POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN WARTIME LIBERIA: THEMES AND CONCEPTS

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Les notes de recherches du CÉPÉS permettent aux chercheurs qui lui sont affiliés d'exposer les résultats des travaux en cours. Les opinions exprimées par les auteurs n'engagent qu'eux.

Contents

Introduction[1]

This paper deals with the historiographical and conceptual foundations of research into Liberian wartime political communication. It has evolved out of an historical study of radio broadcasting and ethnic warfare during a seventeen-year period spanning the regime of Samuel Doe (1980-1990) and the ascension of Charles Taylor (1990-1997). In its initial form, the project detailed the patterns of broadcast resource acquisition and propaganda that reflected and contributed to the dissolution of the Liberian state and to the militarization of its numerous ethnic configurations. Priority was given to explaining the long-term development of public communications and radio broadcasting, the construction of state-wide networks of radio transmitters, uncovering and documenting hate propaganda, and to assessing the extent to which Doe and Taylor deliberately employed such messages. The primary sources used for the study were exclusively printed historical documents, including: survivor memoirs; news coverage in *Africa Confidential* and *West Africa*; human rights reports from the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the U.S. State Department, and Africa Watch/Human Rights Watch; official documents of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and field reports from numerous NGO and IGO sources. Archived transcripts of radio and television broadcasts and public addresses, available through BBC Worldwide Monitoring and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) of the U.S. based National Technical Information Service, provided the bulk of the raw data.

Further study of political communication in Liberia requires greater elaboration of the subject's intellectual roots and theoretical potential. With the need for such a framework in mind, I address the relevant secondary literature and suggest some possible

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approaches to rethinking the causes, conduct, and consequences of the war. Political communication, it should be noted, is treated in minimalist terms: I restrict myself to the spoken word, its broadcast form, and the physical world as it relates to both. This is a deliberate choice on my part. Historian Stephen Ellis has done a masterful job of exploring the religious and spiritual dimensions of the war, in which tribal props and theatrical displays of atrocity carried considerable propaganda content.[2] My concern is less with a rhetoric of acts than with assessing the ether-bound messages that fuelled, defined, and perpetuated the conflict. The reasons for this methodological tilt will become clear as I argue for the use of radio transcripts as legal evidence in current and future war crimes cases. Writing histories of contemporary Africa, as Ellis argues, sometimes requires creative use and interpretation of historical evidence.[3] "The most obvious problem for anyone seeking to use radio as a historical source," he notes, "is the transience of the broadcast word".[4] Since World War II, however, British and U.S. intelligence services and their affiliated communications agencies have monitored and transcribed foreign broadcasts and publications, all of which have been archived. Relatively little of this invaluable pool of evidence has been organized or catalogued, but it is publicly available and ripe for excavation—most certainly to the chagrin of leaders like Charles Taylor who may find themselves *en cavale*, avoiding prosecution before international courts, and hoisted with their own petards.

The first part of the paper, "Unpacking the Literature", is an historiographical survey that identifies gaps in factual information, suggests possible problems of interpretation, and establishes firm justification for further study. It examines only secondary scholarly sources that address, to a greater or lesser extent, five main themes on wartime radio communications and broadcasting. In the second part of the paper, "Expanding the Debate", I contemplate eight interrelated and overlapping ways to interpret practices and trends in wartime political communication. Some draw on peripheral historiographical debates on the conflict in Liberia or extrapolate

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2. Stephen Ellis, "Liberia, 1989-1994: A Study of Ethnic and Spiritual Violence," *African Affairs* Vol. 94, No. 375 (1995): 165-197; and *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimensions of an African Civil War* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999).
3. Stephen Ellis, "Writing Histories of Contemporary Africa," *Journal of African History* Vol. 43 (2002): 1-26.
4. Ibid., 15.

from various readings of political violence, information culture, and the state. All benefit from a multi-disciplinary consideration of this author's survey of the primary evidence. The underlying intent here is to demonstrate the logical momentum behind the words and deeds of Liberia's warring factions and their leaders. More precisely, this paper offers ways of articulating human deliberation and agency in a period of extreme chaos and civilian bloodshed. It establishes a context in which criminal intent can be more readily distinguished from the fortunes of war. And it places a burden or responsibility on Charles Taylor, *primus inter pares* in a rogue's gallery of individuals who found in war and atrocity the path to personal enrichment and public enlightenment. This latter assertion is not as contentious as one might think: Taylor's criminal culpability for countless human rights abuses notwithstanding, he and his forces sustained the idea of Liberia at the same time they dismantled, diverted, and destroyed the physical realities of the state.

1. Unpacking the Literature

Few writers have considered with any degree of rigour Liberian wartime radio communications and broadcasting, neglecting such issues as the possession of broadcast facilities by warring factions, the deployment of radio propaganda, or the impact of either on combatants and civilians. Survivors and observers have made numerous fleeting and anecdotal references. Academics, generally concerned with other aspects of the conflict, have considered specific phenomena. Such partial treatments of the subject suggest useful directions for future research, but they must be disaggregated from the larger discussions in which they are embedded. In the following section, I will survey three such sets of arguments that deal explicitly with radio, and two that do not. In the first case, I discuss the interplay between mass media and the state in the pre-civil war era. A second theme, the cooption of the wartime free press, looks to the electrified nature of wartime discourse, and to the realignment of loyalty, agency, and perception under conditions of conflict. The three themes that follow—Charles Taylor's cultivation of personal power, the relevance of broadcasting for rebel command and control capabilities, and Taylor's media dominance during the 1997 Presidential campaign—demonstrate the strategic and public wartime roles of radio communications and broadcasting. The first two sets of issues deal less directly and specifically with radio com-

munications and broadcasting. Rather, they provide significant insights into government, media, and non-combatant attitudes regarding public information, and provide essential background on the media and the state, the state of the media, and wartime political communication in Liberia.

