Original Article

The State of Journalism and Press Freedom in Postgenocide Rwanda

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Abstract

News media played a prominent role in perpetuating the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Since then, Rwanda has undergone impressive social and economic growth, but the media landscape during this redevelopment remains understudied. Qualitative interviews with Rwandan journalists reveal that reporters censor themselves to promote peace and reunification. Short-term, prioritizing social good over media rights might help unify the country, but ultimately it could limit development and reinforce existing authoritarian power structures. Findings suggest that McQuail's development media theory and Hachten's developmental concept maintain relevance but point to the need for a new or revised media development paradigm.

Keywords

Africa, freedom of the press, journalism, media development, Rwanda, genocide

In 1994, genocide killed 800,000 Rwandans in conflict perpetuated by the Hutu majority against the Tutsi people (Taylor, 1999). Although Rwanda still faces challenges relating to poverty and government corruption, the nation has seen remarkable changes in the 24 years since the genocide. The country has a higher percentage of women in parliament than any other nation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016), approximately 97% of children enrolled in primary school (UNICEF, 2012), and economic growth that has averaged 8% each year since 2001 (Howard, 2014).

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Scholars have suggested that Rwandan media are (at least partially) to blame for the genocide by "inciting the hatred that led to violence by using an ethnic framework to report what was essentially a political struggle" (Kellow & Steeves, 1998, p. 107). Others have furthered that argument, explaining that the Rwandan government and military used national radio to perpetuate a "kill or be killed" narrative that escalated the violence (Kasoma, 1995; Kellow & Steeves, 1998; Mamdani, 1996; Paris, 2004). Critics have additionally argued that international media should hold some of the blame because, as the theory of agenda setting argues, media attention to distant crises can trigger policy responses (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), yet such foreign news coverage was largely absent during the Rwandan genocide (Livingston, 2007).

As a result of the not-so-distant genocide and the news media's role in perpetuating it, understanding the role of news media and level of press freedom in Rwanda today can be particularly complicated. This study, a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with Rwandan journalists, shines light on how the nation's postconflict redevelopment has impacted the role of journalists and the level of press freedom in the country. In doing so, this study revisits existing media development paradigms and points to the need for a new or revised development-focused framework.

Background

Rwandan Genocide

One cannot begin to understand the Rwandan media landscape without, at minimum, a basic understanding of the 1994 genocide, which still permeates all aspects of Rwandan culture. Tension between the Hutus and the Tutsis, ethnic groups established by Belgian colonizers during World War I, existed in the country for decades (Des Forges, 1999). On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira crashed under still-debated circumstances (Kron, 2010). Existing tensions came to a head and this plane crash sparked a 100-day killing spree that left up to 1 million Rwandans dead and more than 2 million refugees (Center for Conflict Management of the National University of Rwanda, 2012). Much of the killing was carried out by civilian Hutus against civilian Tutsis. The genocide ended when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by Rwanda's current president Paul Kagame, defeated the government-backed militias that spearheaded the killings (Center for Conflict Management of the National University of Rwanda, 2012).

Rwandan Media Landscape

Although many scholars agree that Rwandan media escalated the genocide against the Tutsi minority, no single theory can explain how the media incited such hatred. Kellow and Steeves (1998) suggested a handful of theories including media dependency during times of political instability, agenda setting, framing, and the idea of contagion—the power of the media to inspire action (a contagion effect), especially when audiences only hear one voice and others are silenced (Cantor, Sheehan, Alpers, & Mullen, 1999;

Phillips, 1980). Bromley (2007) explained the media's role in the genocide as a pre-meditated process of cultural and social exclusion.

Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines (*RTLM*), a radio station run by hard-line Hutu party officials, was believed by many to have been the primary instigator (Bromley, 2007; Kamilindi, 2007; Kellow & Steeves, 1998). *RTLM* reporters used stereotypes and cultural symbols including popular music to dehumanize Tutsi individuals (Bromley, 2007; Kellow & Steeves, 1998). They called them cockroaches, disclosed their hiding spots, and urged Hutus to slaughter their Tutsi neighbors. It is worth noting, Straus (2007) argued that the impact of *RTLM* was not as powerful and direct as many have claimed. However, numerous others continue to point to the strong role of *RTLM* and other outlets such as the newspaper *Kangura*, which is believed to have helped brainwash Hutus into thinking they were superior and should eliminate Tutsis by publishing and preaching the infamous Hutu Ten Commandments (Kamilindi, 2007). These commandments asserted that Tutsis were dishonest and could not be trusted in any authoritative position in society, and that Hutus should have no mercy on them (Kamilindi, 2007).

