



THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN WAR ATROCITIES: CASES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND RWANDA



The purpose of this analysis is to show the devastating effects propaganda can have on society by giving examples of the narratives used in the local media in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 and Rwanda in 1994.

The media this analysis focuses on are Radio Prijedor and the newspaper Kozarski Vjesnik, propaganda tools used in Prijedor area in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and the newspaper Kangura that were disastrous for Rwanda.

The final chapter presents the consequences that propaganda and the media that disseminates it may leave and the court epilogues that it may get.

**BOSNIA AND
HERCEGOVINA
1992**

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1992

Before the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina broke out, the municipality of Prijedor, located in the northwest of the country, was an ethnically mixed area with 43.9% of its population being Muslims, 42.3% Serbs, and 5.6% Croats.¹

In the spring of 1992 Serbian forces (the Army and the Police of the Republika Srpska, Territorial Defence Force units and volunteer groups)² started attacking the cities in Prijedor municipality. As it is noted “the attacks largely followed the same pattern. First, Serb forces would issue an ultimatum calling on residents of non-Serb villages to surrender their weapons, after which the villages were shelled, regardless of whether or not the ultimatum was complied with. After the shelling, members of the military and police units would enter the villages and abuse, kill, or capture local non-Serb residents and take them to prison camps, which was followed by looting and torching of the villages.”³

Takeover of the city of Prijedor and its municipalities was conducted by following the Variant B Instructions, issued by Serb Democratic Party.⁴ On April 30 1992 Prijedor Public Security Station, assisted by the units of the Serbian Territorial Defence, the 343rd Motorized Brigade and the Yugoslav National Army's 5th Kozara Brigade took over some of the most important institutions in the city of Prijedor such as Town Hall or the court and prohibited all the Bosniaks and Croats, former employees, from entering the buildings.⁵

After that, the Crisis Staff of Prijedor was created and its head was Milomir Stakić, president of the Assembly of the Serbian people in Prijedor and the most important person in war-time Prijedor. The movement of all non-Serb citizens was restricted in addition to having to sign a declaration of loyalty to the Serb authorities.⁶

The role of local media in Prijedor was thoroughly discussed in the judgment of Prosecutor v. Stakić from 2003.

In 1991, when the paramilitary group “Wolves of Vučjak” took over the television broadcasting station, Sarajevo station was cut off and thus citizens of Prijedor could only watch stations from Belgrade, Pale and Banja Luka, which participated in the spread of propaganda, promoting SDS officials and playing Serbian nationalistic songs.⁷ Dehumanization of the Others and the use of hate speech and propaganda that started in Belgrade was continued in the local media.

Kozarski Vjesnik regularly reported on the rising tensions in the municipality and in the April 1992, not long before the takeover it wrote: “Clearly, there is growing fear and distrust even in this town with relations between Muslims and Serbs hitting rock bottom because, without even wanting to admit it themselves, they apparently think the worst of each other.”⁸

It is noted that the newspaper Kozarski Vjesnik played a role in increasing pro-Serb propaganda. Allegations against non-Serb citizens were spread, as well as the warnings to Serbs to protect themselves and not allow the massacres from World War II to occur again.

In order to describe the Others, the non-Serb population, derogatory terms such as “Ustaša” and “Mujahideen” were used. Radio Prijedor was using the same vocabulary and disseminating the same propaganda as the abovementioned newspaper.⁹

The declaration of Prijedor takeover was given to Radio Prijedor on April 30 1992 by Milomir Stakić and it was broadcasted throughout the day¹⁰. Here are some of the extracts from his declaration:

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“Due to the fact that the Party of Democratic Action all this time did not wish to share power, either with the winning parties or with the opposition parties, the work of the Municipal Assembly has been blocked, and the work of all other organs of government has been blocked. Because of this, the citizens and people of the municipality of Prijedor are living in a state of anarchy, insecurity, poverty and great fear, and this is not all... A great deal of tension has been caused in the past 30 days intentionally and for certain purposes, purposes pertaining to a special psychological war, and this has been caused by the organized departure of the Muslim population from Prijedor... We wish to tell all the citizens of the municipality of Prijedor that in our peaceful Kozara area, we must never again experience war and slaughter, burning and destruction, charred homes, screams of terror, which is the aim of the fanatical and slavish rump leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina...¹¹

After the takeover, Serbian nationalistic songs were played often, and the leaders of Party of Democratic Action were called criminals and extremists. Lies about the non-Serb doctors were also widespread in both radio and newspaper. There were allegations that the doctors were making Serbian women not able to have male children, that they were forcing them to abort and castrate male children. Biographies of those doctors were forged, the credibility of prominent Bosniaks and Croats was shattered, and everything was done in order to initiate and spread the hate amongst different ethnicities.¹²

