



CHAPTER 6

Press Freedom in the African Great Lakes Region: A Comparative Study of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo

Anke Fiedler and Marie-Soleil Frère

Drawing on the examples of Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) this chapter considers the factors influencing press freedom in post-conflict societies. Based on Minabere Ibelema, Larry Powell, and William Self's assumption that 'both forces of control and freedom are in a constant state of flux' (2000, 112), we argue that very different dynamics affect the freedom of the press in those countries, albeit in times of political unrest, which include contested elections, mass protests, or legitimation crisis. However, political factors, especially restricting press freedom, seem to prevail over other constraints.

For quite some time, academia has been increasingly interested in exploring the factors that influence the functional and structural architecture of journalistic systems (see, for example, Hallin and Mancini 2004, 2012; Voltmer 2008). While most of this previous research only implicitly

A. Fiedler (✉) • M-S. Frère
Université libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium

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touches upon the concept of press freedom, there have been numerous attempts to classify media systems around the world by using Press Freedom Indices (see, for example, RSF 2015; Freedom House 2015). Although the latter have been subject to criticism because of their Western bias, static nature, or methodological shortcomings (Behmer 2009; Giannone 2014; Schneider 2014), they still largely dominate scholarly understandings of press structures in contemporary communication studies (see for example Norris 2004; Engesser and Franzetti 2011).

By drawing on the more flexible approach of Ibelema et al. (2000), we are seeking to analyze both the nature of the press systems and the relevant factors influencing journalistic freedom in the (post-)conflict societies of Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC. Our study is based on a 'most similar systems design': The three countries under investigation should help 'to identify the key features that are different among otherwise fairly similar systems' (Esser and Hanitzsch 2012, 13). These three Central African states have in common similar historical pathways (Voltmer 2013), characterized by their colonization by the Kingdom of Belgium, independence in the 1960s, followed by thirty years of (mostly military) one-party rule, and a phase of political liberalization in the 1990s. Moreover, on the other hand, they also share recurring patterns of inter- and intra-ethnic violence, open conflicts, and relentless wars (Reyntjens 2009; Prunier 2009). Although all three countries persistently lag at the bottom of press freedom indices (in 2015, RSF ranked Burundi 156th, Rwanda 161st, and the DRC 152th out of 180 countries), they have, however, developed specific press structures since the beginning of the 1990s, which differ not only with regard to the emerging or existing diversity and pluralism in the broader media sector but also in terms of journalistic practices (Frère and Fiedler 2015). These differences exist because various forces, different legal instruments as well as values, norms, and traditions have been shaping and influencing the press systems of the three countries, determining at the same time the degree of press freedom in each state.

The empirical basis for this study comprises 132 face-to-face interviews conducted with media experts between July 2014 and January 2016 in Burundi (48), Rwanda (24), and in the DRC (16 in Kinshasa, 16 in the North Kivu, and 18 in the South Kivu provinces). Interviewees included journalists (and whenever possible from the entire spectrum—press, radio, television, and online media), media officials, international organizations'

representatives involved in media development projects, members of civil society organizations, employees of regulatory authorities and professional unions, as well as people from the advertising industry.

The interviews were conducted mostly by the authors, with the help of three local researchers, in several stages, and in the context of two different projects: The first wave of interviews was done in July 2014 as part of a baseline study about the situation of the media in the African Great Lakes commissioned by IPGL (Institut Panos Grands Lacs) and the Swiss Development Cooperation (see Frère et al. 2014); the second wave of interviews was conducted in January 2015, March 2015, and January 2016, within the research project INFOCORE funded under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7).

In most cases, the interviews were recorded and subsequently synthesized and transcribed. Almost all interviewees instantly accepted that the conversation would be recorded and transcribed and that their names and functions would be published. Only in some cases, especially in Rwanda, did interviewees request that their answers be kept anonymous where they dealt with sensitive issues such as censorship, control of the media, or cases of corruption.

The selection of interviewees followed the principle of theoretical saturation, which 'refers to the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights' (Bryant and Charmaz 2007, 611). The questions for the interview guidelines were derived from the relevant theoretical framework, that is the approach of Ibelema et al. (2000) to analyzing media systems.

In the light of the above, the present study sought to analyze journalistic freedom in the African Great Lakes region and, as such, provides fresh insights to researchers interested in the transformation of media systems. The first part of the chapter sheds light on the normative concept of press freedom from a theoretical point of view. Building upon previous research, this first section looks into factors that may boost or hinder the emergence of a democratically structured media environment in (post-)conflict societies. With the presentation of the three target countries that then follows—Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC—the first two sections establish the basis for the third section, which highlights the results of the study alongside six main conclusions.

