heavy combat gear. But Strick’s YouTube searches had also brought up “punishment videos” taken by soldiers while they were on base. And those soldiers were dressed just like the ones in the killing video, with simple fatigues and footwear and no protective gear.

The conclusion: the soldiers in the killing video must have been very close to their base, not out on patrol. And the online search finally led to a March 2015 report by Britain’s Channel 4 News correspondent Lindsey Hilsum. (Coincidentally, Hilsum was one of only two Western journalists on the ground in Rwanda on April 6, 1994, when the assassination of the

president triggered the genocide.) Hilsum's 2015 report from northern Cameroon included footage taken of soldiers in a small military outpost in Zelevet, soldiers who were wearing forest green fatigues and carrying Zastava M21s. The location of the base matched with the mountain ridge line.

"I thought, Holy shit. Here we go. This is why they've dressed this way, and there's the barracks," Strick recounts. The team also worked to cross reference names that had been mentioned in the video with Facebook profiles of members of Cameroon's army. One profile to surface was that of Tchotcho Cyriaque Bityala, a sergeant, whose photo is a match for the man identified as Tchotcho in the video.

And again, a human source intervened. While the team won't identify the source, he was someone who was familiar with the soldiers in question and was able to verify the identity of three of those seen in the video, matching their names to their faces: Tchotcho Cyriaque Bityala, Barnabas Donossou and Lance Corporal Tsanga, also referred to by the nickname Cobra.

Now, having verified the *where*, *when* and *who*, Leroy made the case to his producers at BBC that the investigation was ready for some kind of documentary treatment, to pull all the findings together. All along there had been some debate among the members of the DM group, with some adamant that it would be better to simply post what had already been determined, the exact location of the killings, and the time element.

"The open-source guys obviously were more excited about publishing. Once they geo-located they were like, 'Okay, job done, we've done the geo-location. Let's Tweet about it,'" Leroy recounts.

But Leroy convinced the group that the journalism production, while it would take some time, would ultimately have more impact and reach a wider audience. And it was important to triangulate sourcing to make sure that every piece of evidence presented in *Anatomy of a Killing* was solid. With the help of BBC producers and video and graphic editor Tom Flannery, the investigation was translated into a mini-documentary.

That effort took the better part of six weeks.

The team could never determine who had captured the video. And it is clear from the recording that more than one person was using a smart phone to record the events. At one point, a man on the sidelines can be seen recording on his phone, then passing the device to someone else.

Amnesty International sent an investigator to the region in August 2018 and interviewed residents of Zelevet who had been displaced by fighting. One witness recounted seeing the women and children being led into the base by Cameroonian soldiers. The witness said that a short time later, he heard gunfire.

In August, the Cameroonian government suddenly changed its position and, on August 18, issued a statement saying that seven Cameroonian military personnel had been arrested and were under investigation in connection with the killings captured in the video. Three of the names on the government's list matched those the investigators had found through their research: Sergeant Tchotcho Cyriaque Bityala, Lance Corporal Barnabas Donossou and Lance Corporal Tsanga.

Anatomy of a Killing, both the 11-minute YouTube documentary uploaded to the BBC website and the Twitter thread, went viral. Most interesting in some respects was the project's impact on Twitter, in some ways as a trailblazer for the use of the medium for storytelling. The Twitter thread generated 57,000 re-tweets, reaching an estimated 15 million Twitter users. As Adamson points out, the story was made for the basic structure of a Twitter thread, with each individual tweet containing a single finding, linked together so that the tweets told a story. That mirrored the structure of the investigation itself, with a series of individual findings linked together into a chain of evidence, a simple visual sequence, leading toward a conclusion.

Looking back, Leroy and Strick concede that the conventional journalism technique of using human sources — in this case the anonymous sources who led investigators to Zelevet and also confirmed the identities of three of the perpetrators — proved to be a turning point. But the end result was still a fusion of traditional journalism and open-source intelligence extracted by so-called “couch analysts,” a product that Strick only half-jokingly refers to as “journalism by proxy.”

In the case of Rwanda, the starting point for this volume, the media were accused of downplaying the story. For a variety of reasons, there just weren't enough journalists on the ground to reach the kind of critical mass that would force a story to penetrate our consciousness. And yet, the few reporters on the ground did manage to leave us with a rich journalistic record of those events.

But when one looks back at Rwanda through the lens of the *Anatomy of a Killing* project in Cameroon, the mind boggles. Just imagine for a moment what might have been in Rwanda, had millions of people on the ground held in their hands phones that were capable of capturing and transmitting still images, video as well as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram posts in real-time. Imagine what news organizations might have done with such streams of user-generated content. Imagine what legions of open-source investigators might have made of the publicly available satellite imagery of virtually every square inch of Rwanda, combined with videos posted by victims, survivors, witnesses and, indeed, by perpetrators themselves.

