

The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide

by Christine L. Kellow and H. Leslie Steeves

We examine and interpret the role of the government-controlled Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which involved mass killings both of and by civilians. We consider the historical and political context of the genocide and analyze excerpts from RTLM radio broadcasts and observational accounts, and we interpret, via several strands of communication scholarship related to collective reaction effects and dependency theory, the role played by radio in inciting the genocide.

On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamina of neighboring Burundi crashed under still undetermined circumstances. This event sparked a massive killing spree over the next 3 months that left up to 1 million Rwandans dead and 2 million refugees seeking safety in neighboring Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi. Most of the killings were carried out by civilian Hutus against their Tutsi neighbors. Age, gender, and occupation were no criteria in the massacres. In hundreds of villages across Rwanda, where previously two ethnic groups had intermingled socially and coexisted peacefully, ordinary people were picking up machetes, sticks, or whatever was available, and killing their neighbors.

Rwandan media have been accused of inciting the hatred that led to violence by using an ethnic framework to report what was essentially a political struggle. They also have been accused of spreading fear, rumor, and panic by using a kill-or-be-killed frame, and of relaying directives about the necessity of killing the Tutsi people as well as instructions on how to do it. Accusers named several small publications, but principally the radio coverage of a single influential station, Radio des Mille Collines (RTLM), which was owned and under the control of supporters of Hutu President Habyarimana. A Rwandan human rights activist lamented that, "The political leaders, as well as all of us, have underestimated the force that RTLM represented . . . that was a lethal error" (Gatwa, 1995, p. 20). Two

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French journalists stated: "If Rwandan crimes against humanity ever come to trial, the owners of Radio des Mille Collines will stand at the head of the accused" (Misser & Jaumain, 1994, p. 72).

For the first time since the Nazi war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg, journalists have testified in genocide trials. Western journalists have been among the witnesses. Rwandan journalists are among the accused. Alan Sigg, head of external relations at a United Nations tribunal investigating Rwanda's genocide, stated that international law dictates that journalists who incite killings are guilty. "For these journalists, it won't be enough to say: 'Sorry, I was just a small fish and I had orders.' The standards of international law should be the same here in Rwanda" (quoted in Kaban, 1995).

Such accusations obviously pose concerns for politicians, journalists, and human rights organizations. They also pose questions for communication studies. Under what circumstances can and do media play an exceptionally powerful—and heinous—role? Can media incite genocide? Genocide is an extreme and infrequent occurrence. The circumstances and crimes vary enormously. In this essay, therefore, we report a preliminary investigation of the probable role of media, specifically radio, in the Rwandan genocide.

Media Influence Studies

The role and influence of media cannot be divorced from the historical, cultural, and political-economic environments in which they function. In general, mass communication emerged alongside industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. The social controls of traditional society were replaced with more formal systems operated by impersonal institutions and governments. Communication systems became similarly depersonalized and were observed to wield increasing power as information disseminators.

Studies in this century addressing role of mass media in Western societies have yielded a plethora of frameworks, but no single theory capable of explaining why the media, at times, seem to have powerful, direct effects, but at other times, weak, indirect effects (e.g., McQuail, 1994). Although early theories, stemming from the mass society concept, assumed strong effects of media, later theories assumed that media could exert strong or weak influences, depending on context and circumstances. Most situations are best interpreted by drawing on several theories and considering relevant contextual information. Our study draws primarily on two broad and somewhat overlapping frameworks. First is the area of collective reaction effects, which emphasizes social psychological explanations for short-term effects. The second area includes dependency theory, agenda setting, framing, event outcome, and media campaigns. This area emphasizes social context and considers both short- and long-term effects.

Collective Reaction Effects

Collective reaction events can be defined as the joint reactions, unplanned or unpredicted, of many in a shared experience. Two types of collective reaction

effects are relevant in the Rwanda situation: widespread panic in response to alarming information, often incomplete, and the spread and strengthening of crowd or mob activity. Fear, anger, and anxiety are potent emotions that can lead to panic and civil disturbance. Media contribute by reaching large populations with the same information at the same time: “Precipitating features of panic seem to be incompleteness or inaccuracy of information, leading to the urgent search for information, usually through personal channels, thus giving further currency to the original message” (McQuail, 1994, 344–345).

A related idea is contagion, which refers to the power of media to inspire imitation of actions. Phillips (1980) found an increased number of small aircraft crashes immediately after well-publicized murder-suicide stories, which he theorized to be imitative murder-suicides disguised as airplane accidents. Holden (1986) found that successful airline hijackings in the United States generated additional attempts. Such controversial findings have not indicated effects on a massive scale, as in Rwanda.

Very important in this area of scholarship was Cantril’s (1940) study, *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. On October 30, 1938, Orson Welles and a group of actors, in a New York studio of Columbia Broadcasting System, broadcast an adaptation of H. G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds* (1993). Six million Americans tuned in to this dramatization of a science fiction novel about a Martian invasion (text included in Cantril, 1940). Over 1 million of them responded with severe fright or panic. This created a unique opportunity for the study of panic behavior inadvertently activated by the mass media. In this rare instance, there could be little doubt that radio had triggered a mass effect. The broadcast caused fear, fear caused panic, and panic led to verifiable reactions. Cantril used surveys, newspaper accounts, and personal interviews to try to understand the feelings and reactions of the people who panicked, as well as the psychological and sociological aspects of panic. Cantril’s study has since been criticized for an overemphasis on individuals and their psychological states (e.g., their suggestibility and religiosity) and a failure to consider all relevant contributing factors, such as the creators of the broadcast. Nonetheless, Lowery and DeFleur (1983) suggested that this study inspired new ways of thinking about media effects by placing more emphasis on selective (versus direct) influences and recognizing the importance of historical context (p. 77). Several of Cantril’s findings appear useful in interpreting the Rwandan situation, despite vastly different circumstances.

Media Dependency and Related Frameworks

Media dependency is a broad perspective that attempts to reconcile several frameworks that view media systems as a part of the larger fabric of society. Influenced in part by the sociological thought of Emile Durkheim, among others, dependency theory assumes that life in complex industrialized societies requires increased dependency on mass media’s role in disseminating information. Whereas in traditional societies people controlled access to information via interpersonal communication, in modern society the locus of information control shifted to impersonal organizations of mass communication. This is because people in traditional societies tended to have similar needs that could be met via interpersonal

networks. Urban-industrial societies are much more complex and diverse. Therefore, people become increasingly dependent on mass-mediated information controlled by organizations with political and economic motives (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Merskin, in press).¹

Many studies have documented and examined heightened dependency on media during times of political, economic, or environmental crisis and uncertainty (e.g., Merskin, in press). These studies suggest that communication researchers promoted powerful effects models during the times of the two world wars, then minimal effects during the more stable period of the 1950s and 1960s. After social upheaval once again disturbed the balance, media were credited with more power. McQuail (1994) theorized that actual effects may be greater in periods of instability, and suggested several potential reasons, all consistent with dependency theory: In times of instability people may be more reliant on mass media for information and guidance; people may know of the crucial events only through media; and media are more influential in matters outside the realm of personal experience (pp. 332–333).