PRESS FREEDOM: A CONTESTED NORMATIVE CONCEPT

In itself, the concept of press freedom is ‘contentious’ and there have been dozens of definitions and several attempts to conceptualize and operationalize it in the context of ‘media democratization’ (Becker et al. 2004, 2–3). Academics have been trying for years to systematize and measure the degree of ‘press freedom’ and ‘independence’ using media freedom indices (Becker et al. 2007); notions of *objectivity*, *neutrality*, or *autonomy* are generally key to the analyses. Regardless of the problems inherent in these attempts at measuring press freedom (Behmer 2009; Schneider 2014), it is rarely asked whether the very concept of ‘press freedom’ is in itself normatively loaded, to the extent that results actually take precedence over analysis (Giannone 2014). Western studies are generally driven by normative-oriented approaches that, according to Benson, ‘may promote ethnocentrism and justify the US model of market-oriented, ostensibly objective journalism.’ He argues that this model strongly influences international organizations such as Freedom House when they rate ‘national press systems as free, partly free or not free, based primarily on political rather than economic criteria’ (Benson 2008, 2596).

Furthermore, it has to be taken into consideration that press freedom is perceived differently from country to country (Voltmer and Wasserman 2014; Hanitzsch 2011). This is precisely the reason why Ibelema et al. (2000) have developed an ‘alternative model for press systems analysis,’ with a view to overcome the ‘free/not free’ dichotomy. Their objective was to identify ‘specific logistical factors and to show that the logistical process is applicable to all countries irrespective of ideology, form of government or level of development.’ They identified seven factors that play a role with regard to journalistic freedom:

- the *structural factor* (‘economic status and opportunities, diversity in media ownership and educational opportunities’);
- the *political factor* (‘power distribution and the process of governance’);
- the *cultural factor* (‘the value systems at any given place that consign everybody’s behavior within that context’);
- the *relational/managerial factor* (‘human relations processes that facilitate the accomplishments of one’s objectives with the other’, such as public relations and contacts with sources);

- the *technological factor* (‘the growth of portable and stealthy technologies of mass communication’ that can enhance ‘the capacity of people to share information’);
- the *semantic factor* (‘the human capacity to convey information in subtle ways and to take advantage of inherent ambiguity and contradictions of language’);
- the *existentialist factor*, which is defined as an all-or-nothing strategy for journalists (‘what one does, to undertake actions on the basis of personally determined principles’: for instance, ‘courage’ and ‘self-sacrifice’ for the sake of the profession) (Ibelema et al. 2000, 99, 103–110).

The most interesting aspect of this approach is that the concept of press freedom is not understood as something static. According to Ibelema et al. (2000), the forces conducive to journalistic freedom are in a constant struggle with the forces aiming at restricting the freedom of the press. Both forces in a country oscillate between the poles of ‘weak’ or ‘strong.’ When both the forces of control and the forces of freedom are strong, then ‘the press system tends toward conflict.’ In this case, ‘both forces will battle for dominance, with one eventually emerging as the dominant force’ (Ibelema et al. 2000, 111). This applies, in particular, to Burundi, where the political system (increasingly authoritarian and repressive) and the journalistic environment (increasingly liberal due to international donor support) have developed in diametrical directions since 2010, leading eventually to the destruction of the independent broadcasting sector in May 2015 (Frère 2016). When the forces of control are strong and the forces of freedom are weak, then ‘the press system tends [to shift] towards controlled expression’ (Ibelema et al. 2000, 111). This is the case in Rwanda. The DRC offers a strange mix in which both forces of control and forces of freedom can alternatively be strong or weak according to the location (in this huge and very diverse country) or period.

Against this background, the next section presents the conflict cases and media landscapes of Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC in more depth, before showing, in the last section, how some of the factors identified by Ibelema can help us to grasp the diversity and dynamics of the situation of press freedom in ‘post-conflict’ contexts, where the tensions between control and freedom show some peculiarities.

THE MEDIA IN THE AFRICAN GREAT LAKES REGION: A 'POST-CONFLICT' SYNDROME

It is important not to overlook the fact that Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC share bloodstained histories that have had an impact on journalism and press freedom (Frère 2007). Since 1994, they have gone through brutal wars and conflicts that have resulted in the death of many people and traumatized the general population. A civil war raged between Tutsi and Hutu populations in Rwanda (1990–1994) and Burundi (1993–2006) (Lemarchand 1996; Guichaoua 1995; Remacle et al. 2007). In the Eastern part of the DRC, several armed conflicts (which involved at some point up to nine neighboring countries) have been going on since 1996. Peace was reached either through the victory of one of the belligerents (in 1994 in Rwanda) or through negotiated peace agreements signed between the government and rebel forces (in 2000 for Burundi and 2003 for the DRC), but for about a decade, peace was in part only theoretical, with numerous violent episodes and the persistence of armed groups active at the common borders of the three countries (Tull 2010; Reyntjens 2009; Turner 2007; Autesserre 2010; Vlassenroot and Reymaekers 2004; Nest et al. 2006). The security situation remained fragile and regularly threatened by massacres, rapes, assassinations, and other forms of criminal acts.