But going forward, we no longer need to imagine. This world very much exists. But how has it changed the way traditional news media and those lapping at the shores of media intersect with massive human rights crimes and atrocities committed in broad daylight?

In the 25 years since Rwanda, there is much to lament when it comes to the state of international media coverage of human rights violations and atrocities. News organizations have continued to retract and look inward. There are fewer foreign correspondents on the ground in Africa now than there were in 1994. Despite the lessons of Rwanda, the conflicts in Darfur, the Central African Republic and Myanmar, as well as numerous other tragedies, have unfolded before us. When we looked back at what happened in Rwanda and how the media was interwoven with events, our focus was almost exclusively on how media actors used or abused the tools of the trade. In a dramatic twist, the forces perpetrating many of today's atrocities now use media tools themselves, sometimes to great effect. And we are left to wonder, where are the better angels of our nature, those who can use media tools to inform, and hold perpetrators to account?

Adamson sees hope for new forms of collaboration among mainstream news organizations, citizen journalists and open-source investigators. Before joining the BBC, Adamson worked as a print reporter in the Middle East, spending a considerable amount of time in Syria. From 2011, he watched with intense interest as the Syrian conflict laid bare the coincidence of two unprecedented situations: the near absence of traditional media and the emergence of social media and user-generated content to occupy the void.

With a few notable exceptions, international media were unable to put boots on the ground to cover Syria, by comparison with the war in Iraq a decade earlier. Many incidents in that war unfolded beyond the range of TV cameras. But unlike Rwanda, Syria's war was the first major conflict that was extensively documented by those who were caught up in it. The combatants, as well as civilians, were carrying video cameras embedded in their mobile phones. While journalists were largely absent, so-called user-generated content poured out of Syria from mobile phones. And news organizations struggled to piece together a clear picture of what was happening, based on that flow of content. As has been noted elsewhere in this collection, there were probably more minutes of content recorded and posted during the Syrian conflict than there were minutes of real time.

The necessity of verifying and making sense of that content pioneered the kind of open-source investigative work done by organizations such as Bellingcat. "I followed the rise of open-source work and I thought, 'This is really powerful,'" Adamson says, noting that the investigators got a jump on long-standing news organizations like the BBC. The BBC's *Anatomy of a Killing* documentary was a direct result of the decision to pay more attention to the digital output and hire open-source investigators to help cover these stories.

Adamson admits that when Leroy told him within hours of seeing the Cameroon video that he would be able to nail down the location because of the mountain range visible in the background, he was skeptical. "I thought it was just a needle in a haystack and I was quite skeptical that he was going to get anywhere." The end result was a cutting-edge story that deployed virtually every new open-source technique, but also relied on

old-fashioned human sources and journalistic storytelling. The story also exceeded all expectations because of its resonance on Twitter, a medium that many storytellers had yet to master.

Of course, there are reasons for concern. Yes, journalism can now tap into the accountability that is enabled by the evidence of war crimes and human rights violations generated by people using mobile phones. And other institutions, such as the International Criminal Court in the Hague, are also wrestling with how to treat the emergence of this user-generated content. For its part, Bellingcat is opening an office in the Hague to work directly with the International Criminal Court on a project to catalogue the vast quantity of user-generated content produced over the last seven years in Syria. “They know that those grainy YouTube videos uploaded from Idlib and Aleppo and places like that constitute a body of evidence that might well be crucial in the prosecution of war crimes over decades to come,” Adamson says.

So mobile phones and their users are creating a vast body of evidence that can be used by prosecutors and journalists. But Adamson is also troubled by the arbitrariness of it all. Clearly, many atrocities are not recorded on mobile phones, proverbial trees falling in the forest with no one there to hear them. “The incident in Cameroon, which we documented in that story, isn’t an anomaly,” Adamson says. But it now exists for us because it was recorded and the video could be verified. But as Adamson asks, isn’t whether or not an event has been recorded a very arbitrary criteria by which to go about holding people to account? Are we entering a world where nothing can be believed unless there’s a really good video of it on YouTube?

And there is the obvious critique that investigating human rights violations from 10,000 feet works very well for news organizations increasingly unable or unwilling to put boots on the ground. But faced with the current reality, the potential presented by the fusion of traditional journalism with open-source investigation does point to at least one way to move forward. Moving forward while still glancing back, on occasion, to grainy video of two fellow human beings facing death.