In an attempt to further understand how the media facilitated the genocide, and why the public largely obeyed their calls to action, it is important to understand the larger media landscape in Rwanda at the time. The news media, as an institution, were new in Rwanda. The first newspaper, published by the Catholic Church, was established in 1933. Rwanda was, and still is, a highly religious country, and "People are raised and taught to take what they hear on the radio as gospel truth" (Kamilindi, 2007, p. 136). The government launched a newspaper and radio station in the 1960s. But it was not until the 1990s that the news industry became relatively prevalent. And when it did, the press in Rwanda did not adhere to Western ideals of press freedom. For the most part, news organizations were government owned. *RTLM* was owned and operated by members of the government and other like-minded people in positions of authority, including military and businessmen, who ascribed to the racist thinking of then-president Habyarimana (Kamilindi, 2007). For this reason, many journalists ascribed to the pro-Hutu propaganda and voluntarily participated in the genocide. Reporters with opposing views were not tolerated. Forty-eight journalists who publicly opposed the genocide were killed (Kamilindi, 2007).

As for the public, they trusted authority in a way many individuals living in Western countries do not. Many African nations, including Rwanda, can be understood as communalistic societies (Moemeka, 1994) in which "individuals exist first to serve the community and second to benefit themselves through such communal service" (Moemeka, 1997, p. 174). Individuals in such societies highly value respect for authority, which includes both formal authority figures such as elected officials and informal authority figures such as parents or older adults. Furthermore, the leadership structure is such that everyone is expected to participate. "Those who find themselves in situations in which they are the oldest persons around are expected to assume the leadership position in that situation and to dutifully represent the community" (Moemeka, 1997, p. 181). Presumably, this value of personal responsibility to obey authority and protect the community contributed to Rwandans' willingness to carry out such brutal murders.

The media landscape in Rwanda has changed tremendously in the last quarter century. After the genocide, an influx in international donors enabled the number of media houses to grow, and with the support of UNESCO, the country's first School of Journalism and Communication was established at the University of Rwanda (originally the National University of Rwanda) in 1995 (Kayumba & Kimonyo, 2006). However, Rwanda's postgenocide government faced a challenge ensuring that this rise in the number of media houses and trained journalists would not result in hate speech again (Waldorf, 2007).

After taking power in 1994, the RPF "promoted private media outlets to create a façade of media pluralism" while simultaneously suppressing independent journalism under the veil of "inciting ethnic 'divisionism' and even genocidal ideology" (Waldorf, 2007, p. 404). Although Rwanda's constitution states, "freedom of the press and freedom of information are recognized and guaranteed by the state" (Republic of Rwanda, 2003, Article 34), a number of clauses allow for restrictions and censorship. For example, a broad law defines divisionism as "a crime committed by any oral or written expression or any act of division that could generate conflicts among the population or cause disputes" (Republic of Rwanda, 2001, Article 3). This law on divisionism is widely applied and commonly used to restrict journalists (Bonde, Uwimana, Sowa, & O'Neil, 2015). Specifically, journalists cannot publish anything regarding the relationship between Hutus and Tutsis. A law on genocide denial can similarly be used to restrict journalists. This law, passed in 2008, "aims at preventing and punishing the crime of genocide ideology," which is defined as follows:

> An aggregate of thoughts characterized by conduct, speeches, documents and other acts aiming at exterminating or inciting others to exterminate people basing on ethnic group, origin, nationality, region, color, physical appearance, sex, language, religion or political opinion, committed in normal periods or during war. (Republic of Rwanda, 2008, Article 2)

The law further describes various degrees of an act of genocide ideology that range from intimidating or degrading someone to killing them. Individuals convicted of committing this crime in public, as would likely be the case with a journalist, can be sentenced to 20 to 25 years in prison and fined 2 to 5 million Rwandan francs (US$2,300-US$5,800). Research has documented the sustained presence of influences and frames created by the government in mainstream Rwandan media (Cruikshank, 2016; Frère, 2007; Kalyango, 2011).

Before 2002, most media outlets in Rwanda were government owned (Bonde et al., 2015), but in the past 15 years the liberalization of the media has allowed for a more varied landscape to be created. As of 2015, there were 38 radio stations (nine of which were online only), 11 TV stations (four online only), 53 newspapers, and 23 news websites actively operating in Rwanda (Bonde et al., 2015).

Although commercial news organizations are now permitted in Rwanda, the ownership structure of news outlets can be difficult to determine. In a survey of Rwandan journalists, more than one third of respondents said that ownership of media is not transparent in the country (Bonde et al., 2015). Furthermore, many privately owned

media houses rely on government-funded advertising and journalists claim that government entities buy ads from outlets that support the government through their news coverage and withhold advertising money from news organizations critical of the government (Bonde et al., 2015), thus muddying the distinction between public and private organizations. In addition, when private media outlets were permitted in 2002, they were done so in conjunction with the creation of the High Council of the Press (HCP) which was "defined as an independent 'body dealing with of (sic) the press,' but 'attached to the Presidency of the Republic' (Article 73)" (Frère, 2009, p. 343).

Although the Rwandan media landscape has evolved in many ways since the genocide, international press freedom bodies remain critical. Reporters Without Borders ranked Rwanda 159 out of 180 countries on the 2017 World Press Freedom Index and said "The specter of the 1994 genocide is still used to brand media critical of the government as 'divisionist'" (Reporters Without Borders, 2017, para. 1). Freedom House ranked Rwanda "not free" in its 2018 report (Freedom House, 2018). However, the validity of such rankings—largely produced by Western agencies—could be brought into question, especially when compared against non-Western metrics. For example, although press freedom, specifically, was not measured, in 2015, Rwanda scored 60.7 out of 100 in overall governance on Ibrahim's (2015) Index on African Governance, placing it 11th in the continent and above the average for all African nations as well as above average for East African nations.