The media were targeted in peace and reconciliation policies implemented by the governments and supported by foreign donors, because they had been involved in the conflicts. The concept of 'hate media' was central to the genocide perpetrated in Rwanda in 1994 (Thompson 2007; Chrétien 1995; Kellow and Steeves 1998; Li 2004; Straus 2007) as was also the case in Burundi and the DRC. In the attempts to restore and consolidate peace after 2000, serious steps were taken to reform legal frameworks and media regulations in the three countries, with a view to avoiding a repetition of previous tragic events. Post-conflict governments are often trapped between the necessity to open up the media landscape—in order to allow for tensions to be expressed in media discourses rather than through bullets (as well as to please foreign donors)—and the fear that media discourses may themselves become weapons that fuel conflict. In that context, new press laws were adopted in Rwanda (in 2002) and Burundi (in 2003), while a transitory regulatory body, the High Media Authority, was established in the DRC in 2003 as well. Yet, in many respects, the legal framework and regulatory

authorities have remained toothless or have even been used to repress journalistic freedom (Frère 2009).

Despite difficult economic conditions, a highly volatile security environment and a lack of infrastructure (all of which are commonplace in post-conflict situations), media pluralism has consolidated in the three countries. A diverse range of media organizations currently operate in the DRC (more than 450 radio stations are registered, over 200 television stations, and several hundred newspapers), but the territory is so wide that only a handful can disseminate information over such a large geographical scope. Rwanda and Burundi had, until recently, similar numbers of broadcasters operating: besides the public media, over twenty radio stations and around eight private televisions were on air.¹ The press is relatively developed in Rwanda (fifty-three active newspapers and twenty-three news websites, according to Bonde et al. 2015, 46), compared with Burundi (thirty-six registered papers and six registered news websites, according to Frère et al. 2014).

It is, however, well known that the number of media outlets sometimes has little to do with the degree of journalistic freedom. For this reason, we will attempt, in the next section, to show that press freedom can be assessed very differently in the three countries according to Ibelema et al.'s (2000) model.

THE DYNAMICS OF FREEDOM AND CONTROL FOR JOURNALISTS IN THE GREAT LAKES COUNTRIES

The factors influencing the journalistic freedom in the three countries under investigation vary but are mutually dependent. From our interviews, we can conclude that five key factors play an important part in shaping what can or cannot be said on the 'marketplace of ideas' (Ibelema et al. 2000, 98).

THE POLITICAL LEVEL: 'POST-CONFLICT' POLITICAL AUTHORITIES AND THE DEGREE OF TOLERANCE FOR 'INDEPENDENT MEDIA' DISCOURSE

In post-conflict societies, political unrest and civil disorder are constantly feared, which can lead the authorities to suppress independent public discourse, as any critique of the government is perceived as 'unpatriotic'.

This is illustrated by a number of examples from our interviews. To start with the most recent case, Burundi: The media sector of this small central African country was, until recently, the representative par excellence of the three states. Due to a strong political commitment of the international community during the civil war, most of the independent and private media were supported through foreign donor funding. As a result, a somewhat diversified and professional media market developed. In particular, the radio broadcast landscape was considered to be a relatively pluralistic space with various broadcasters, including some close to the government, and others associated with the opposition and civil society; most of all there was a degree of freedom to criticize the government as well as to analyze and investigate critical issues (Nindorera et al. 2013, 17).

In May 2015, following huge popular protests and a failed coup d'état after President Pierre Nkurunziza's unconstitutional decision to run for a third mandate, four radio stations and one private television broadcaster, constituting the main providers of independent information in Burundi, were destroyed. This event marked the culmination of escalating tensions between the regime of Nkurunziza and the independent press, whose relations had been gradually deteriorating since 2006 (Frère 2016). According to Bob Rugurika, former director of the oppositional Radio Publique Africaine (RPA) that was burnt down on May 14, 2015, it was the presidential camp's calculated decision to muzzle the press, which explains why even today those radio channels are still not operating. The entire independent press remains under heavy surveillance by state security agents. This is something that was premeditated.

Independent critical perspectives on the government's actions have progressively become unacceptable to the Burundian political authorities. This is despite the fact that the dominant political party (the CNDD-FDD), a former liberation movement, used to have good relations with the Burundian private media when it was still a rebel organization and needed a channel to voice as well as galvanize its political claims.

In the DRC, the authorities also regularly attack press freedom. In January 2015, they suspended Internet and cell phone services, following protests against a new electoral bill and attempts to change the constitution by President Joseph Kabila. Even though the media were not targeted directly (the aim was to prevent protesters from communicating), that suspension made it difficult for journalists to do their work. Faustin Kuediasala, the editor of the daily *Le Potentiel* (the main newspaper in Kinshasa) stated:

It is always difficult to access official sources that's why we need the Internet. [...] During these events, it was thorny and no one had the courage to talk to us. People thought that if they talked to us, it could turn against them [...] During these three or four days, when the Internet was completely shut down, we were off [...] totally off.

Since 2006, the government also decided on several occasions to shut down the transmitters of a number of broadcasters, including that of Radio France Internationale, the UN-backed Radio Okapi, and the main stations close to the political opposition. In Rwanda, the two main independent newspapers, *Umuseso* and *Umuwugizi*, were suspended in 2010 and the acting editor-in-chief of the latter was shot dead a couple of months after.