Agenda setting, which Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur included under the dependency umbrella, refers to the way that media order and project the relative importance of issues (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Merskin, in press). The media exert influence on what is significant in the public domain. This influence may be more powerful with broadcast media. Whereas print material can be reordered, there is no choice of order or emphasis in the broadcast, if one chooses to listen. Much agenda-setting research has examined political campaigns, showing how media (and their sources) set the public agenda by focusing on certain issues rather than others. Although early studies have shown that media tell us what to think about, later agenda-setting studies, reviewed by McCombs and Shaw (1993), demonstrate that media may also tell us how to think about particular issues and, consequently, what to think. Funkhouser and Shaw (1990) divided agenda-setting effects into two levels. At the micro-agenda-setting level, the content of the media determines the relative importance of specific issues. In macro-agenda-setting, the media may distort an entire cultural worldview by fitting it into the media's agenda.

Agenda setting is one branch of understanding the interrelationships among media, public opinion, and public policy. Framing is another. The frame helps determine the way people interpret a message's meaning. In his effort to clarify the framing concept, Entman (1993) offered the following definition:

Framing essentially involves *selection and salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described [emphasis in the original]. (p. 52)

¹ Since Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur's (1976) initial article, the views of each author have evolved in different directions, with DeFleur emphasizing macrosocial assumptions and Ball-Rokeach emphasizing social-psychological assumptions (see, e.g., DeFleur & Dennis, 1996; Merskin, in press). Our use of dependency theory is in line with DeFleur's direction and consistent with Merskin's views.

The types of media frames commonly used in reporting political conflict include the “risk and danger frame,” which warns the audience of general and specific threats they face as a result of the conflict; the “violence frame,” which dramatizes the fight; the “victims frame,” which focuses on the costs to the various players; and the “powerful are wicked” frame, which can serve to unite the opposition (Wolfsfeld, 1991).

Agenda-setting and framing can affect the outcome of events. Event outcome is a category of effect that positions the role of media, along with other players, in the resolution of critical events (e.g., revolution or domestic political upheaval). Wolfsfeld (1991) explored the relationship between the media and political actors in an examination of the Israeli conflict. He found the media to be a source of power in the *intifada*. Protesters saw the mass media as the only channel for redress. The Palestinians sent two messages: one of victimization and one of defiance. Wolfsfeld showed how the strengths and vulnerabilities of the authorities and protest groups are fed into media, which translate both sides’ positions and exert their power through quantity and frames of coverage. Media reports, in turn, influence the perceptions of success for each side, which may lead to changes of tactics, or in the status of the players.

Finally, in this general area of scholarship and practice, a media campaign is a conscious, structured attempt to use media to influence awareness, attitudes, or behavior. We suggest that, as time went on, RTLM radio increasingly carried out a full-fledged campaign with the goal of political solidarity for Habyarimana’s party before his death and of genocide of the Tutsi people afterward.

Interpreting the Role of Radio

In this study we interpret the probable role of radio in the Rwandan genocide. Our investigation is preliminary. A comprehensive study, including systematic interviews with Rwandans, remains to be carried out. There is much we cannot know without interviewing genocide survivors, including the extent of resistance to radio broadcasts and other messages inciting violence. Our study should be viewed as an early step in raising questions and suggesting interpretations about radio’s role.

The method may be described as a qualitative textual analysis, involving a close reading of available radio transcripts. Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994) divided the analysis of documentary data into three broad categories, with subdivisions under each: content and narrative analysis, structuralism, and semiotics. Our study falls in the category of macrotextual narrative analysis, which views texts as “symbolic action,” and assumes the role of words in representing, dramatizing, and shaping society (p. 465). In this form of analysis, the researcher typically identifies and interprets the ways in which a dominant (hegemonic) societal position is supported in a text. Narrative techniques, including the use of cultural symbols and frames (Entman, 1993) may be interpreted as supportive, or possibly resistant, of dominant messages (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Steeves, 1997). Research on context is crucial, as texts have little meaning apart from their cultural and political-economic origins.

We are indebted to Reporters Sans Frontières, a Paris-based media-monitoring organization.² Their comprehensive report, *Rwanda: Les Médias du Génocide* (Chrétien, Dupaquier, Kabanda, Ngarambe, & Reporters Sans Frontières, 1995), includes translations (from Kinyarwanda to French) of extensive excerpts of RTLM and Radio Rwanda broadcasts obtained from Radio Rwanda archives. A total of 74 tapes were made from RTLM broadcasts between October 1993 and July 1994, and from Radio Rwanda broadcasts during April 1994 (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 17). We obtained research assistance to translate all these excerpts from French to English (i.e., approximately 16,000 words of translated material).³ English translations of RTLM excerpts from the morning of April 6, 1994, are available on the Internet (Reporters Sans Frontières, 1994).

In addition to the above data, African Rights, a London-based organization dedicated to addressing human rights abuses in Africa, published a lengthy report on the genocide including many excerpts from RTLM and Radio Rwanda broadcasts, translated from Kinyarwanda to English (African Rights, 1995). African Rights Codirector Rakiya Omaar obtained these tapes in Rwanda during the genocide directly from Rwandans taping the broadcasts (R. Omaar, personal communication, March 21, 1997). Because of how the tapes were collected, most excerpts quoted were undated. Therefore we relied on Reporters Sans Frontières's data in our study. The themes and messages in the excerpts contained in Chrétien et al.'s (1995) report were consistent with those in the African Rights report, strengthening their mutual validity.

As noted above, our study draws heavily on historical and contextual information, including journalistic accounts and one eyewitness account (M. Bessey, personal communication, April 5, 1997). We acknowledge the assistance of prior writings implicating the role of radio in the genocide and reporting some first-hand observations, (i.e., African Rights, 1995; Berkeley, 1994; Chrétien et al., 1995; Gatwa, 1995; Misser & Jaumain, 1994).