Journalism Development

A number of paradigms and theoretical frameworks could be at play to explain the changes occurring in the journalistic landscape in Rwanda. In 1981, Hachten suggested five normative concepts of the press: authoritarian, Western, Communist, revolutionary, and developmental. In 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Hachten (1992) altered that typology to include only four dimensions: authoritarian, Western, revolutionary, and developmental. The developmental concept, as discussed in both of Hachten's frameworks, "emerged in the wake of political independence in impoverished nations throughout the developing world" and suggests that media should promote nation building and "support authority, not challenge it" (Hachten & Scotton, 2012, p. 40). The developmental concept shares traits with the authoritarian concept, particularly with a structure in which information flows from the top-down and freedom of the press can be restricted based on the development aims of the ruling party (Hachten, 1981, 1996).

Similar to the developmental concept is development media theory (also called media development theory), a normative theory which argues that media freedom, while desirable, should be subordinated to the political, economic, social, and cultural needs of the country to promote development (McQuail, 1983). Other scholars have also attempted to classify global media systems, some based on developmental statuses similar to first, second, and third world: market or Western nations, Marxist or communitarian nations, and advancing or developing nations (Altschull, 1984) and Western, Communist, and Third World (Martin & Chaudhary, 1983).

These distinct yet overlapping paradigms were largely created in response to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) *Four Theories of the Press* to recognize that communities undergoing significant development transitions often lack the infrastructure, financial resources, and professional skills to sustain media institutions similar to those in the developed world, in which Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's four theories can take place (Altschull, 1984; Hachten, 1981; McQuail, 1983).

With the exception of the communist perspective, capitalism was legitimized in the classical four theories, but under development media theory, the media undertook the role of carrying out positive social change programs, even if that meant accepting restrictions and instructions from the ruling party (McQuail, 1983, 2010). McQuail (2010) put it bluntly as follows: "social responsibility comes before media rights and freedoms" (p. 151). Critics suggest that this tenet, seen in both the developmental concept and development media theory, enables journalism to represent government propaganda and argue that media should never surrender the power to criticize government policies even if it risks causing the policies to fail (Hachten & Scotton, 2012).

Derived from development media theory is the centralized mass media method, which calls for government and media to work together to distribute a general message to a wide audience, but creates the message in a top-down fashion without considering the public's needs or opinions (Moemeka, 1991). This method is used in most developing countries, especially in Africa, because it is cheap and easy, and it is generally effective in that the message typically reaches the target audience. However, it almost always fails in getting individuals to understand and accept the message and act accordingly (Moemeka, 1991).

It could be argued that practices such as the centralized mass media method occur as a result of what Freire (1968) has called a "fear of freedom." This fear of freedom is seen, at least to some extent, when, "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility" (Freire, 1968, pp. 46-47). This fear may be due to or a result of the power distance in Rwandan society (Hofstede, n.d.). Power distance, defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, n.d., para. 2), has not been studied in Rwanda specifically, but has revealed hierarchical societies in all African nations that were examined.

All of these paradigms or schema could, in varying ways, relate to the notion of "media development." It has been argued that "the conceptualization of 'media development' is marred by a conflation of means and ends, lack of definition and permeation by narrow normative views" and "can benefit from greater conceptual and analytical clarity" (Berger, 2010, p. 561). In 1997, Musa said that development media theory was "at a toddler stage" and "marked by ambiguities and contradictions" (p. 144). Musa (1997) went on to suggest that to have a "practicable media theory for development, scholars must take into account the historical contexts that gave rise to the present media systems" (p. 143).

Such criticisms are not lost on media development theorists. Hachten and Scotton (2012) wrote that, as of the mid-1990s, the developmental concept "appeared to be losing momentum" as a result of "current global trends toward more democracy and market economies" which tend to support Western press concepts (p. 42) and McQuail has worked to develop more applicable normative theories of the media (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). However, despite acknowledgment of the criticisms, little has changed with regard to the creation of a "practicable media theory for development" since Musa's (1997) call for such a framework (p. 143).

Given that Rwanda is very much in a time of developmental transition, it presents a unique opportunity to explore whether these frameworks hold continued relevance by analyzing the role of journalists in Rwanda, their goals, their perceptions of press freedom and, overall, how they contributed to development and social change in the country. To understand the relationship between Rwandan journalists and the government and how such a relationship relates to media theories of development, the following research questions are posed:

> **RQ1a:** How do Rwandan journalists understand their role in present-day society?
> **RQ1b:** How do Rwandan journalists understand their relationship with the government?
> **RQ2a:** How do Rwandan journalists perceive their level of press freedom?
> **RQ2b:** What topics/areas are journalists prohibited from reporting on and what are the consequences of doing so?