These examples serve to illustrate that political forces restricting media freedom prevail over other constraints on occasion, and tend to drag the media environment backward to the past era of direct censorship that disappeared with political and media liberalization in the 1990s. However, besides direct repression, political authorities use other means to control the media sector, including legal frameworks and regulatory authorities. In all the three countries, the lack of clarity in their legal texts is a frequently quoted cause for the lack of press freedom. The actual problem lies in the discrepancy between the wording of media texts (by and large they are liberal) and their interpretation by the administration and the judiciary, which are largely politicized and often corrupt. Jean Bosco Rushingabigwi, President of the Rwandan Maison de la presse (Press House), considers that the expressions 'public interest' or 'information that may destabilize national security' mentioned in the new law on access to information adopted in 2013 should be better exemplified and might serve as constraints to the access to information.² According to Vincent Nkeshimana, former Director of Radio Isanganiro, the press law in Burundi (which was also changed in 2013) only refers in 'vague terms to certain notions that restrict the freedom of journalists.' This is particularly the case with regard to 'the meaning of notions such as state security, libel and information that put the national economy at risk.' In the DRC, where the press law dates back to Mobutu's days (1996), it can be bypassed by any public authority willing to exert pressure on journalists. For Achille Kadima, a staffer at *Africa News*,

We are in a country where you will be encouraged to tell the truth, but as soon as you do it, some laws will be used against you. In other places, when

there is an embezzlement, you can publish it, you can report on the legal procedure. But here, there is always a malign magistrate who will prosecute you just because you have reported on a public trial. (Kadima 2015)

As far as media regulation is concerned, regulatory bodies have been established in each of the three countries: the Conseil national de la Communication (CNC) in Burundi, the Conseil supérieur de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (CSAC), which replaced the Media High Authority, in the DRC, and the Media High Council in Rwanda. One journalist with Radio Maendeleo succinctly expressed the situation: 'the regulatory bodies are not independent at all.' In the DRC, the CSAC, set up in 2011, is considered a politicized structure subject to the control of the executive power. It is perceived as a weapon used by the Ministry of Media and Communication to silence media outlets that are close to the political opposition to President Joseph Kabila. As noted by the director of Radio Maendeleo in South Kivu, 'The CSAC is at the orders of the ruling power and imposes sanctions whenever the governor requests it' (Kamuntu 2014).

Consequently, self-censorship is widespread among the journalists, as most of them want to avoid trouble. Fred Muvunyi, former chairman of the self-regulatory body RMC (Rwanda Media Commission), acknowledged that 'self-censorship is flowing like blood in the arteries and veins. There is no censorship, but there are things that journalists don't do because they are not confident of what will happen' (cited in Harber 2014, 3). Yet, self-censorship, even though it has a major impact on the degree of press freedom, is extremely difficult to assess.

THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL: VARIED ECONOMIC FACTORS IMPACTING ON JOURNALISM

Money (and where it comes from) is always a decisive factor that affects media freedom. Given the weak economies (partially related to previous conflict situations) and the correspondingly limited market for advertising in all the three countries, many media outlets have to work in precarious conditions, which affects their level of freedom.

In Burundi specifically, media outlets have become dependent on aid from foreign development programs for up to 85% of their annual budget (Nindorera et al. 2013). Innocent Muhozi, General Director of Radio Television Renaissance in Burundi, described the situation as follows:

The budget of Burundi depends on external aid—up to 50 percent. As long as the country does not get out of the economic backwater resulting from the structural weaknesses inherent to the Burundi economy, the stalled post-conflict reconstruction, the dangerous increase of corruption and so on, all of which bear negatively on economic growth for companies and on the advertising market, the independent broadcasters of Burundi will remain dependent on sponsors. (Muhōzi 2015)

In this respect, the situation of Burundi is the most difficult of the three countries but also the most comfortable at the same time. In this country, the most popular radio stations such as RPA, Bonesha FM, and Radio Isanganiro are largely dependent on, and are beneficiaries of, external aid at many levels, including foreign state subsidies, aid from external partners (international NGOs such as Search for Common Ground, La Benevolencija, or the Panos Institute). Some radio stations depend on funding from international religious networks as in the case of denominational radio stations. The independent weekly *Iwacu*, which remains today the only local independent media source after the radio stations were closed, was created in 2005 and has survived thanks to funds from the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Swiss foreign Aid DDC (Direction du Développement et de la Coopération / Direction of Development and Cooperation). Therefore, we can talk of an ‘externally dependent’ journalism economy in Burundi, as funding for practicing the job is mostly provided by foreign donors. In this case, ‘extroversion’ has a lot to do with the degree of independence from local authorities. Because the Burundian media is foreign funded, it criticizes the government far more than if it depended on the local economy. The same applies to Radio Okapi in the DRC, which is financed by the United Nations.