We begin by describing the historical, political, and cultural context of the genocide, as the role of media cannot be assessed otherwise. We then draw on resources noted above, as well as communication theories and studies we reviewed, to narrate the sequence of events in Rwanda and interpret how the government used media, especially radio, as a tool in the genocide.

Historical and Political Context

Before the genocide, the Rwandan political situation was largely ignored by international media (Silverstein, 1994). Even after April 1994, Western reports neglected

² UNESCO provided funding for Reporters Sans Frontières to collaborate with the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the Center for African Research (CRA), both located in Paris, and with Rwandans, to research mass media's role in the genocide. Larger media monitoring organizations such as the BBC and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) failed to monitor RTLM broadcasts during the genocide.

³ We thank Nathalie Ricci-Whaley for her careful work.

the politics at the root of the conflict and emphasized an ethnic frame (Wall, 1997). Yet socially, culturally, and linguistically, the Tutsis and Hutus of Rwanda have blended to the point that it is often difficult to identify one's ethnic origin observationally. In fact, it is questionable whether a distinction existed before colonial influence. Ethnicity in Rwanda, many argue, was overshadowed by an economic class system greatly distorted by the needs of various governments. A Hutu could become a Tutsi by the acquisition of wealth (e.g., Newbury, 1988).⁴

Most historians agree that the first inhabitants of Rwanda were hunters and gatherers whose descendants are today's small minority, Twa, just 1% of the population (African Rights, 1995, p. 2). The Twa have always been excluded from the social and economic mainstream by other Rwandans (United Nations, 1996, p. 204). When the Hutu cultivators and the Tutsi cattle herders arrived much later, the groups lived side by side in a patchwork of small chiefdoms and clans (African Rights, p. 2). Historically, specialization was a major feature of Rwandan culture. Sutton (1993) described the historic interdependence of the Tutsis, who kept cattle, the Hutus, who grew gourds (as containers for milk and curd), and Twa, who provided pottery in demand by both Tutsis and Hutus. By the 17th century, when the highly stratified Kingdom of Rwanda was established, the minority Tutsis, about 10% of the population, comprised the nobles, military commanders, local officials, and cattle herders. The majority Hutus—over 80% of the population—were subsistence farmers.

The arrival of Europeans distorted and reinforced this system of specialization, as well as Rwandans' self-perceptions. About 40 years before the Germans claimed Rwanda in 1898, the explorer Hanning Speke compared the physical characteristics of Tutsis and Hutus. His accounts have continued to pervade popular culture. He described the Tutsi people as descendants of Ethiopians, and more "European" and "superior" to the Hutus and Twa (Speke, 1906, p. 201). The German colonizers accepted this analysis, gave the Tutsis increased power, and manipulated them to subjugate the other groups. The Belgian colonial administration, which took over in 1916, also allied itself with the Tutsi elite and further instigated official policy that emphasized ethnicity. Since the 1920s, a reference to ethnic origin was required on identity cards and administrative and academic documents (Prunier, 1995).

The Tutsi monarchy dominated until overthrown by the Hutus in 1959 (3 years before independence from Belgium). At least 10,000 Tutsis were killed in the Revolution of 1959 (African Rights, 1995, p. 11). The following years saw the execution of over 20,000 Tutsis, and 150,000 others fled to neighboring countries, such as Uganda, where they remained refugees until this decade. The postcolonial Hutu government continued the discriminatory policy of including ethnic origin on common documents, using it in the 1970s to exclude Tutsis from administrative posts and universities (Gatwa, 1995, p. 18).

⁴ The nature of the division between Tutsis and Hutus has been controversial. Some analysts believe that the distinction between the two groups is an ethnic division. Others argue that the distinction has been based solely on social status and economic activities (e.g., see Minear & Guillot, 1996). We thank Christopher Bessey for sharing his research on this issue.

The social and political systems established by the new Hutu regime following independence essentially replaced the hierarchical Tutsi system with a similar one dominated by Hutus. There was little change for the majority of Rwandans who remained desperately poor (African Rights, 1995, p. 12). The practice of social mobility continued, but with a new twist. In the precolonial past, Hutus who acquired many cattle were assimilated with the Tutsis. Impoverished Tutsis were regarded as Hutus (United Nations, 1996, p. 7). By the early 1960s, many Tutsis aspired to become Hutus, often bribing officials to get new identity cards listing them as Hutus (African Rights, p. 12).

A new cycle of ethnic violence followed independence. Tutsi refugees in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) organized armed groups and staged 10 attacks between 1962 and 1967. Each was followed by retaliatory killings of Tutsi civilians in Rwanda, resulting in new refugee flights from the country. Rwandan political tensions were a source of instability for the entire Great Lakes region (Minear & Guillot, 1996, p. 55).

By 1973, ethnic unrest and violence were at their height (United Nations, 1996, p. 204). Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu from the northern prefecture of Ruhengeri, seized power in a coup. His single-party government, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND),⁵ through a policy known as “established ethnic and regional balance,” institutionalized previously practiced ethnic discrimination. Ethnic quotas were used to allocate jobs and resources. The Tutsi minority got 10%. As the President’s home region began to enjoy increased privileges, regional rivalries heightened the ethnic antagonisms (United Nations, 1996, p. 204).

According to Gatwa (1995), Habyarimana’s regime was one of the more oppressive in Africa, characterized by “corruption of political surrogates, ideological and divisive propaganda, brain washing, networks of secret police and . . . the determination to kill any potential opponent” (p. 18). Rwanda had other problems, shared with much of sub-Saharan Africa (i.e., overpopulation, debt crisis, environmental degradation, and AIDS). Rwanda’s population density is the highest in Africa. Much of the land, long strained by intensive farming and denuded of trees, could not sustain the people. Consequently, Rwanda experienced six famines during this century. Pressures of this magnitude leave people more dissatisfied, often desperate and vulnerable to manipulation.