Method

This study utilized interviews with current and former Rwandan journalists and editors, who provided insights into the roles, opportunities, and challenges of working in the media industry during the postgenocide reconstruction of Rwanda. According to Besley and Roberts (2010), "journalists represent excellent candidates for qualitative interview projects" (p. 70) because, due to their profession, they should be able to articulate their experiences clearly and effectively (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). With the growth of blogs and social media, it can be difficult to distinguish who should be considered a "journalist." For this study, a journalist was defined as someone who earns or earned the majority of their income from working as a journalist.

Sampling Frame

Initially, journalists were identified by conducting a search in each Rwandan newspaper's website for reporter contact information. A later search of social media sites relating to Rwandan journalists was used to contact more reporters and editors. After initial journalists were contacted, a snowball sample was used.

Table 1. Interviewee, Job Title, Employer, and Employer Type.

Participant	Job title	Employer	Employer type
Journalist 1	Former radio/TV presenter	*Voice of Africa*	Religious
Journalist 2	Editor	*Radio/TV 10*	Commercial
Journalist 3	Online news editor	*Izuba Rirashe*	Government-run
Journalist 4	Senior producer	*Radio/TV 10*	Commercial
Journalist 5	Former journalist	Withheld	Government-run
Journalist 6	Editor/reporter/presenter	*Radio Isango Star*	Commercial
Journalist 7	Reporter	Withheld	Commercial
Journalist 8	Reporter	*The New Times*	Government-run
Journalist 9	Editor	*Umusingi*	Commercial
Journalist 10	Executive level	*Umuseke.rw*	Commercial
Journalist 11	Journalist	*Royal FM*	Commercial
Journalist 12	Reporter	*The New Times*	Government-run
Journalist 13	Editor	*Gusenga.org*	Religious
Journalist 14	Senior reporter	*Izuba Rirashe*	Government-run
Journalist 15	Reporter	*City Radio*	Commercial
Journalist 16	Freelancer	*The New Times*	Government-run
Journalist 17	News editor	*The East African*	Commercial
Journalist 18	Reporter	*Associated Press*	Commercial
Journalist 19	Former journalist	Withheld	Government-run
Journalist 20	Director	*Radio Salus*	Student-run
Journalist 21	Reporter	*Radio Salus*	Student-run
Journalist 22	Reporter	*Kigali Today/KT Radio*	Commercial
Journalist 23	Executive level	*Great Lakes Voice*	Commercial
Journalist 24	Editor	*Kigali Today*	Commercial

Note. Employer type determined by Bonde, Uwimana, Sowa, and O'Neil (2015), and through interviews.

Interviewing

Twenty-four in-depth interviews were conducted in May and June 2016, upon which saturation was reached, as no new ideas were uncovered. The sample included a mix of reporters and editors who worked for both independent and government-run news organizations. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the interviewees' job titles and employers, as well as each employer's ownership status. The journalists were 83% male, and their names are withheld to protect them from potential retribution. Further information about each interviewee that might reveal their experiences with the genocide is also withheld to protect identification of these individuals. In addition to protecting the interviewees' identities, revealing their genocide experiences was not necessary in answering this study's research questions. Most interviews took place at the office of the interviewee or a nearby coffee shop, but were determined at the discretion of the interviewee. One interview was conducted over the phone and the remaining 23 interviews took place in person in Kigali and Butare, Rwanda. They were conducted in

English. Each interview began with a summary of the study and an informed consent protocol. All interviews were audio recorded with permission from the interviewees.

The interviews were semistructured (Creswell, 2003) and consisted of open-ended questions as well as some demographic questions. Journalists were asked to reflect on their own stories, their role in society, and talk about the challenges they faced in navigating the postgenocide societal landscape.

Analysis

Transcriptions were created from the audio recordings of the interviews, which generated 194 pages. The shortest interview was 12 min and the longest was 1 hr and 49 min, with the average interview length being approximately 45.5 min. Each transcript and its accompanying field notes were read multiple times to identify central themes, phrases, references, or terminology to make meaning of the diverse perspectives. While reading and rereading the transcripts, the authors engaged in what Baxter and Babbie (2003) refer to as the "iterative cycle" of developing codes by "each time revising the coding categories until they capture all" of the relevant data (p. 367). Themes and trends were identified through this iterative process, which allowed for major emergent categories to be developed. When analyzing the interview data, some categories emerged based on existing literature, but efforts were also taken during readings of the transcripts to discover new issues or themes that materialized from the text (Besley & Roberts, 2010).

After an initial set of categories emerged which allowed the data to be organized in a useful way, transcriptions of the interviews were imported into Dedoose, a collaborative, cross-platform application for the management, integration, and analysis of qualitative data (Lieber & Weisner, 2013) to further analyze how frequently and in what capacities those themes, ideas, and phrases were used. A combination of the data being analyzed by real people and computer-supported analysis software enabled the interviews to be organized and categorized by themes and terminology used as well as account for timing/spacing, tone, and body language.