It is necessary to differentiate here between state and private media. State media in the three countries do not have survival problems, as they depend on public subsidies (and therefore practice a more ‘introverted’ form of journalism that focuses more on official information). Not only do they get huge sums of public money annually (which, in post-conflict countries, can also be explained by the fact that public media are a precious propaganda tool in times of political unrest), but they also get privileged access to advertisements. Numerous state-owned companies give precedence to the public media to publish their ads. In Burundi, the government’s daily, *Le Renouveau*, is never short of official ads and calls for bidders and tenders, which is not the case for the main private weekly *Iwacu*, according to its director, Antoine Kaburahe. And the lack of

advertisers has forced many private publications to close down since 2006.

In Rwanda, state-owned institutions usually grant the pro-governmental papers, *Imvaho Nshya* (a former public daily that was privatized in 2014) and *New Times*, the exclusive rights to their ads. When this led to strong criticism, the ruling authorities in Rwanda justified their choice by arguing that the said publications are regular dailies and have the largest circulation. The scarcity of advertising and the limits to newsstand pricing mean that numerous independent papers are actually selling at a loss.

When this local economic challenge is not compensated for by funding from external partners, it may lead to another form of externally dependent journalism: the practice of brown envelope journalism. Sponsorship can either be transparent, by clearly identified backers, or covert (as in the case of print publications suspected of being supported by key public figures or political parties). The practice of paying for positive coverage is not a peculiarity of post-conflict countries but is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, as demonstrated by Lodamo and Skjerdal (2009) in Ethiopia, Lilian Ndangam (2006) in Cameroun, or Adjovi (2003) in Benin (see Chaps. 1, 8, and 9 for a related discussion of brown envelope journalism). In this practice, a journalist agrees to be paid for an article by organizers of events, or for the broadcast of a program highlighting the concerns of the sponsor. According to Dieudonné Malekera, Secretary of Proxy Media Libre, this is the rule and not the exception in South Kivu: ‘One writes for whoever is going to pay.’ This must be distinguished from the current practice in Burundi, where institutions directly sponsor programs and articles on specific topics of concern (such as disarmament, reconciliation, health, or human rights), because in the former case, each journalist negotiates their own terms and gets individual compensation. This has a direct impact on content and the articles eventually become little more than promotion for the sponsor. This practice is called ‘coupage’ (‘cutting’) in the DRC (or ‘transport’ in reference to the transport allowance paid to the journalist) and ‘giti’ (‘tree’) in Rwanda. In Burundi, the expressions used are ‘per diem’ or ‘prise en charge totale [PET]’ (which, loosely translated, means ‘full coverage of expenses’). From the above, we can deduce that the ‘externally funded’ and ‘introverted’ journalism economies have a direct impact on the dynamics of press freedom in the Great Lakes region, as they strongly influence the topics covered and the way local and international stakeholders are presented.

*THE RELATIONAL/MANAGERIAL LEVEL: INFORMAL
RELATIONS LEADING TO SHAKY PROFESSIONAL VALUES*

In this post-conflict environment, the economy is not only slowly recovering, it also has a legacy of ‘informality,’ rooted in the stakeholders’ survival strategies. In the media sector of the three countries, generations of journalists have suffered from a lack of professional stability (no contract, no regular salary, minimal wages), leading to a high turnover at media outlets. Frequent breaches of media ethics are not only due to economic and political constraints but also because a journalist employed without any contract or without regular remuneration is not in the best position to stick to journalistic ethics.

Commenting on this scenario, the Deputy Representative of the Swiss Development Cooperation in Burundi’s capital, Bujumbura, explained: ‘Many journalists accept that they must work without any contract, without any form of social benefits and for a salary that is not sufficient for a decent living.’ She further observed:

Yet the Labor Code, even though it does not provide specifically for the protection of journalists, requires that contracts must be signed after six months of work in a company. Company managers often deliberately ignore this provision—and in the absence of collective labor agreements, journalists are not able to build up a career in commercial media, because they have no proven track-record in salary and rank. (Ndikumasabo 2014)

In the DRC’s South Kivu province, where labor conditions are most precarious, the majority of media outlets neither sign contracts nor pay salaries. For Janvier Museme, the provincial representative of the CSAC, this has major consequences for the relationship between the journalist and his/her sources:

It is the employer himself who induces the journalists to become corrupt and even to commit breaches as if they were part of the administration. How do you expect a journalist to cover an event when he is not actually coming to cover the event but rather to collect a tip? The first thing he does is to compile a list of the journalists in attendance to submit it to the organizer of the event. (Kilondo 2014)

In this case, the journalist might enjoy freedom at a political level (no repression) and at an economic level (working for a media outlet that has

a sufficient budget), but his/her own professional instability becomes an obstacle to practicing balanced and comprehensive reporting. In post-conflict countries, there are particular risks that media professionals will not take (such as going to unsecured zones), because the informality of the relation with the employer does not provide any security cover in the event that something happens to them while on duty.