The recent crisis in Rwanda began in late 1990, when the principally Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from Uganda to overthrow the predominantly Hutu regime of Major General Juvenal Habyarimana. They sought a return of the Tutsi refugees and recovery of political power. Habyarimana’s power became increasingly difficult to maintain. Facing multiple crises—the attacks by the RPF, pressure from international financial institutions, and internal discontent—Habyarimana relented in June 1991, and introduced a new constitution that included multiparty politics. A transition government, led by a Tutsi

⁵Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement. Later, in 1991, the name was changed to National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development, Mouvement Républicain National pour la Démocratie et le Développement (Gaud, 1995, p. 26). The acronym, MRND, remained in use (United Nations, 1996, p. 23).

prime minister from the main opposition party, was formed with a vision of power sharing with Habyarimana in his new position as president. The Arusha Peace Agreement was signed in August 1993 to end the civil war. However, relations with the opposition party remained strained. In addition, the Hutu ruling party, MRND, was split between hard-liners who wanted to see the army return to power and those loyal to President Habyarimana. The president fought to salvage his power base, sometimes alienating supporters. In a July 1992 letter of resignation from the MRND, presidential advisor Christopher Mfizi accused Habyarimana of encouraging the activities of Réseau Zéro, an organization that was soon to be identified with the infamous death squads implicated in the 1994 genocide. An international commission inquiring into Rwandan human rights violations affirmed that the president participated in, and sometimes chaired, the meetings of the death squads (Gatwa, 1995, p. 19).

By 1993, political dichotomization was extreme. There were only two poles from which everyone was forced to choose. At one end were those who wanted to maintain power at any cost. These included the president, his political entourage, and the army. At the other pole were those working for social and political change, including the RPF. It became impossible for any individual or organization to remain neutral. The media, the churches, the NGOs, and all the people were placed into one of the two camps (Gatwa, 1995, p. 20).

Role of the Media

Just as ethnicity was used as a tool of the government, so were the media. Many media and other forms of communication played a role in the genocide. Throughout 1992 and 1993, for instance, extremists toured the country inciting hate in public meetings (African Rights, 1995, p. 76). The press played a significant role. However, radio is a far more efficient means of reaching large numbers of people, and was much more significant as a catalyst.

The importance of radio in Africa evolved rapidly with colonial and postcolonial development. Before these interventions, communication had been largely oral. A village sage—or others with designated roles—took responsibility for interpreting the “repository of a culture’s myth and wisdom” (Christians et al., 1991, p. 338). In rural areas with low literacy, radio broadcasts brought major change and new competition for the village sage. Fueled by the modernization paradigm of development and the communication theories of Daniel Lerner (1958) and Wilbur Schramm (1964), radio was heavily promoted by UNESCO and other international aid agencies as a development tool. African political leaders soon recognized radio’s potential to consolidate their new nation-states. By 1970, there was one radio receptor per 120 people in Rwanda. Twenty years later, the ratio was 1 radio for every 13 people (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 57). Broadcasting’s role shifted from an aid to development to “a kind of political megaphone” (Bourgault, 1995, p. 80). The rhetoric of public mindedness became entangled with the political objectives of those in power. Mytton (1983) observed that, “The government seeks to use its power over the media to exhort its citizens to greater effort and at the same time

prevent the media either from questioning policy or being sufficiently critical of political authority” (p. 136).

To the extent that oral tradition remains strong and illiteracy is widespread, the radio may have great impact. According to Hachten (1974), “Listeners tend to conceive it as literally the government itself speaking” (p. 396). African leaders, both insurgent and incumbent, have long recognized this impact (Bourgault, 1995; Hachten, 1974; and Myton, 1983).

Additionally, some African countries have strong traditions of hierarchy and authoritarianism, which increase the likelihood of blind obedience to the orders of officials on the radio. Norms of rote obedience were, and continue to be, exceptionally strong in Rwanda (African Rights, 1995, p. 1010; Chrétien, 1995, p. 57; Zarembo, 1997). A Tutsi businessman whose family disappeared in the attacks reflected that, “The popular masses in Rwanda are poorly educated. Every time the powers that be say something, it’s an order. They believe someone in political authority. Whatever this person demands, it’s as if God is demanding it” (quoted in Berkeley, 1994, p. 19).

The government could now take the responsibility (and power) of interpreting the world for its people. In other words, the government used radio and other media as agenda-setting and framing tools. Rwandans became increasingly dependent on radio for information about government, especially given their limited literacy and foreign language skills, and a dearth of alternative information sources. The war years beginning in 1990 intensified the government’s, and opposition’s, use of media, and transformed media into macro-agenda-setting tools with an agenda of ethnic hatred. Media’s role in determining the outcome of events consistent with this agenda became increasingly evident. Finally, media became part of a full-fledged propaganda campaign. The resulting “campaign war” led to casualties among journalists as the government sought to make its campaign the only campaign.

Preparation for Genocide: 1990–1994

Media had been a pawn of the political and ethnic strife since the beginning of the war in 1990. When the RPF first struck from Uganda, the attack appeared to be “a skillfully orchestrated media campaign” (Ntibantunganya, 1992, p. 34). Immediately upon the surrounding of Kagitumba in northern Rwanda, press agencies, leading radio stations, and many Western journalists reported the “new national liberation war” (Ntibantunganya, 1992, p. 34). Although the attack took Habyarimana’s government by surprise, the media were waiting at the border.

In the early 1990s, media frequently issued appeals to racial hatred. These included official media—Radio Rwanda, the Rwandan Press Agency, and the periodicals, *Imvaho* and *La Relève*—as well as the privately owned paper, *Kangura* (Donnadieu, 1992, p. 28). Radio Muhabura was aligned with the opposite camp as an instrument of the RPF (Gatwa, 1995, p. 19). The accusations and counter-accusations of the media sometimes led to violence. For example, a March 1992 Radio Rwanda broadcast reported that an anonymous source in Nairobi knew about 20 planned assassinations of Hutu leaders by the Tutsis. Many blamed the broadcast when Hutus attacked Tutsis and burned their homes the following day (Dorsey, 1994, p. 145).

Tensions ran especially high after a November 1991 publication of a cartoon in an independent paper, *Kiberinka*, which denounced the government by depicting Habyarimana in priest's robes holding a bloody sacrament. The following day, Radio Nationale claimed that the biased reporting of the opposition press was aiding the RPF. The army pleaded for loyalty:

They have set up a number of privately-owned papers in Rwanda which vilify our government. They have given financial support to existing papers for the same purpose. Every day their objectives are being realized through these papers, which no longer conceal their intentions, and which work openly for the enemy under the cover of freedom of expression. (quoted in Donnadiu, 1992, p. 29)

The small, privately owned publications targeted by the army in this broadcast were prolific. High illiteracy rates, a lack of English or French language skills, poor transportation, and lack of other infrastructure had made radio in the indigenous language, Kinyarwanda, the chief source of information in the villages. Rwandan cities, however, were filled with many small papers, mostly slim weeklies in Kinyarwanda. They often were the product of a single individual. Free press laws protected their existence, but not their owners, from government harassment. Owners were routinely jailed without formal charges. For many small papers, this usually spelled financial ruin. Larger publications, however, considered the routine prison terms a mere inconvenience (Versaveau, 1992, p. 36).