Findings

Analysis of the transcripts yielded 1,207 applications of 53 codes and subcodes in Dedoose. These codes included ones used for this study as well as codes analyzed in other articles from the same data set. After analyzing the transcripts and the frequency of each code relevant to this study, three key themes emerged. The first theme focused on a complex relationship between journalists and the government, specifically that journalists work *with* the government and censor themselves a great deal. The second theme related to journalists' beliefs about press freedom in Rwanda. Specifically, this theme highlights journalists' perceptions about continually improving levels of press freedom, especially if a journalist knows how to convey the information correctly, but that societal consequences exist surrounding some topics. The third theme that journalists commonly spoke of was the notion that outsiders do not understand the

Rwandan press freedom landscape and are wrong to pass judgment without a deeper appreciation of its complexities and implications.

Relationship With Government

The first theme that emerged demonstrates that the role of journalists in Rwanda today is tightly interwoven with that of the government, which is consistent with development media theory. Numerous journalists explained that as a result of Rwanda's history, and the role of media in perpetuating the genocide, journalists today should work in conjunction with the government. Many journalists acknowledged that this is likely more important in Rwanda than in other countries as a result of the genocide. It was common to hear that all aspects of society work differently in Rwanda because of the genocide, and for someone to understand the Rwandan media landscape, they need to view it from a Rwandan perspective. Journalist 13, an editor at newspaper *Izuba Rirashe*, put it bluntly when he said, "In Rwanda, we have a particular history that makes us sometimes do things other people don't do."

Working with the government. Since the genocide, the Rwandan government has prioritized development, reconstruction, and unity. As such, journalists spoke about working *with* the government to promote those aims and in some senses, right the wrongs of their predecessors during the genocide. Journalist 8, a reporter at the largest government-supported newspaper, *The New Times*, explained that "Officials out there were so busy putting in press anything that goes hand-in-hand with unity and reconciliation. So media had to be there to report on it." Journalist 23, from *Great Lakes Voice* said, "The civil society, the media, the parties, the politicians—you failed in the genocide. Therefore, here, we don't want you to do the same mistakes." Such findings lend support to the notion that development media theory and the centralized mass media method are at play in present-day Rwanda.

As discussed, a number of laws under the Rwandan government's redevelopment plan restrict the way journalists and the public discuss the genocide and the subsequent reunification efforts. Specifically, Rwandans are not to be identified as members of ethnic groups such as Hutu or Tutsi; instead, everyone is Rwandese. In addition, strict laws were created to prevent discussions that promote genocide ideology. Journalists regularly spoke about these as strong no-go areas in their work, but largely did so in the context of promoting the same goals as put forth by the government. Journalist 3, from *Izuba Rirashe* said, "You make sure that you don't publish things that might separate people, that might endanger national cohesion." Journalist 1, from *Voice of Africa*, furthered this point by explaining his belief that the government's media restrictions were promoting national development: "The government can control the media, but not in a negative way—just in a positive way, to keep things going on and to keep the country in a good light."

Self-censorship. However, journalists also revealed a great deal of self-censorship in conjunction with government restrictions and it was often difficult to determine what restrictions were put in place by the government versus self-imposed. This self-censorship appeared widespread regardless of the commercial or government allegiances of the journalist or his or her media organization. Journalist 17, an editor at *The East African*, spoke about government restrictions on discussion of ethnicity in the context of her own beliefs, explaining, "we feel that if you say 'Rwandan,' whether Hutu or Tutsi, you're helping to address the issue of society looking at one side . . . So in our coverage, we try not to, you know, highlight ethnicity." Journalist 6, an editor, reporter, and presenter at *Radio Isango Star*, outlined the gray area between government and self-censorship as a result of the recent genocide:

> You cannot report on everything . . . Not always for somebody told you not to do so, but simply for [a] media personality, you think you cannot do it. There are some issues of . . . us journalists, thinking we cannot act because of the history of what they call the "hate media," which our country lived. So our media has some barriers, sometimes because of us journalists and sometimes even some local officials. So we cannot report on everything.

Other journalists were more direct about their self-censorship. For example, Journalist 4, a producer at *Radio/TV 10*, explained as follows:

> Because we are still in a fragile period—you know, it's almost 22 years after [the] genocide . . . and people are still having fresh wounds in their hearts . . . even if we are having developments in Rwanda . . . people who committed genocide are still there; people who suffered are still there; widows, orphans are still there. They are still having a fresh memory. They are still having fresh wounds. It means that we have to be careful. Because of that, some people do self-censorship to themselves . . . Even if you can't get penalized, you self-censor yourself, you say "no no no, this is untouchable, I'm not going to talk on this [subject]."

Journalist 7, a reporter in Kigali, also believes that the majority of censorship is self-imposed. "There is a bit of censorship, you can tell when you're writing the story, but I don't think it's mostly government led, its individual led." Journalist 4 from *Radio/TV 10* elaborated on this self-censorship in the context of an interview with a genocide survivor. He explained,

> when you were editing, it was very hard to choose what to put on air and what to not, because you might know that people out there who were listening to radio station might feel, might be traumatized by that testimony.

Similarly, Journalist 10, at *Umuseke*, explained that it is his own desire, not government regulation, driving his desire to report positively:

I belong to a new generation. I know what we want—we just want peace. We just want development. We just want to survive. So what people want to bring us back in the stories? Why? There is no need.