Moreover, it is interesting to notice that after the takeover, the first issue of the Official Gazette of Prijedor Municipality that was published was renumbered as “Year 1”, instead of just continuing with the issue numbers.¹³

After the takeover of Prijedor, Radio Prijedor was used to deliver ultimatums to the citizens of other towns in the municipality and to order them to surrender themselves and give up their weapons.¹⁴

After the attack on Hambarine Kozarski Vjesnik stated that “because the Muslim paramilitaries did not allow the wounded and killed to be evacuated, the military command had issued an order to use force to effect this removal.”¹⁵

In the article it is also stated that “This military activity was intended to issue a warning. Its purpose was not to provoke violence which shielded the perpetrators of this crime. The Crisis Staff wishes to warn that from now on, they will no longer be warning actions, but that it would directly attack the areas where perpetrators of such acts and members of the paramilitary formations are hiding.”¹⁶

Similar announcement was stated on Radio Prijedor saying that the town of Kozarac will be razed to the ground if the citizens do not surrender themselves and their weapons.¹⁷

From these articles it is easy to conclude that the lies and the propaganda was used to ethnically clean the areas with the non-Serb majority. Furthermore, the director of Kozarski Vjesnik and Radio Prijedor, Mile Mutić, was often seen in the Crisis Staff meetings and interviews with Stakić and others as well as the articles about the takeover were often published in his media.¹⁸

On May 30 1992, a local radio station Radio Prijedor broadcasted an order to all non-Serb citizens to mark their houses with white sheets and to wear white armbands.¹⁹

Moreover, in an interview in Kozarski Vjesnik in June 1992, Stakić said: “We do not wish to treat the Muslims the way the Muslim extremists have been treating the Serbs in Zenica, Konjic, Travnik, Jajce... and everywhere in Alija’s Bosnia where they are the majority population.”²⁰

During this period Kozarski Vjesnik “referred to its publications over this period as the “War Edition” supports the fact that combat operations were ongoing.”²¹

Moreover, since March 1992 it advertised bus trips to foreign countries which “the Trial Chamber regards as forming part of the beginning of the process of deportation.”²²

Finally, it is stated in the judgement of Prosecutor v. Stakić that “Even though Dr. Stakić helped to wage an intense propaganda campaign against Muslims, there is no evidence of the use of hateful terminology by Dr. Stakić himself... Statements made by Dr. Stakić do not publicly advocate killings and while they reveal an intention to adjust the ethnic composition of Prijedor, the Trial Chamber is unable to infer an intention to destroy the Muslim group.”²³

RWANDA 1994

Two years after the events that occurred in the municipality of Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in April 1994 a genocide was committed in Rwanda, a country whose history is marked by the spiral of conflicts and violence between Hutu and Tutsi, two of the largest ethnic groups in the country.

In 1973 a Hutu, Juvenal Habyarimana, became the president of a country and a mostly peaceful life lasted until the late 80s when the economy stopped progressing. In the early 90s, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel army constituted of Tutsis living in Uganda, emerged. Instead of using the opportunity to unite the citizens of Rwanda, both Hutu and Tutsi, Habyarimana highlighted ethnic divisions even further by portraying all Tutsis as enemies together with those Hutu citizens who were perceived as siding with them. Violence was on the rise, and it culminated when the airplane carrying Juvenal Habyarimana was taken down on April 6 1994.²⁴

As Gerald Caplan notices in its article Rwanda: Walking the road of genocide, “The two rockets that brought down President Habyarimana’s plane became the catalysts for one of the great calamities of our age: a genocide and a civil war, separate but simultaneous.” Government and military structures, cultivated throughout the years, joined forces with the media, a powerful propaganda tool.²⁵

Media showed efficiency in disseminating desirable messages, targeting groups and individuals, and encouraging regular people to “go to work” and kill. Radio and television called Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines and the newspaper Kangura were the leaders in spreading hate and encouraging violence. They targeted “anti-Habyarimana government and opposition members; Hutu who opposed the extremists, thousands of whom were slaughtered without mercy in their first days; critics such as journalists and human rights activists; any Tutsi seen as community leaders, including professionals, political activists, lawyers and teachers; as well as priests, nuns and other clergy who were Tutsi or who sheltered intended victims.”²⁶

Newspaper Kangura, a media of Hutu Power, often used the words such as “to massacre”, “to exterminate”, “to clean”, “to work” and so on, words that were calling people to act and to defend themselves. Kangura was issued from 1990 to 1994.²⁷ In the 1990 Kangura published 10 Hutu Commandments²⁸ which go as follows:

1. Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who, marries a Tutsi woman, employs a Tutsi woman as concubine, employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or takes her under protection.

2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers, and sons back to reason.

4. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group. As a result, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor: makes a partnership with Tutsi in business, invests his money or the government's money in a Tutsi enterprise, lends or borrows money from a Tutsi, gives favours to Tutsi in business (obtaining import licenses, bank loans, construction sites, public markets, etc.).

5. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military and security should be entrusted only to Hutu.

6. The education sector (school pupils, students, teachers) must be majority Hutu.

7. The Rwandan Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi.

8. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi.

9. The Hutu, wherever they are, must have unity and solidarity and be concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers. The Hutu inside and outside Rwanda must constantly look for friends and allies for the Hutu cause, starting with their Hutu brothers. They must constantly counteract Tutsi propaganda. The Hutu must be firm and vigilant against their common Tutsi enemy.

10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961, and the Hutu Ideology, must be taught to every Hutu at every level. Every Hutu must spread this ideology widely. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for having read, spread, and taught this ideology is a traitor.

The language used in the newspaper was after taken by and used in the RTLM, created in 1993. The popularity of the radio was huge since the majority of people could not read.²⁹ Furthermore, a sound of other persons voice may be powerful and more motivating than a written word and apart from its chatty and witty broadcasters, RTLM used a populist approach and went on the streets and talked to ordinary citizens. In addition to inviting people to share their thoughts and gossips, radio used to play popular, lively music, too.³⁰ Most importantly, the RTLM disseminated fear in order to “reinforce distorted notions of Rwandan history”³¹, saying that the Tutsi want to recreate the past and enslave Hutu again. The RTML was continuously highlighting “the foreign origin of Tutsi and, hence, their lack of rights to claim to be Rwandan, the disproportionate share of wealth and power held by Tutsi and the horrors of past Tutsi rule. It continually stressed the need to be alert to Tutsi plots and possible attacks and demanded that Hutu prepare to ‘defend’ themselves against the Tutsi threat.”³²

At the same time, government was gathering and training thousands of militia members while giving the weapons to civilians, as well.³³ After the president was kill, from April 7, full scale killing started and the radio was used to mobilize the citizens and instruct them how to kill. ³⁴

Just like the Kangura the RTML used specific, dehumanizing, language to refer to Tutsis. It called for their extermination as if they were cockroaches hiding in bushes, houses and churches and for “cutting down the tall trees”.³⁵ The word “extermination” could also be heard in different context, such as: “Tutsi were going to ‘exterminate you until they are the only ones left in the country so that they can keep for a thousand years the power that their fathers had kept for four hundred years ... You must not let up in your efforts.”³⁶

Radio was not only used to give instructions for killing, but also to praise the good and efficient killers and encourage those who were hesitant to join in. Radio also gave advices to Hutu like “to make sure that bodies were not left on the roads to be seen by foreigners and to please not stand around barriers laughing when someone’s throat was cut”³⁷ so that the foreign aid would not stop coming.

THE EPILOGUE

The events in Prijedor culminated in the establishment of prison camps Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje. Over 3000 people went through the camps in just a couple of months of spring and summer of 1992. Hundreds were killed and a large number of both women and men was tortured daily - mentally, physically and sexually.³⁸

The camps closed after the foreign journalists came to visit them and spread the news about their horrible and inhumane conditions.³⁹ Victims' bodies were later found in mass graves with Tomašica being the biggest one with 483 victims.⁴⁰

More than 3,000 civilians died in the territory of Prijedor municipality in 1992, and around 38,000 Bosniaks and Croats left the municipality before the second half of October of 1992.⁴¹

In front of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) 18 individuals have been convicted for the Prijedor crimes⁴² and over 30 individuals were sentenced in front of the courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁴³ No one was found guilty of spreading hate over the media. Journalists and speakers mostly continued with their careers in Radio Prijedor and Kozarski Vjesnik, got into politics, help their relatives get the same jobs or retired after the successful career.⁴⁴

After 100 days of terror, killings, and sexual violence the genocide in Rwanda ended. It left behind between 800 000 and one million dead men, woman and children, mostly Tutsi, but moderate Hutu, as well.⁴⁵ International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), based in Tanzania convicted 61 person for the crimes committed in Rwanda. What is interesting is the fact that the ICTR dealt with the responsibility of the media. Thus, there are judgements in the cases Prosecutor v. Georges Ruggiu⁴⁶ and Prosecutor v. Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bossco Barayagwiza, Hassan Ngeze.⁴⁷

Ruggiu was the RTLM broadcaster and is the only non-Rwandan charged for incitement to commit genocide and crimes against humanity for acts of persecution. He plead guilty and was charged to 12 years of prison in the year 2000.

Nahimana and Barayagwiza, founders of the RTLM, and Ngeze, editor of the Kangura, were charged for using media for propaganda purpose that led to extreme violence and killings of hundreds of thousands of people. The ICTR convicted them of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, incitement to genocide, and crimes against humanity for acts of persecution and extermination in 2003. Four year later, in 2007, after the appeal, their direct role in genocide was overturned, their sentences were reduced, but their involvement in broadcasting hate, and so the role of the media in the genocide was upheld. ■

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