Although revolving prison doors helped keep writers in check before April 1994, journalists were at the tops of lists of those who had to be killed during the genocide (African Rights, pp. 199–210). Deguine and Ménard (1994) declared that journalists have never been murdered in such numbers. Some were killed because of their ethnic backgrounds, but most because of their political involvement and professions (p. 55). One survivor of the massacres was André Sibomana, editor-in-chief of a Catholic weekly, *Kinyamateka*. Hunted as a Hutu, turned “Tutsi accomplice” for “thought crimes,” he managed to escape to the hills. “We made a mistake: we underestimated the force of the propaganda. That was a mortal error” (quoted in Deguine & Ménard, p. 58). The propaganda relayed by the media was unrelenting and convincing during the years preceding the massacres. Thus psychological conditions for collective reaction effects were put in place.

Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines

Although several Rwandan media have been accused of inciting the genocide that began in April, by far the most influential was Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM). Many survivors believe that the extent of the killing and later exodus would not have happened without RTLM. It became the government voice in demanding genocide.

RTLM was started in August 1993 to help ensure President Habyarimana's monopoly of power, and to counteract the RPF's Radio Muhabura (African Rights, 1995, p. 78; Gatwa, 1995, p. 19). Fifty shareholders invested 100 million Rwandan francs (US\$1 million at that time). It was backed by the ruling inner circle, some

with close links to the extreme Hutu nationalist party, the Coalition for the Defense of the Republic (CDR). Backers included Agatha Kanziga, Habyarimana's wife; Seraphin Rwabukumba, the father-in-law of one of Habyarimana's sons; and Joseph Nzirorera, political spokesman for Habyarimana's party. In Kigali, this group of RTLM backers was sometimes referred to discreetly as "Habyarimana's wife's clan" (Misser & Jaumain, 1994, p. 73). The president of RTLM's board of directors was Felicien Kabuga, a businessmen with close ties to the MRND and related by marriage to President Habyarimana (African Rights, 1995 p. 78). The station was located near the presidential palace and guarded by the government.

RTLM immediately attracted a large audience, especially among young people. Reggae and the music of Zairian, Congolese, and Camerounian artists were popular. However, the music that attracted much of the audience was played during times when fewer listened (i.e., 8–10 a.m. and 6–8 p.m.), so as not to compete with Radio Rwanda (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 69). Following an attempted coup in Burundi and the execution of President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993, RTLM started broadcasting openly ethnic commentaries and news. These were often inaccurate and inflammatory (African Rights, 1995, p. 78; Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 69). Announcers employed a popular variety of anecdotes, stories, insults, personal messages, and humorous remarks (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 47; Deguine & Ménard, 1994; Gatwa, 1995). The station prided itself on *inkuruishushe*—"hot news." A political jingle was repeated all day long to keep the public keyed up: "We have the latest hot news" (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 69). Hot news included invented attacks and alleged misconduct in the lives of opposition party members (Gatwa, 1995, p. 19).

The station recruited excellent journalists and announcers from both the intellectual milieu and the working classes. Many of RTLM's journalists came from the press. This was part of a larger campaign to minimize the role of the press and increase Rwandans' dependence on government radio. Some publications folded as a result of RTLM's aggressive recruitment campaign (Chrétien et al., 1995, pp. 74–75).

The increased role of RTLM, compared to the "official" government station, Radio Rwanda, requires clarification. RTLM's broadcast range was limited to Kigali, whereas Radio Rwanda's reached the entire country. Radio Rwanda's power had been greatly increased by President Habyarimana, who provided small, inexpensive transistor radios to every region of the country. Radio Rwanda was located directly across from, and had a direct line to, the presidential palace, and was fed by a generator at the palace in case of power outage. RTLM had access to this direct line. Gradually, RTLM started using Radio Rwanda's airwaves more and more, so Radio Rwanda was broadcasting less and less. In this way, Radio Rwanda did not have to take responsibility for extremist hate messages. RTLM could be the main voice of extremist hate, and the official government station could wash its hands of it (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 70).

Jean-Philippe Ceppi, a Western journalist present before and during the genocide, said he saw everybody listening to RTLM: "military personnel or peasants, rebels or intellectuals in cafes, in cars, in the fields; the Rwandan people spend all their time with a receiver stuck to their ear" (quoted in Chrétien et al., 1995, p.74). Further, soldiers at every checkpoint had their own radio equipment and some-

times amplified the RTLM broadcasts so they could be heard throughout entire neighborhoods (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 74). An interview with Media Bessey, a Rwandan who fled after the genocide began, confirmed these observations. Bessey also observed that RTLM's incitement of hatred of the Tutsis usually was in Kinyarwanda, the primary language of the station, whereas broadcasts in other languages—English, French, and Kiswahili—were more innocuous (personal communication, April 5, 1994).⁶

RTLM Genocide Broadcasts

By April 6, 1994, the day the president's plane went down, RTLM was established as the propaganda arm of the Hutu government. It completely overshadowed Radio Rwanda. Excerpts from the broadcasts of the morning of April 6, gathered by Reporters Sans Frontières (1994), demonstrate that the station was well organized and in place to incite hatred and violence. The station immediately, and throughout the genocide, used a technique of reversal to encourage genocide. The station encouraged Hutu hatred and slaughter of the Tutsis by talking about Tutsi hate of the Hutus. The frequent use of popular culture, biblical references, and familiar historical context strengthened the power of the broadcasts. Additionally, although alternative voices had been largely silenced, RTLM repeatedly told listeners to ignore any oppositional information that might somehow reach them.

The following excerpt, from the morning of April 6, 1994, was a dialogue, supposedly between two Tutsis. It was performed as a song, which includes lines of a popular poem titled *I Hate the Hutu*, by the poet and songwriter Simon Bikindi. The song containing phrases from the poem were regularly broadcast beyond April 6 and used to incite hatred (African Rights, 1995, p. 75; Chrétien et al., 1995, pp. 119, 202):

- The truth resists all ordeals, even the ordeal of fire. I talk to people who understand. Me, I hate Hutus. Me, I hate Hutus. Me, I hate Hutus who become Tutsis.
- What are you saying, Mutawa?
- Let me say it. I'm getting things off my chest. I'm going to tell you why I do hate them. Me, I hate the Hutus. I hate their "Hutuness," which makes them want to be our equals.
- Here, I agree with you.
- Me, I hate the Hutus. They're very arrogant with each other. The one who becomes important despises the other Hutus even though they are the same. Me I hate the Hutus. The greedy Hutus [take everything, give nothing], and they ignore me. They like to live as slaves, and practice slavery amongst themselves.
- Can we blame you for that [hating them]?
- How lucky we are that there are not many here who want to be our equals. (Reporters Sans Frontières, 1994, parentheses added by RSF).