Likewise, Journalist 8 at *The New Times* explained his desire to write stories that promote social change in the country:

In [the U.S.], for example, the literacy level is high. Someone can apply common sense [and] logic into doing something. I [sometimes] find myself in a situation where I need to, before I report something—even if it's ok, it is accurate—I need to assess myself on what my writing will mean tomorrow. At the time, I'll have to censor myself. Not to censor in the interest of what the government says or wants, but to get to know, really, can it serve better? Can it change?

Possibly, as a result of this self-censorship as opposed to government censorship, the next theme that emerged highlights Rwandan journalists' beliefs that they have a relatively high level of press freedom that is continually improving.

Perceived level of press freedom. International organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (2017) and Freedom House (2018) have criticized the lack of media freedom in Rwanda. However, the second theme that emerged from the interviews illuminates Rwandan journalists' feelings that they receive a high level of press freedom, at least, relative to past levels of freedom in the country, and are continually gaining more freedom.

High press freedom. Numerous journalists explained that although there are necessary restrictions in place for the good of the country, overall they feel as if they can report freely and the level of press freedom is constantly improving. Journalist 12, at *The New Times*, a government-funded newspaper, elaborated on his perception of high press freedom by explaining that media bodies were recently created to promote press freedom in the country's postgenocide era:

We have the High Council of the Media in the Rwandan Office of Regulations, which are there for media [protection]. The country has the School of Journalism since 1996 [*sic*] after [the] genocide. I can also say that there is an Association of Rwandan Journalists. So, based on such achievements, I cannot hesitate to say that the future of Rwandan media is bright.

However, at times journalists seemed to contradict themselves, acknowledging that they work with the government and abide by government restrictions while at the same time claiming that they play a watchdog role by reporting on government misdeeds. In other words, much of what the journalists described as freedom simultaneously sounded like restrictions, especially those from nongovernment-funded outlets. For example, Journalist 4 from the commercial station *Radio/TV 10* said,

You are free to say what you want depending on the topic, and depending on the history of our country. That's, I can't say that we are free or we are not free. It depends on what you want to talk about and when you want to talk about [it] and who you are talking to.

Journalist 10, at the commercial outlet *Umuseke*, discussed similar notions by saying,

There are some changing mindsets with top officials, even the president . . . some [government officials] change [their minds to understand] that we [journalists] have to be here and we have to be critical and we have to be positive. We have to be both. We have to be balanced.

Journalist 21, a reporter at the student-run *Radio Salus*, said,

The level of press freedom here—in entertainment and sports it's high . . . But on other subjects, especially politics, human rights, no, it's very low. It's very low. For instance, talking about genocide issues, they [the government] want only one version of the story . . . You can't do a balanced story with that.

Although many journalists conveyed their feelings about improving levels of media freedom, some did acknowledge limitations. For example, Journalist 17 from the commercial publication *The East African* said,

We cannot say we operate with the same level of independence as, for instance, our other counterparts in the region, Uganda or Kenya. And again it's because of the history. There are certain sensitivities around how you cover issues . . . So to that extent, when you're doing your work, that sort of guides you and at the same time limits [you].

Others spoke about their freedom in the context of knowing how to work around the restrictions.

Understanding how to convey information. Numerous respondents explained that they feel as if they are free because they know how to report things in ways that do not cause problems. Journalist 8 from *The New Times* said, "I want to believe that we have actually a majority of the say in whatever we cover. Maybe the difference would be in what light we cover [it]." Journalist 1 from *Voice of Africa* elaborated by saying,

[journalists] know how to speak . . . That's the way many journalists know how to [work within the restrictions]. [They] know the way to speak things, the way to write things. 'Cause if you have [*sic*] the way, I think you can talk about anything you want, even the dangerous issues. You can talk about them [dangerous issues], but that's what you're gonna use, the way you're gonna pronounce it, the way you're gonna ask questions.

Journalist 17 from *The East African* gave the example of working around the restrictions when writing about ethnicity. She said,

Quite often you omit [controversial issues] in your work . . . especially issues around ethnicity. You might cover an issue, but you may not be able to explore the different angles around it because you may find yourself, you know, difficulty with the law. So we don't have specific off limits—you can't cover this, you can't, no—but there are some provisions within the law. For instance, like, within the penal code, I think it's article 701, it has this clause on media offenses that could lead to public disorder or insecurity, you know, incite, but it does not specify exactly what. So what that means is you always are trying to say, "Okay, how can I cover the issue and I don't incite?"

Consequences. Despite the majority of respondents talking about growing levels of media freedom, not all journalists were as optimistic about press freedom in the country. Journalist 9, an editor at *Umusingi*, spent a year in jail for inciting divisionism in an opinion column published in his newspaper in June 2012. He said, "Why did they imprison me? Because of journalism? . . . Being a journalist is a profession like other professions, it's not a crime."