In Rwanda, if salaries are paid, they tend to be very low, somewhere between US\$150 and US\$300 per month (Stapleton 2014). In many private media outlets, journalists are paid irregularly and 53% of the journalists work without contracts (MHC 2014). In Burundi, most private outlets consistently pay their staff, but the salaries are low: 46% of staff on the payroll receive between US\$65 and US\$150 a month (Nindorera et al. 2013). The situation with regard to contracts is rather blurred and, in most cases, there are many different categories of staff in one outlet. Some people have contracts and others do not or they may have to work within a certain bracket, for instance as a trainee or freelancer, for as long as the outlet sees fit. The consequences for media are easy to foresee and as Jolly Kamuntu, the Director of Radio Maendeleo, a community radio station established in Bukavu (DRC), puts it: ‘Certain journalists have no idea about ethics and professional conduct and when cash is paid, these are ignored. The sponsor dictates the information.’ Radio Maendeleo, created in 1993, has always tried to pay a regular salary to its staff (around US\$100 a month), but the reduction of foreign support threatens the station’s sustainability and, in January 2016, wages had not been paid for months.

This fundamental instability of journalists makes it difficult to engage collectively in professional organizations based on a shared identity and values. One notes, for example, that all three countries have a Code of Ethics, as well as a Media Council for self-regulation, but none of these councils operate properly, and none of them could tackle the poverty and informality in which journalists operate. The Rwanda Media Commission, the Observatory of the Burundian Press, and the Observatory of the Congolese Media did not succeed in stimulating a dialogue between the journalists and their employers regarding working conditions (and related ethical issues). Similarly, the main journalists’ unions: the Union of Burundian Journalists, the Rwandan Journalists Association, and the Union of the Congolese Press, have not managed to facilitate any meaningful dialogue, even though all of them tried to initiate a reflection on the necessity of adopting collective agreements that would clarify managerial duties and relationships with staff members (Frère et al. 2014).

*THE TECHNICAL LEVEL: THE MOBILE REVOLUTION
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF NEWS PRODUCERS/RECEIVERS*

Technological progress has deeply transformed the way journalists operate in the post-conflict African countries under study. In particular, the spread of mobile phones in a context where there are hardly any fixed lines has revolutionized practices in news organizations. According to the 2014 ITU data, Burundi had more than 3 million mobile phone subscribers (for 21,669 fixed lines), Rwanda almost 8 million (for 49,612 fixed lines), and the DRC 31 million (for 59,534 fixed lines). Therefore, 64% of Rwandans, 53% of Congolese, and 30% of Burundians have access to a cell phone.

Journalists use their mobile phones to reach sources, make appointments, collect information, contact their newsroom, take pictures, or even record interviews. As Ben Kabamba, from Radio Okapi, explains: ‘Each journalist does everything today. We have Chinese mobile phones (USD50), so it is affordable for many people. Journalists can take pictures directly, write something and send it quickly ... That’s the new immediacy of information.’

Mobile phones are especially important in an insecure context: Alexis Ndayiragije, from Bonesha FM in Bujumbura, explained how he remained connected while reporting in Cibitoke after a rebel attack in 2015:

Even before leaving my home, I had to call the colleagues and tell them: ‘I am going to the field ... It is dangerous. You have to call me. You have to follow me.’ And regularly I would receive calls from the colleagues in the newsroom, and my friends and family.

Reporting equipment is generally in short supply in newsrooms and journalists have to share, which inevitably causes delays in the production of reports. Such shortages are regular in Rwanda and directors admitted that their reporters sometimes use their own devices when they are on duty.

The Internet is also a useful tool to gain better access to information, but local audiences only have limited connectivity. Internet penetration remains low (6% in Burundi and in the DRC; 25% in Rwanda, where the government is implementing an ambitious plan to bring optic fiber transmission to even the most remote villages). The Internet has been employed occasionally to broadcast the content of programs that had been suspended

or prohibited on regular websites, on the airwaves, or in print. In June 2013, when the *Iwacu* website was suspended because of CNC sanctions, another site located outside the country immediately took up its news coverage. Currently, the Burundian journalists exiled in Kigali have launched two daily radio programs, 'Inzamba' and 'Humura Burundi,' disseminated through the Internet, especially via social networks such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook. In Bujumbura, an anonymous network of journalists called 'SOS Media Burundi,' established as soon as the independent media were closed, operates online, documenting the numerous violations of human rights (Frère 2016).

In the DRC in 2012, when the UN-sponsored Radio Okapi had to stop broadcasting because, apparently, the station had not submitted its list of specifications to the CSAC, many listeners could tune in via the website as an alternative to the radio broadcast.

Even though low-cost 3G devices are currently boosting Internet connectivity, power outages and the scarcity of required infrastructure are major obstacles to the expansion of technologies, and therefore to the daily work of journalists. According to the World Bank, only 6.5% of the people had access to electricity in Burundi in 2012, 16% in the DRC, and 18% in Rwanda. In other words, what is the use of numerous radio stations when there is no generator to ensure that the broadcast can go on in case of power cuts? As Pascal Murhabazi, Station Manager of Radio Tuungane in Minembwe (Eastern DRC) puts it: 'The major challenge for [us] in Minembwe is power ... There is not a single electricity supplier in Minembwe.' A survey of the outlets in the region reveals that generators are the major source of electricity and supply from the SNEL (the national electricity company in DRC) is only a stopgap. Highlighting the extent to which generators are used, Kifara Mutere, Director of the radio station Messenger du peuple in Uvira, complained, 'We have to replace our generator nearly every year because it is used so much [...] You can take a look in our storage room and see for yourself: So many old, broken down generators are piled up in the dark.' Emergency electrical load-shedding in Burundi causes numerous power cuts and forces radio stations to purchase backup generators that use a large amount of fuel and sometimes even cause damage to the technical equipment.