⁶ An exception is indicated in news reports of Georges Ruggiu, a Belgian journalist, who was seized in July 1997 by the United Nations Rwanda genocide tribunal and charged with inciting genocide in French language broadcasts on RTLM (e.g., "UN Tribunal," 1997).

Beginning on April 6, the RTLM broadcasts used the word *work* to mean killing. This terminology resonated with the culture by referring to the theme of communal work. For instance the word *interahamwe*, which means communal work parties, was used in many broadcasts to incite communal killing. The word *work* also resonated historically, because the same vocabulary was used in the revolution of 1959. Also, Interahamwe was the name of a youth party organization turned death squad during the genocide (e.g., African Rights, 1995, pp. 75–76; Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 305; Reporters Sans Frontières, 1994).⁷

Throughout the weeks following April 6, RTLM relentlessly broadcast orders to exterminate all Tutsis, referring to them as *inkotanyi* (a common reference to the RPF) or as *inyenzi*, a derogatory term meaning cockroaches. According to African Rights (1995),

It told the Hutu population that “the Tutsis need to be killed,” calling on the population to “hunt out the Tutsi” and telling them that “the RPF is coming to kill people; so defend yourselves.” It asked the population “who will fill up the half-empty graves?” (p. 80)

Chrétien et al., (1995) referenced a June 4, 1994, excerpt: “We must fight the *inkotanyi*. Finish them off . . . exterminate them . . . sweep them out of the country . . . because there is no refuge, no refuge then! There is none, there is none!” (p. 305).⁸

Calls to genocide sometimes referred to the Bible, referring to Habyarimana as Christ (e.g., Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 326), and suggesting that the Virgin Mary sanctioned retaliation (p. 160). RTLM also often recalled historical events that would arouse emotion, especially the Revolution of 1959, when thousands of Tutsis were killed or fled, and the 1993 Arusha Accords, which RTLM framed as an abandonment of everything gained in 1959. For instance: “I am convinced that we are in the middle of a revolution, a revolution similar to that of 1959, one that I think is an ultimate revolution” (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 138).⁹

Throughout the genocide the *inkuruishushe* (hot news) announcements emphasized a “risk and danger,” “kill or be killed” frame. Many of the directives to genocide employed the above-noted reversal technique, which described alleged, and unsubstantiated, Tutsi atrocities against the Hutus (Berkeley, 1994, p. 19). In fact, none of the Reporters Sans Frontières’s excerpts that we translated explicitly instructed Hutus on how to kill Tutsis. Instructions always were framed as Tutsi acts. In this manner, RTLM suggested and legitimized the most extreme cruelties against the Tutsis. For instance, a May 20, 1994, broadcast described Tutsis as gathering guns, killing Hutu families and burning down their houses, then hiding in a church preparing for another attack. Thus, Hutus should destroy the church (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 195).

⁷ For examples of the use of Interahamwe in RTLM broadcasts encouraging genocide, see Chrétien et al. (1995), for example, pp. 193, 201, 202, 337, 338.

⁸ For other excerpts, see, for example, Chrétien et al. (1995), pp. 137, 174, 193, 195, 198, 200, 206.

⁹ For other references to the Revolution of 1959, see Chrétien et al. (1995), pp. 118, 129, 130, 138, 197, 325.

Sometimes, the broadcasts made up reasons why no Hutu bodies were visible. A broadcast of June 3, 1994, for instance, described how the *inyenzi* “grabbed pregnant women, knocked them unconscious with a stick, and sliced open their stomach to extract the fetus, which, in turn, they tossed on the ground and killed after having sliced its stomach open too” (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 338). Further, mothers and babies killed would be thrown into lakes and rivers like the Kangara, and the bodies would flow to Lake Victoria (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 338). In another gruesome excerpt from June 14, 1994, the “*inyenzi-inkotanyi*” were accused of killing Hutus by dissecting them alive, “extracting certain organs,” for instance, the “heart, liver, stomach.” The *inyenzi-inkotanyi* then ate the bodies. Therefore, no bodies could be found (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 162).¹⁰

As suggested in these excerpts, RTLM placed all Tutsis in one category. It blurred the distinction between rebel soldiers and Tutsi civilians (Berkeley, 1994, p. 19). The enemy also included moderate Hutus (e.g., Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 267). Belgians, who had historically aligned themselves with the Tutsis, also were targeted (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 275; Misser & Jaumain, 1994, p. 74), and Belgian colonial policy privileging Tutsis was occasionally recalled in the broadcasts (e.g., Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 197).

Many broadcasts were directed to particular audiences (e.g., government staff maintaining roadblocks or distributing weapons), or directed attacks on specific buildings (e.g., churches, mosques, or schools) to which refugees had fled. African Rights (1995) reported that more than 300 were massacred in a mosque in the Nyamirambo district of Kigali after RTLM reported their location. RTLM constantly celebrated alleged retaliatory massacres as they occurred (pp. 80–81).¹¹ According to African Rights (1995), many Rwandans heard RTLM broadcast the names of specific people targeted for killing, but no such broadcasts were recorded (p. 81). Nor do any Reporters Sans Frontières’s excerpts we translated name individuals targeted, though a May 28 broadcast named a known Tutsi with a Hutu identity card who should have been killed, but was spared for paying a fine (Chrétien et al., 1995, pp. 192–193).

RTLM did not give clear or consistent instructions about how to distinguish Tutsis. An identity card alone was insufficient, as many with Hutu identity cards had known Tutsi ancestors. Personal appearance sometimes was emphasized as follows: “100,000 young men must be quickly recruited . . . we must kill the *inkotanyi* . . . the proof that we will exterminate them is that they are only a single ethnic group. Just look at one person, their physique and their physical appearance, look at their cute little nose and then break it” (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 193). Other times, the radio cautioned that looks can be deceiving: “Isn’t there any Hutu with a long nose? What stops a Hutu from being noble? You understand that it is a shame to think that” (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 202).

Some transcripts of RTLM broadcasts reportedly targeted people not named, but with metaphors and allusions that were perfectly understandable to the audi-

¹⁰ For other examples of alleged Tutsi cruelty, see, for example, Chrétien et al. (1995), pp. 206, 317, 326, 338.

