Background

- The 1994 Rwandan genocide is the seminal example of the use of media as a tool to instigate conflict.

- The genocide was organized primarily by members of the Hutu-dominated Mouvement Revolutionnaire pour le Developpement (MRND), and their targets were almost entirely minority Tutsis and Hutus opposed to the MRND.

- The genocide was carried out mainly by members of militias and the army, but a significant number of Hutu civilians took part as well. By the time the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took Kigali on July 19 and the killing subsided, up to one million Rwandans were dead.

The Role of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM)

- The behavior of the nominally private radio station Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) prior to and during the genocide has been well documented.

- Though analysts differ on the extent to which abuse of Rwandan media was a direct cause of the genocide, all agree that it was used to set the scene for the mass killing that later erupted.

- "Radio... systematically laid the groundwork for mass slaughter from the moment it was licensed in July 1993." It also helped facilitate the genocide, as RTLM broadcast names, addresses and license plate numbers of Tutsi targets. "Killers often carried a machete in one hand and a transistor radio in the other."
The Role of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM)

- "The political and military elite established RTLM as part of this broader strategy to thwart the impact of internal reform."

- Further evidence of this strategy is found in the fact that prior to the genocide the government distributed free radios around the country in order to allow Rwandans to tune into RTLM

- ...that RTLM was "allowed to broadcast on the same frequencies as the national radio when Radio Rwanda [the national state-owned station] was not transmitting. Though officially private, RTLM was essentially the tool of Hutu extremists from the government, military and business communities."

The Role of Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM)

- "The massacres would have taken place with or without the RTLM broadcasts."

- Indeed, to some extent there has developed an overemphasis on the role of hate radio in the genocide and RTLM has become a common scapegoat for the slaughter, perhaps because some leaders and policymakers, particularly from powerful industrialized countries, want to turn attention away from their lack of response and the international community’s failure to intervene.

- In the process rumors concerning RTLM broadcasts have morphed into fact: according to Kimani, "contrary to popular belief, the RTLM transcripts do not contain many open and direct calls for the massacre of Tutsis."

The Strategy

- RTLM’s strategy was two-pronged.

- First, it sought to create the impression that an attack by the Tutsi-dominated RPF, based in neighboring Uganda, was being planned and that the Tutsi were pursuing a sinister plot to topple the government, rule Rwanda and repress, and by some reports enslave, Hutus.

- According to Article 19, “government officials easily manipulated information about the RPF and security issues as a pretext to incite violence against Tutsi civilians.”

- Media were used to create the false impression that the RPF attack was imminent and that Hutus were in grave danger.
The Strategy

- Preemptive action by Hutus, in an effort to “defend” themselves, was portrayed as necessary in order to head off the looming RPF attack and foil their plans.

- RTLM "stressed constantly the need for self-defense against Tutsi, warning that Hutu must be prepared to fight against them to the last person." [14] In other words, RTLM attempted to create the impression conflict was inevitable, and that Hutus had no choice but to slaughter Tutsis in order to save themselves.

The Strategy

- Second, Rwandan hate radio sought to demonize and “dehumanize” Tutsis in order to create the impression that killing Tutsis was not akin to killing other humans, thus making the act somehow more acceptable and easier to carry out.

- RTLM broadcasters frequently referred to RPF soldiers as inyenzi, literally meaning “cockroaches,” and tried to spread the myth that Tutsis were inhuman in their thirst for blood, urging listeners to “understand that the cruelty of the inyenzi is incurable, the cruelty of the inyenzi can be cured only by their total extermination.”

The Format

- RTLM was the first Rwandan radio station to adopt a western-style talk radio format featuring opportunities for listeners to call in and speak on the air, which proved immensely popular with Rwandans whose options on the radio dial were limited.

- "It adopted a fast-paced, informal style that featured the latest popular music."

- "Several announcers were famous for their quick wit and command of the nuances of kinyarwanda, the language used for most broadcasts."
The Format

- RTLM did not bore its listeners with regular, repetitive news reports, opting instead to play music from well-known Rwandan musicians, including Simon Bikindi, famous for his anti-Tutsi hit "I hate these Hutus" (in addition to composing xenophobic ballads, Bikindi was one of the founding shareholders of RTLM).
- Interspersed with the music were commentaries, interviews and other original pieces.
- This formula quickly made RTLM Rwanda’s most popular station. Because of the station’s lively content and musical component it appealed particularly to young male Rwandans, which ideally positioned it to incite hatred and lay the groundwork for genocide.

Print Media Component

- It was in the print media where hate speech against Tutsis first gained prominence and “became so systemic as to seem the norm.”
- The state-owned newspaper Kangura (meaning “Wake Up” in Kinyarwanda) was the original organ of hate media, as it began demonizing Tutsis and the RPF in October 1990.
- Its effectiveness can largely be attributed to its reliability, an indication of its proximity to those in power. Article 19 observed that “whatever Kangura called for usually occurred, when it related to specific individuals, and this added to the fear which the newspaper inspired.”
- Kangura was followed by similar publications with links to President Habyarimana’s regime and powerful Hutu individuals. Kangura’s methods were similar to those of RTLM and many of the themes popularized by RTLM actually originated from the pages of Kangura.

Print Media Component

- Kangura also published the infamous “10 Hutu Commandments,” which called upon Hutus to massacre Tutsis, and the paper generally went to great lengths to create the impression that the RPF had a devious grand strategy, at one point featuring an article titled “Tutsi colonization plan.”
Exportation of the Propaganda

- RTLM left the airwaves when the genocide ended in July 1994, but its influence persisted.

- Some of RTLM’s equipment may have been handed over to Radio Rutomo (also known, inappropriately, as Radio Democracy), a pirate station based in Zaire broadcasting into Burundi [31], a country with demographics similar to those of Rwanda and a history of ethnic conflict between Hutus and Tutsis.

- In August of 1994 Radio Rutomo began broadcasting hate propaganda directed against Burundian Tutsis that smacked of tactics eerily similar to those used by RTLM (although it has been argued that “the same could be said of the broadcasts from the [Burundi] government-controlled station.”)

International Community Response

- The Burundian government called for the station to be shut down, as did the UN Security Council, a UN sub-committee and the NGO Reporters sans Frontiers.

  - In 1995 US officials decided that they could legally play a role in silencing the station, but before they could the tone of the station’s broadcasts became less virulent.

  - Nonetheless, in 1996, the Burundian government decided to jam the station’s signal, “apparently using equipment from the Israeli government.” “This made the signal difficult to pick up in the capital, but it remained accessible in more remote areas.”