Interestingly, despite discussions of repercussions such as jail time, many journalists spoke about consequences of violating press restrictions in the context of harms to society, not to the individual journalist. Journalist 10 from *Umuseke* explained that because of "our old history, bad history" he is cautious about what he writes. "Because if you let the people talk about all of what's in their hearts, it can be explosive. It can really be explosive." Journalist 1, from *Voice of Africa* elaborated on the potential consequences to society by saying,

I know some . . . people who say "yeah, I'm Tutsi, I hate hutu, 'cause they killed my family. I can revenge myself." I know those people . . . so imagine if you give those people the freedom to say whatever they want. They go, they can go to radio and say "hey guys, we didn't manage to kill you . . . it's time." Imagine what can happen again. And other guys say "hey, you said you would kill us, now we have the power, we can kill you, too. Hey, my friends, let's start killing these guys!"

The idea that what a journalist writes could be harmful to society was reiterated by Journalist 3 from *Izuba Rirashe*:

When it comes to journalists, we have to see whether or not to try not to bring back what happened. If someone brings a story and we let the story go out, now we have a society that is not free. So you make sure that you are not bringing people behind. You make sure that you don't publish things that might separate people, that might endanger national cohesion.

Outsiders do not understand. Overall, journalists conveyed an "outsiders don't understand" narrative surrounding press freedom in the country. Journalist 17 from *The East African* called Rwanda's rankings on global press freedom indexes "disturbing" and Journalist 18, an *Associated Press* reporter in Kigali, said "people from outside, they think the media in Rwanda is very terrible . . . but there has been some progress." Journalist 20, a journalist at *Radio Salus*, explained that resources and infrastructure play a key role in how Rwandan media function. He said,

Sometimes here in Rwanda, or in Africa in general, we do not have big investors in media section and sometimes people from Western countries think media is not free. But as I said sometimes the big challenge of our media, I think, it's not even politics environment [*sic*], but a *means* environment. Because . . . media is expensive. Sending reporters on field—if you find for example a reporter of CNN or Al Jazeera in area, you can calculate expenses. It can be like all the budget of any local radio here in Africa. So sometimes you are limited on means more than politics environment.

Journalist 24, a Kigali-based reporter, summed up these sentiments when she suggested that people come visit the country before criticizing the media landscape or ranking the level of press freedom:

I would like them to come and do research and to know why media is [the way that is currently is]. The media is not like France . . . we don't complain like they complain. I would like [foreigners] to come visit before they do the report.

Discussion

This study set out to understand Rwandan journalists' perceptions of press freedom, their role in society, and their relationship with the government in this postgenocide era. The findings indicate that journalists from both commercial and state-run media outlets in Rwanda work with the government and practice self-censorship in their reporting in an effort to promote peace in a society still in recovery. Despite acknowledging clear restrictions by the government, most journalists believe they have a relatively high, and continually increasing, level of press freedom. They also believe outsiders do not understand their news media culture and should not judge them as oppressed.

The findings imply that journalists in Rwanda exemplify Moemeka's (1997) idea of a communalistic society in which the primary ethical role of communication is to sustain social order. In such societies, community welfare overrides personal aims. This helps explain why Rwandan journalists are committed to uniting the country and publish stories with such a goal in mind. These ethical values are enforced through "normative, practical, or logical force (or some combination of these)," according to Moemeka (1997, p. 171). Indeed, this study demonstrated how these values were both mandated by the government—by outlawing stories that promote ethnic divides—and voluntarily carried out by journalists—by choosing not to publish stories about sensitive topics. These communalistic cultural ideals likely contributed to journalists' acceptance of self-censorship, which is also likely amplified in this postgenocide time, when Rwandans are especially bonded in their shared goal not to repeat the past. Moemeka (1997) states, "When people are bonded with one another in the name of their community, they are usually willing to make tangible and intangible sacrifices for one another" (p. 174). Based on the findings of this study, press freedom appears to be a sacrifice that Rwandan journalists are willing to make in an effort to uphold peace. However, these findings should be viewed with healthy skepticism, as it is important that Rwanda's

communalistic society does not act as a disguise to protect President Kagame, who has been criticized for carrying out an authoritarian regime (Berman, 2016).

It is also possible that Rwandan journalists practice self-censorship because they fear full freedom, as Freire (1968) explained. Given the history of the genocide and the role of media in perpetuating the conflict, journalists could be especially fearful. Like Journalist 1 from *Voice of Africa* said,

> Imagine if you give those people [that harbor resentment about the genocide] the freedom to say whatever they want. They go, they can go to radio and say "hey guys, we didn't manage to kill you . . . it's time." Imagine what can happen again.

These results fuse together to indicate that present-day Rwanda represents an example of McQuail's (1983) development media theory, which asserts that "the media are required to join the government in the task of nation building" (p. 188) and Hachten's (1981) developmental concept. However, given the relatively recent genocide in the country, these findings simultaneously lend support to Musa's (1997) call for a "practicable media theory for development" that takes into account "the historical contexts that gave rise to the present media systems" (p. 143). Nordenstreng (1997) cautions that new paradigms should not be "universally valid" but, instead, should be part of a continuum in which national media systems can share multiple paradigms and "typologies serve the purpose of analytical distinctions and not of totalizing labels" (p. 108).