¹¹ For other examples of specific places targeted or destroyed, see, for example, Chrétien et al. (1995), pp. 192, 193, 202, 206, 306, 312, 337.

ence (Berkeley, 1994, p. 18). Broadcasts frequently attacked opposition party members, particularly Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who supported the 1993 Arusha agreement and had condemned RTLM. Many broadcasts also condemned leaders of surrounding countries perceived as Tutsi sympathizers, especially President Museveni of Uganda (African Rights, 1995; Chrétien et al., 1995).

RTLM managed to broadcast throughout the massacres. After being destroyed by RPF bombs around April 25, the station was on the air again in only 3 days from a mobile armored car. RTLM was evacuated from Kigali on July 3, and moved to Gisenyi in northwest Rwanda (African Rights, 1995, p. 83; "Rwanda: Hutu," 1994).

Although few other media were available during the genocide, RTLM was aware that some Rwandans (e.g., those with short-wave radios) would hear contesting versions of reality.¹² RTLM frequently challenged these other reports. It told Rwandans to ignore them as biased and ill informed. The example below was broadcast May 14, 1994:

This is nothing but propaganda from White people; we are used to it. However, we can still maintain that the inkotanyi, wherever they have gone, have massacred the Hutus . . . after the 200,000 killed, the journalists say that the numbers today rise to 500,000 killed. Where do these other 300,000 come from? These other 300,000 are without a doubt Hutus. . . . This war that we are fighting is a very important one . . . it is, in fact, a war of extermination, a war started by the inkotanyi—because it is they who have started it with the purpose of exterminating the Hutus. (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 202)¹³

As the news of the mass killings spread globally, RTLM began to reassure Hutus that their safety was assured by a "security zone" that would be set up by the French to "welcome the Hutus fleeing the Tutsi terrorists who have gone crazy and want to decimate them" (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 282). The interahamwe would need to hide "so that the inkotanyi would not pull their eyes out or eat their livers" (Chrétien et al., 1995, p. 337). Thus RTLM continued the fiction of genocidal Tutsi atrocities, while describing safe havens for Hutus. The station encouraged mass exodus at the same time it continued to incite genocide.

Discussion

Today, there are approximately 92,000 inmates in overcrowded prisons (Zarembo, 1997). Many were military personnel; many others were not. They await trial for genocide. Alfred Kiruhura, 29, an illiterate farmer from eastern Rwanda, is one of these. He states:

¹² According to Media Bessey (personal communication, April 5, 1997), not many people, other than those who knew aid workers, had access to short-wave radio. Also, VOA, BBC, and other short-wave stations require foreign language knowledge. This would be a barrier for many Rwandans, even with short-wave access.

¹³ For similar excerpts, see Chrétien et al. (1995), pp. 194, 279, 286, 287, 288, 338.

I did not believe the Tutsis were coming to kill us, but when the government radio continued to broadcast that they were coming to take our land, were coming to kill the Hutus—when this was repeated over and over—I began to feel some kind of fear.

He admitted that he was a member of the Interahamwe, a youth party organization turned death squad. The stations “were always telling people that if the RPF comes, it will return Rwanda to feudalism, that it would bring oppression. . . . We believed what the government told us” (quoted in Berkeley, 1994, p. 18). The same confusion is echoed over and over. Emmanuel Kamuhanda, 18, has admitted to killing 15 people in his home village:

The government told us that the RPF is Tutsi and if it wins the war all the Hutus will be killed. As of now, I don't believe this is true. At the time, I believed that the government was telling the truth. (quoted in Berkeley, 1994, p. 19)

Rwandan theologian Tharcisse Gatwa (1995) believes that, before the 1990s, the genocide would have been inconceivable, and that it took 4 years of psychological preparation (p. 19). This psychological groundwork more typically takes place within the realm of the military, which works on captive audiences of young recruits. The process readjusts the notion of murder to a noble goal, duty, or obligation. Within tight structures and stratified hierarchies of power, soldiers are indoctrinated as to who the “enemy” is. The deviation in the Rwandan genocide was that much of the killing involved civilians as perpetrators and victims. The radio and other media played a major part in their indoctrination. The radio, long established as the voice of government, defined the enemy as the Tutsis, and inspired an obligation by Hutus to protect themselves and their families. Further, Hutu extremists eliminated via assassination or recruitment almost all Rwandans who might have provided opposing views, including politicians, journalists, human rights activists, and lawyers. Strategies for eliminating or distorting outside information included cutting phone lines, imposing curfews, creating roadblocks, expelling foreign journalists, and encouraging ethnocentric reporting that massacres were hopelessly “tribal” (African Rights, 1995).

The political dichotomization resulting from media campaigns was in place by the time of the April 6 plane crash and ensured that everyone was in one of the two camps. Mazrui (1990) stated that a “dichotomous framework of world order perceptions amounts to an iron law of dualism, a persistent conceptualization of the world in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 13). One of the most persistent themes of humanity has been the notion of an “us” and “them” circumscribed over a framework of “good” and “evil.” War has been fueled by the myth of an evil enemy: “We first kill people with our minds, before we kill them with weapons. Whatever the conflict, the enemy is always the destroyer. We’re on God’s side; they’re barbaric. We’re good; they’re evil” (Keen, 1991, p. 18). In 1994 Rwanda, politics, fueled by the media, had designed the framework for war. This war was framed in ethnicity—Hutu versus Tutsi. Within days after April 6, virtually all dissension had been silenced. Journalist Mark Fritz (1995) visited Rwanda three times between May and August 1994 and provides a human perspective to what happened:

What is strange after spending too much time in Rwanda is that seemingly incomprehensible events begin to take on a perverse logic. Many of the people who killed were illiterate peasants. They were told that a rebel army was coming to butcher them. They were told that there were supporters of this army in their midst. They were told they had to kill these people before this army arrived or they, and their children, would soon die horribly. Many of these people truly believed they were doing their patriotic duty. Old people dutifully compiled death lists that showed who had ancestors from the rival ethnic group. Children listened to the conversations of their playmates' parents, trying to detect whether they said anything negative about government. *When the radio said it was time to kill the people opposed to the government, the masses slid off a dark edge into insanity* [emphasis added]. (p. 32)

Our study suggests consistency between RTLM radio's role in the genocide, and the dependency and collective reaction frameworks reviewed earlier. Rwandan media's micro-agenda-setting function accompanied Rwandans's increased dependence on media—especially radio—for political information. This function was firmly in place for many years before the ethnic wars that led to the genocide began in 1990. Then, at the macro-agenda-setting level, the media worked to instill a pronounced ethnic fear and hatred that previously had not been part of the everyday culture. The visible role of radio in the outcome of real events, as in attacks on Tutsis following broadcasts about planned assassinations in March 1992, obviously strengthened their power and potential to wage a full-fledged campaign and catalyze genocide. Many media contributed to the heightened ethnic hatred and encouragement of violence during the ethnic wars between 1990 and 1994. However, when the genocide began in April 1990, nearly all media had been silenced, except RTLM radio.