The quality of the broadcast itself is not always up to standard because of insufficient maintenance and the fact that equipment dates back to when these media were first set up. Private radio stations tend not to have

qualified technicians to maintain their transmitters and depend on external specialists, who are expensive and not always available at short notice.

Moreover, the technical dimension of press freedom is not only related to journalistic practices; it also encompasses the way that the audiences are able to receive the information that is disseminated. From the receiver's perspective, mobile phones have also changed the way that information can be accessed and consumed. Nevertheless, at this level, lack of equipment also impedes the reach of the media. In Burundi, before they were closed, none of the private radio stations had transmission that covered the entirety of the national territory. Radio Publique Africaine, Radio Isanganiro, and Radio Bonesha were among the private broadcasters with the most extensive coverage in the country. The directors of these three stations, who were interviewed in the course of this study, voiced complaints about the 'enormous fees' that they had to pay to the regulatory body ARCT (Agence de régulation et de contrôle des télécommunications) and to the public broadcaster RTNB (Radio Télévision nationale du Burundi) for the rental of antenna towers, in order to reach out beyond the capital city. This technical dependency on the equipment from the RTNB made it easy for the government to shut down all transmission out of Bujumbura, as soon as the first peaceful demonstrations started at the end of April 2015.

Technical issues (be they on the side of news producers or receivers) are thus often related to political and governance issues, reflecting the unwillingness of local authorities to provide any more than minimal infrastructure for minimal cost to the citizens.

*THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL: 'PEACE JOURNALISTS',
'WATCHDOGS', 'RESPONSIBLE GATEKEEPERS,' OR 'VOICE
OF THE VOICELESS'?*

Journalistic practices and the extent to which they can be qualified as more or less free are not only a consequence of the political, economic, or technical factors discussed in this chapter but also of the perception that African journalists have of themselves in the post-conflict environment. That perception impacts on the limits of what is viewed as acceptable or not regarding professional behavior, the actual construction of stories, and subjects that can be covered (what Ibelema et al. (2000) refer to as cultural, semantic and existentialist factors).

Central Africa provides examples of the best and worst in terms of journalism and its impact on society—from the contribution of the Rwandan RTLM (Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines) to the genocide of the Tutsi people in 1994 (Thompson 2007; Chrétien 1995) to the commitment of Burundian radio stations to reconciliation and peace-building, or the part played by a station like Radio Maendeleo to give a voice to ordinary citizens undergoing continual violence and insecurity in South Kivu. Four models are referred to by the interviewees: the ‘peace journalist’ (whose role is to contribute to finding solutions and reconciliation in warring communities), the ‘watchdog’ (willing to denounce any form of public mismanagement), the ‘responsible gatekeeper’ (who will make sure that information disseminated is not threatening a fragile peace), and the ‘voice of the voiceless’ (who aims at giving a voice to the unheard majority). These different models are all equally important in post-conflict societies and none of them can be considered as symbolizing more freedom than the other.

On the side of the so-called ‘public service’ media, ‘responsibility’ is the major impetus. The staff working for the public media are mostly perceived as having a responsibility to project a positive image externally. This may mean hiding contentious issues, rather than holding public institutions accountable for activities undertaken with public money. Even though they are supposed to address the information needs of the general public, journalists are mere mouthpieces of local authorities.

As for the private media, they often label themselves ‘independent watchdogs’, even though they have (hidden) connections to political and business interests. Claiming to be ‘counter-power’, they are generally of ‘poorer quality and strength than the more established public media, which maintain significant advantages in terms of access to state financing, advertising dollars, information, professionally trained staff, infrastructure, and materials’ (Moehler and Singh 2011, 278). Some of them publish sensationalist and unverified material, sometimes regardless of respect for privacy and citizens’ rights. In Rwanda, attempts to investigate and denounce, with a lack of professionalism, have got some of the private media into regular trouble. As the executive secretary of the Media High Council noted:

There are always isolated cases of abuses of press freedom by individuals, either through ignorance or mistrust ... There was a wave of adventurers entering the journalistic profession in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide,

people who had no clue about the job. But later a lot of efforts have been made to improve the level of professionalism. (Mbungiramihigo 2014)

The Rwanda Media Commission has had to rule more than 120 cases since it was established in 2014. Quite often, the complaints made have resulted in a journalist being unable to provide any solid information in their defence after being summoned to appear before this self-regulatory body. We analyzed twenty-six of these cases (the ones documented in English): thirteen were cases of libel, four dealt with the publication of false news, six with refusal to publish a right of reply, one case of plagiarism, and one case of injury. In the seventeen cases from the first two categories, the journalists could not provide evidence of the information published.