- 1 Interview with author, December 10, 2018.
- 2 Interview with author, November 27, 2018.
- 3 Interview with author, November 29, 2018.
- 4 The full statement is available at www.mincom.gov.cm/en/2018/09/13/fake-news-on-the-alleged-extrajudicial-executions-attributed-to-cameroonian-defence-forces/.



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Paul Rukeshu was born in Rwanda in 1978. He received a bachelor's degree in sociology at the National University of Rwanda (now University of Rwanda) in 2007. Paul is currently the team leader of Digital Content Development at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Education Department, a memorial run by the Aegis Trust, which is a UK NGO. He is responsible for digital content development, content appraisal and validation as well as coordinating the digital content development team on a daily basis. He started working with the Archive and Documentation Centre of the Aegis Trust in July 2010. Previously, he worked for the National Service of Gacaca Courts.

Joachim J. Savelsberg is a professor of sociology and law, and holder of the Arsham and Charlotte Ohanessian Chair at the University of Minnesota. Educated in Germany, and following fellowships at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University, he joined Minnesota in 1989. He held visiting professor/fellow positions at Ludwig-Maximilians Universität (Munich), Karl Franzens Universität (Graz), Humboldt Universität (Berlin), Rockefeller Bellagio Center, Käte Hamburger Center for Advanced Study (Bonn), Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study

(South Africa) and Paris Institute for Advanced Studies. Publications addressing mass violence and media include *Representing Mass Violence: Conflicting Responses to Human Rights Violations in Darfur* (University of California Press, 2015), “Media and Transitional Justice” in *The Oxford Handbook of Transitional Justice* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and, with Wahutu Siguru, “Media Reports and African Genocide” in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

David Smith is a founding director of Okapi Consulting, working in the domain of communications in conflict zones and fragile states. David is of the firm belief that getting parties to any conflict to talk to each other is a vital step toward securing stability, without which lasting peace is unlikely. His current projects include the development of a regional radio network in the Lake Chad Basin, targeting areas affected by Boko Haram. Radio Ndarason Internationale, broadcasting in Kanuri, Kanembu, Buduma and French, has studios in N’Djamena and Maiduguri. A similar project is in development phase in West Africa’s G5 Sahel region. David is also responsible for the conception of Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Radio Ndeke Luka in the Central African Republic and Bar Kulan in Somalia. His entry into media was in South Africa, where he worked as a journalist at Capital Radio, prior to taking producer positions at public broadcasters in Canada and the Netherlands.

Scott Straus is Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Scott specializes in the study of genocide, political violence, human rights and African politics. His most recent books are *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Cornell University Press, 2015), which has won four awards, including the 2018 Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order, as well as two honourable mentions, and *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016). He has also published several books on Rwanda, including *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Cornell University Press, 2006); *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights after Mass Violence* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); and *Intimate Enemy* (Zone

Books, 2006). He has published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, *World Politics*, *Politics & Society*, *Journal of Genocide Research*, *African Affairs*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Research* and the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. Scott has received fellowships from the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and the United States Institute of Peace. Scott was named a Winnick Fellow at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in December 2016 was appointed to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council by President Barack Obama. Before starting in academia, Scott was a freelance journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Anjan Sundaram is the author of two books, *Stringer: A Reporter's Journey in the Congo* and *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship*. He has reported from Central Africa and commented on international news since 2005, receiving numerous awards. He obtained a Ph.D. in creative writing and journalism from the University of East Anglia in 2017.

Allan Thompson, after 17 years as a reporter with the *Toronto Star*, covering immigration, business, federal politics, foreign affairs and defence, and travelling frequently on assignment to Africa, joined the faculty of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication in 2003. In 2006, Allan launched the Rwanda Initiative, a capacity-building project in the media sector in Rwanda through a partnership between Carleton's journalism school and its counterpart at the National University of Rwanda. He also initiated the process of publishing an edited collection called *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* (Pluto Press, 2007). In 2009, he launched the Centre for Media and Transitional Societies, which is responsible for international media internships for Carleton students, and undertook a research program on the impact of information and communications technologies on radio in Africa. Allan was a candidate for the Liberal Party of Canada in the southwestern Ontario riding of Huron-Bruce in the 2015 federal election and will be running again in 2019. He contributed a chapter on the dynamics of the 2015 campaign to *The Canadian Federal Election of 2015* (Dundurn Press,