During the genocide broadcasts, RTLM used several narrative techniques to incite killings. A relentless, "risk and danger," "kill or be killed" frame, and related "violence" and "victims" frames, emphasizing gruesome consequences of violence for victims, were the most blatant. Hutus were told repeatedly that the Tutsis were killing Hutus in large numbers, and that Hutus, therefore, must kill all Tutsis. Instructions on how to kill, perfectly understood, were described as Tutsi acts that demanded retaliation. The use of realistic contextual details and powerful cultural and religious symbols enhanced the credibility of the messages. Further, the absence of other information, group listening, and interpersonal communication contributed to the conditions necessary for the collective reaction effect of the genocide.

Cantril's (1940) study nearly 60 years ago of the impact of Orson Welles's radio drama offers some observations with parallels to the Rwandan situation, although obviously there were vast differences in the timing, context, content, and outcomes of the *Invasion from Mars* broadcast in 1938 America and the repeated RTLM broadcasts in 1994 Rwanda. These parallels support interpretations based on both dependency and collective reaction frameworks.

The first parallel is public confidence in the medium of radio. In the 1930s, radio in the U.S. had replaced newspapers as the primary source of news; most had great faith in the validity of radio (Cantril, 1940, pp. 68–69; Lowery & DeFleur, 1983, p. 55). In rural Rwanda, the radio's credibility and importance were even greater. Interpersonal networks were insufficient for political information, illiteracy was widespread, and the population had become increasingly dependent on radio. A second parallel is historical timing. The depression and the threat of another world war had produced political and economic instability by 1938 in the U.S. Rwanda, in 1994, faced much more extreme political and economic pressures. As noted earlier, unstable times may cause actual media effects to be greater. This has been suggested in many studies, including studies in the collective reaction, dependency, and agenda-setting traditions (McQuail, 1994). Cantril (1940) further credited the technical brilliance of the Welles drama for the large effect. The use of "on-the-spot reporting," the interviewing of "experts," and real place names inspired confidence in the validity of the Welles broadcast. RTLM broadcasts during the genocide were similarly well executed. The station employed expert journalists. Broadcasts referred to known historical context, drew on popular culture and religion, encouraged specific actions, targeted specific places, and celebrated specific massacres, adding realism. Cantril (1940) identified the listening situation as important to the interpretation and consequent reactions of the people. Social relationships were important. Many tuned in as a result of the contagion of fear and excitement of people who quickly called each other (pp. 83, 140, 144). In Africa, oral traditions, close ties with kin, and fewer radio receivers mean that group listening is common (Lewis & Booth, 1990, p. 170). People had each other to ignite fear and to corroborate their opinions, judgments, and reactions.

In sum, this study suggests that the strong establishment of media dependency for political information, alongside media's agenda-setting and framing roles, and an absence of alternative voices, can set the stage for unusually powerful propaganda campaigns. Such campaigns, in turn, may spark extreme fear and mass panic with catastrophic outcomes, even genocide. A favorable context for such collective reaction effects (of radio, in this instance) include public confidence in the medium, historic timing, the technical quality and realism of the production, and certain social factors such as group listening, that may support the spread of fear and violence.

The pattern of events in Rwanda is not isolated. Rwanda's neighbor, Burundi, which shares a similar ethnic mix, has experienced years of political and ethnic conflict and is vulnerable to a violent eruption. Again, the media have been directly involved. In a June 1995 interview, Robert Ménard, chairman of Reporters Sans Frontières, talked about Burundi:

For years now, a certain number of newspapers in Burundi have been fanning the flames of hatred by throwing oil onto the fire. We have seen what radio stations that preach hatred can achieve, you know, radio stations such as Des Mille Collines radio in Rwanda. We do not wish this. We cannot accept the idea that this situation can be repeated in Burundi. ("Burundi: Reporters Sans Frontières")

Borst (1995) reported that a broadcast on Radio Broaibf in Bujumbura described concern with "papers filled with diatribes against one party or ethnic group and cartoons showing one side sipping the other's blood from bottles through straws." This time, however, participants discussed many practical measures to curb the negative media influences. Solutions ranged from jamming a pirate radio station being broadcast from neighboring Zaire to the training of journalists in the careful selection of how and what they report (Borst, 1995).

Predrag Simic (1994), of the Institute of International Politics and Economics in Belgrade, wrote of the former Yugoslavia, with similarity to the voices from Rwanda:

The function of the war propaganda disseminated by the conflicting parties has been, by turn, to mobilize and intimidate, glorify and demonize, and justify and accuse, bearing out the assumption that the media bears [sic] a large part of the responsibility for the outbreak and tragic course of the war in the former Yugoslavia. (p. 40)

Simic's (1994) themes parallel Rwandan themes (e.g., media wars, fear and rumor, the fueling of ethnic tensions). Media war in the former Yugoslavia began in the mid-1980s, when the controlling party began to exploit the media (principally television) in a struggle to retain power. Free elections in 1990 brought a media boom that gave birth to hundreds of new newspapers and dozens of private television stations, dominated by militant nationalist rhetoric. Programming was opinionated and increasingly focused on an ethnicity that had been deemphasized for the previous 70 years. According to Simic, "Serbian media aroused fear and confusion with their commentaries on the potential creation of a new Ustasha state, in which it was said they would have no choice but to resist with arms unless they were to experience genocide again" (pp. 43–44). Members of ethnic groups were portrayed by the opposing media as devoid of human characteristics, so that violence would not only be allowed, but desirable (p. 42).

Thus, we again see a situation where extreme media dependency can set the stage for campaigns to increase ethnic hatred and fear, leading to massacres. Given a favorable historical and political context, fear is a powerful stimulus to panic and the irrational actions that accompany it. Under conditions of dependency, media campaigns may serve as a catalyst for fear and collective reaction effects. Yet, radio dependency and collective reaction effects alone cannot explain atrocities like the Rwandan genocide. They provide part of the interpretation in this instance. However, in-depth interviews are needed to understand further radio's role. Many Rwandans did resist the radio directives and peer pressure to participate in the genocide. Examining the degree of resistance, as well as compliance, should be a focus of further study.

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