The keyword here is responsibility, which is understandable in a context where some journalists have contributed to facilitating a genocide. But the Rwandan government has a very definite understanding of what it means to be a ‘responsible’ journalist. As President Kagame himself declared in 2012:

The media will be an invaluable partner in communicating our agenda, advancing our interests and being among the key narrators of our story. In addition, by holding both our governments and citizens to account, a responsible media will promote our core values, good governance and democracy.

Such an understanding of the journalist’s role, and subsequent threats, harassment, and detentions, push journalists into self-censorship: They hold back information and criticism of authorities in order to avoid trouble.

In Burundi, where the ‘peace journalist’ and ‘watchdog’ models have been promoted by foreign donors and NGOs, the urge to position oneself better in the media market has, at times, driven journalists to publish unverified information or to break news or scoops based only on rumors. In April 2014, Radio Publique Africaine announced that the Banque de la République du Burundi (National Bank of Burundi) was on fire. Hundreds of residents of Bujumbura rushed to the location and found no sign of flames or smoke. The news was eventually retracted. Acting too quickly in treating information has become a ‘professional pathology,’ according to Thaddée Siryuyumusi (former General Director of the RNTB) and Pierre

Bambasi (former President of the CNC). In Bukavu and in Goma in January 2014, certain media outlets republished a rumor announcing that Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, had passed away. This immediately brought people out on the streets to celebrate—until the Rwandan media refuted the story.

Yet, the propensity to circulate rumors is not only rooted in sensationalism (and the wish to sell) but also in the constraints that hinder access to public information in post-conflict countries, where it is hard to establish a practice of transparency and disconnect public communication from propaganda. Although willing to provide the audience with critical information, denouncing mismanagement of public funds or abuses of power, journalists do not always have the capacity to get access to the requisite data or to cross-check. Therefore, it is sometimes their faith in the importance of their role as defenders of citizens' rights to information that leads them to spread unverified stories.

Tshivis Tshivuadi (2015), General Secretary of the press freedom organization, *Journaliste en Danger* (JED) in the DRC, has fought to bring to parliament a law on access to information: 'It is an important law for journalists because, here, information sources are not accessible. We can talk of the laziness of journalists or their lack of professionalism, but there is also a problem of access to information.' The interviews made it clear that most journalists are convinced that 'good' journalism is important in a post-conflict society, but, while they show different understandings of what 'good' journalism is in such a context, they also emphasize the constraints preventing them from reaching that goal.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed the factors that influence the freedom of the press in three post-conflict states: Burundi, Rwanda, and the DRC. At five levels, we observed restrictive measures and actions impeding the work of media professionals. The constraints include political interference, financial bottlenecks, precarious working conditions, technical challenges for both the producers and consumers of news, as well as journalists' self-perception.

Ibelema et al. (2000) have highlighted in their study that the forces striving for media freedom and the forces that want to suppress it are in a continuous struggle. We argue that, within each of these five factors, divergent and convergent forces are permanently at work. This explains why (and more precisely how), in all three countries, there are times when

journalists enjoy more freedom and periods in which they are particularly constrained. In times of conflict, opponents to press freedom are found mainly at a political level, but in post-conflict countries, they can also be identified within media owners, advertisers, sources of information, and among the journalists themselves. Economic constraints, for instance, may have an impact on independent reporting. Journalists are caught in a dilemma: Even if they fight for media freedom on the one hand, they often have to engage in unfair practices on the other, for the simple reason of daily survival.

The present study has also highlighted the fact that it is important, in countries such as Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, to take into account specific sub-factors that are not included in the analysis of media structures in the Western world. These include, on the political level, self-censorship and the lack of confidence in the way the law is applied by the judiciary; on the economic level, the degree of 'external dependency' or 'introversion' of the journalism economy; on the managerial level, the informality and insecurity of the media professionals; and, on the technical level, the supply of electricity to media outlets and the lack of basic infrastructure. The population's access to the media in post-conflict societies is one component of press freedom that must not be neglected. Press freedom is an asset that can only be met with acceptance when people actually 'have a choice' and can make informed decisions when selecting amongst a variety of media offers in accordance to their own education and political awareness. Ultimately, attention needs to be paid to the different models to which African journalists turn in their professional practices, which are deeply rooted in the experience of war, dictatorship, and the abuses of a state that is violent against the citizens it is supposed to protect.

Using these factors and sub-factors, one can understand why the issue of press freedom in the three countries in fact shows similarities but also major differences, even though the three countries are close to each other in the rankings of press freedom organizations. These variables reveal how the dynamics between freedom and control are constantly evolving in these post-conflict environments.

NOTES

1. In May 2015, a political crisis emerged in Burundi, leading to the violent closure of the main independent media and more than 100 journalists fleeing the country.

2. Founded in May 1997, with the support of UNESCO, Maison de la presse's mission is to strengthen the capacity of the Burundian media to host professional media organizations and to meet the training and documentation needs of media professionals.

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