1016). He is a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

Yannick Veuilleux-Lepage is a senior researcher in the Transcultural Conflict and Violence Initiative at Georgia State University, where he works on Department of Defense-funded projects analyzing online extremist discourse and the media products produced by extremist groups. His doctoral research, which explained the process by which new techniques of political contention appear, transform, spread and disappear, drawing on insights from evolutionary theory, will be the subject of an upcoming book titled *How Terror Evolves: The Emergence and Spread of Terrorist Techniques* (Rowman and Littlefield International, forthcoming May 2019). Yannick previously worked as a senior intelligence analyst specializing in international terrorism and emerging threats for the Government of Canada. Yannick holds a doctorate in international relations from the University of St. Andrews; a master's degree in international affairs from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs and a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies (security studies) from Carleton University.

j. Siguru Wahutu is a fellow at the Berkman Klein Center of Internet and Society at Harvard University and an assistant professor in New York University's Department of Media, Culture and Communication. His research interests are in the fields of data privacy and media manipulation, sociology of media, sociology of knowledge, genocide, mass violence and ethnicity, with a regional emphasis on Sub-Saharan Africa. His current book project examines how media fields in Africa construct knowledge about instances of massive human rights violations. Siguru's research has appeared in *African Affairs*; *Sociological Forum*; *Media, Culture, and Society*; and *Global Media and Communication*. He has also written about global media patterns on the coverage of genocide in Africa (with Joachim Savelsberg), on ethnicity and land politics in Kenya (with Tade Okediji) and on Kenyan media's experimentation with social media platforms and messaging apps (with Wambui Wamunyu).

Paul Watson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of three books, including the bestselling *Ice Ghosts: The Epic Hunt for the Lost*

Franklin Expedition (McClelland & Stewart, 2017) and the memoir *Where War Lives* (Penguin Random House, 2007). He spent almost a quarter of a century in journalism as a foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Toronto Star*. Paul resigned as *The Star*'s multimedia Arctic correspondent after the newspaper tried to kill a story detailing how the Conservative government used the search for Sir John Franklin's missing nineteenth-century ships to push a political agenda. Paul is also the subject of an award-winning two-man play, "The Body of an American." His website is www.arcticstarcreativity.com. You can follow him on Twitter: [@wherewarlives](https://twitter.com/wherewarlives).

Geoffrey York is the Africa correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*. He has been a foreign correspondent for *The Globe and Mail* since 1994, including seven years as the Moscow bureau chief and seven years as the Beijing bureau chief. He has been covering Africa from his base in Johannesburg since 2009. He is a veteran war correspondent who has covered conflicts since 1992 in places such as Somalia, Sudan, Chechnya, Iraq and Afghanistan. He is also the author of three books, including two books on Indigenous issues and a book on health policy. He has received a number of awards for journalism, including a National Magazine Award and several National Newspaper Awards. He was born in Ottawa, graduated from the journalism school of Carleton University, and joined *The Globe and Mail* in 1981. In addition to his foreign assignments, he has served in the newspaper's bureaus in Winnipeg, on Parliament Hill and at Toronto City Hall.



After 17 years as a reporter with the *Toronto Star* — covering immigration, business, federal politics, foreign affairs and defence, as well as travelling frequently on assignment to Africa — Allan Thompson joined the faculty of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication in 2003.

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**“WHILE WE STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND HOW
OR WHY THE OUTSIDE WORLD DIDN’T SEEM TO BE
MOVED BY WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN RWANDA**

— despite the valiant efforts of a small cadre of brave journalists on the ground — we also witnessed the perverse and highly successful use of media tools by those perpetrating the genocide. While conventional news media somehow failed to fully grasp what was happening in Rwanda, or, at the very least, failed to capture the attention of audiences back home, hate media outlets in Rwanda dominated the airwaves and successfully delivered a vile message of hate that contributed to the killing spree.”

*—From the foreword by Lieutenant-
General Roméo Dallaire, former Force
Commander of the United Nations
Assistance Mission for Rwanda*

When human beings are at their worst — as they most certainly were in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide — the world needs the institutions of journalism and the media to be at their best. Sadly, in Rwanda, the media fell short.

In the chapters of *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond*, veteran journalists and researchers revisit the case of Rwanda and its grim lessons, as well as other situations of genocide, war crimes and mass violence, including Darfur, the Central African Republic, Myanmar and South Sudan. They also examine how the nexus between media and mass atrocity has been shaped by the dramatic rise of social media, looking at how the media might help to locate and prosecute war criminals, and even play a role in preventing future atrocities.

Twenty-five years after the Rwanda genocide, as similar tragedies continue to unfold today, there is still much to learn about the role that media plays when mass atrocity events threaten. *Media and Mass Atrocity* is a critical text for citizens, journalists, researchers and policy makers who want to better understand the terrain where media and mass atrocity meet.

Centre for International
Governance Innovation