In the current study, journalists reported a desire to look to the future and report positively instead of criticizing current government efforts aimed at moving beyond the genocide. Many journalists discussed their role as working *with* the government to promote unity and reconciliation, effectively acting as agents of social change. This top-down message additionally supports the use of Moemeka's (1991) centralized mass media method and Hachten's (1981) developmental concept. Fair (2008) found that government control of the press in Ghana is "soft control" where leaders use "refined methods of manipulation" to play off "the social realities of journalists: their low pay, engrained respect for seniority, desire for careers, love of country, and duty to family" (p. 40). Although the Rwandan government has used forms of control such as jail and intimidation, much of the self-censorship that journalists report could be understood as "soft control." Thus, soft control could be understood as a key component of a "practicable" development media theory, as well.

Similarly, in neighboring Tanzania, former President Julius Kambarage Nyerere used public nation building policies to create unity among Tanzanians based on a sense of national identity instead of ethnic identities (Wangwe, 2005). Such efforts are believed to have made a positive impact on Tanzania's ethnic and tribal relations (Miguel, 2004), and, thus, it could be argued that the Rwandan government's efforts and accompanying self-censorship may lead to continued peace and development.

Of course, critics would argue that by conforming to the desires of the government, even in the context of "soft control," journalists are doing the opposite of promoting development—instead, they are hindering it. In the case of post-coup d'etat Thailand, Sobel (2016) argued that by media acting as government spokespeople, they

are actually serving the purpose of strengthening the authoritative structure of Thai society and, thus, preventing democratic development. Similarly, Frère (2009) cautioned, "by prioritizing control over freedom because of the existence of movements which were 'divisionist' or denied the genocide, the government would only encourage the spread of a radical 'clandestine' discourse" (p. 348). Thus, it should be asked whether this clandestine discourse is good for a country trying to recover from the devastating effects of a genocide. Waldorf (2007) argues that while the Rwandan government suggests that *RTLM* and *Kangura* represent the dangers of too much press freedom, such outlets might signify the risks of too much government control of media. On one hand, there exists a strong need to promote national cohesion, but there simultaneously exists the need for press freedom. Consequently, situations in which McQuail's (1983) theory of media development and Hachten's (1981) developmental concept apply, such as the postgenocide reconstruction of Rwanda, can concurrently present opposing interests.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited in that it only includes interviews with journalists and does not include the perspectives of Rwandan government officials or the general public. Future research should expand this line of inquiry to include other segments of the Rwandan population. In addition, the location of the journalists could have affected findings, as Kigali and Butare are more focused on government affairs than the rural areas. Demographic and other variables might also factor into political relations; future research should take into account the journalists' gender and age, for example, and whether they are reporting for a local or foreign outlet (such as a Rwandan journalist working for the Associated Press). Findings from this study provide an opportunity for comparative work, and a focus is needed on journalists in rural areas. It would also be beneficial to examine how power distance (Hofstede, n.d.) applies in Rwanda. Furthermore, given that the Rwandan government attempts to control the narrative surrounding the genocide and reconstruction, it is possible that some interviewees were unwilling to discuss any attempts on their part to stray from the government's efforts.

Future research can analyze whether "radical 'clandestine' discourse" (Frère, 2009, p. 348) flourishes in the future, but in the case of postgenocide Rwanda today, what we are likely seeing is that media are assisting the government with short-term development. Although it could be argued that short-term development can lead to long-term development, primarily via peace and stability, concerns could also be raised about the long-term ramifications of widespread self-censorship. By not identifying individual's ethnicities, Rwandan media are encouraging social stability. By not criticizing the way that the government spends money, Rwandan media are encouraging infrastructure growth. By writing about positive achievements instead of past ills, Rwandan journalists are building national morale. By understanding their role in society as unifiers, Rwandan journalists are promoting cultural cohesion. All of these considerations are necessary in the years immediately following the genocide in order for the country to move forward, which it has in terms of economic and infrastructure development. In fact, it appears that the media/government message of unity and reconciliation has been tremendously effective in terms of the public's

acceptance and support, suggesting that in the case of Rwanda, the centralized mass media method (Moemeka, 1991) did not fail but was rather quite successful. Although this study cannot prove a causal link between Rwanda's positive development and the current role of journalists, Hornik (1980) suggests that communication can act as a catalyst for development and a complement to other social change efforts. However, such self-censorship may, in the long-term, reinforce the existing political structure and restricted press freedom landscape.

But for how long will this self-censorship last? Numerous journalists spoke about the growth of the media sector and a rise of professional journalistic standards in recent years, both as a result of government development initiatives and the creation of the nation's first School of Journalism at the University of Rwanda. Thus, it is possible that as the country and the media sector continue to develop, a more pluralistic media landscape will enable journalists to serve functions beyond the aims of the government. However, what is clear at this time is that aspects of existing media development theories are distinctly present today and, thus, cannot merely be written off as irrelevant or outdated. Nonetheless, fair criticism of these theories exist—which points to the need for a new or updated media development paradigm that factors in the local historical contexts and moves the field toward clearer analytical distinctions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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