Mass Media and the State

Little has been written on the mass media in Liberia or its interaction with the state. For the most part, such studies that do exist are journal articles and graduate dissertations of varying empirical value, written by Liberian journalists and scholars, that focus on long-term histories of the printed press pre-dating the 1990-1997 civil war.[5] In general they ignore the role of broadcasting.[6] This is likely due in no small part to the fact that radio is a relatively new technology compared to print journalism, and the preponderance of literacy and higher education among Liberians has generally been limited to a select coastal elite for whom the written word was a much more salient type of political communication. Debates among these scholars have turned on the independence of the media from government meddling and intimidation. "While past publishers/

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5. The most prolific of these is journalism scholar Momo K. Rogers, See Rogers, "The Press in Liberia, 1826-1996: A Select Chronology," *Liberian Studies Journal* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1997): 95-120; "The Liberian Press Under Military Rule," *Liberian Studies Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1996): 7-32; "The Liberian Press: An Analysis," *Journalism Quarterly* Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer 1986): 275-281. Rogers' dissertation is a rich, if somewhat mechanical, historical overview of print newspapers and pamphlets. See Momo K. Rogers, "Liberian Journalism, 1820-1980: A Descriptive History" Ph.D. Diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1988. For a more theoretically informed study of press freedom and long-term government-press relations, see Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Modernization and the Decline of Press Freedom: Liberia, 1847 to 1970* Journalism and Mass Communications Monographs No. 160. (Columbia, SC: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 1996), as well as his more comprehensive dissertation, "Press Freedom in Liberia, 1830-1970: The Impact of Modernity, Ethnicity, and Power Imbalances on Government-Press Relations," Ph.D. Diss., Temple University, 1994. For some of the earliest articles on the subject, see Henry B. Cole, "The Press in Liberia," *Liberian Studies Journal* Vol. 4 (1971-1972): 146-?; and Esuakema Udo Oton, "The Press of Liberia: A Case Study," *Journalism Quarterly* Vol. 338 (Winter 1961): 208-212.

6. Two exceptions are by Jerome Zack Boikai, "National Development in Liberia and the Role of the Broadcast Media, 1950-1980: A Descriptive Study." Ph.D. Diss., Wayne State University, 1983; and Ronald Joseph Shope, "The Patron's Press: An Examination of Broadcast Press Freedom's in the Republic of Liberia Between 1976 and 1986." Ph.D. Diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1995.

editors were either pro or anti government, depending on who was in power," writes journalism scholar Momo K. Rogers, "there was no systematic attempt by any administration to suppress unfriendly papers." Things changed under the leadership of William S. Tubman (1944-1971), when "government not only infiltrated papers with henchmen but where such a tactic failed, used every means possible to crush them."[7] For communications scholar Carl Patrick Burrowes, the 1960s was a period of great change in government-press relations, when "the executive branch would resort increasingly to quasi-legal measures to punish detractors" and "journalists… would shift away from constitutional arguments for the preservation of free expression to greater reliance on personal appeals to the goodwill of the president." After the change, Burrowes notes, "free expression devolved from a right to a privilege, rooted in patronage and watered down with sycophancy."[8]

Following the seizure of power in 1980 by Samuel K. Doe and the People's Revolutionary Council (PRC), the government tendency to treat mass media as an elite prerogative only worsened. Repressive measures included "the closure of newspapers, summary imprisonment of journalists, harassment of journalists, regulatory edicts, judicial actions, and an actual and unprecedented presidential sanctioning of the murder of a journalist."[9] By the end of the Doe decade, the government was paying lip service to notions of freedom of the press, all the while advocating developmentally-oriented "responsible journalism" in which the mass media was to be held legally responsible for censoring itself. After years of ethnic repression and nepotism, Doe had shown himself to be brutal, insecure, isolated, and quixotic, was increasingly perceived to be connected to indigenous secret societies and witchcraft. According to media scholar and consultant Louise M. Bourgault, a crosshatch of beliefs rooted in traditional secret societies, settler cults, Christianity, and Islam was "fused into a generalized Liberian culture, one which was sustained in the popular press."[10] This cultural syncretism flavoured press content inordinately preoccupied with accounts of paranormal phenomena. Bourgault notes the cooperative interplay between Doe's interest in controlling public discourse, audience predilec-

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7. Rogers, "The Liberian Press: An Analysis," 281.
8. Burrowes, *Press Freedom in Liberia: 1830-1970*, 592.
9. Rogers, "The Liberian Press Under Military Rule," 10.
10. Louise M. Bourgault, "Occult Discourses in the Liberian Press Under Sam Doe: 1988-1989," *Alter*nation Vol. 4, No. 2 (1997), 191.

tions for such content, and journalistic will to produce it, facilitated by the fact that they "shared a common epistemology and a common symbol system."[11]

Scholarly inquiry into Liberian radio and broadcasting has also focused heavily on the pre-civil war era. Doe and the PRC proved intolerant of media criticism or of political advocacy that diverged from official policies. In this respect, according to the late J. Gus Liebenow, they were no different from Tubman or Tolbert, "who not only made life difficult for editors and journalists of independent newspapers but would have preferred to have government monopolize communications."[12] Doe's predecessors relied on a number of loyal print outlets to propagate their vision of news. Meanwhile, "[r]adio broadcasts, other than from the Protestant Christian station, ELWA, and from a Roman Catholic-owned radio, were the monopoly of the government station, ELBC."[13] Liebenow notes the homogenizing potential of broadcast communication for revolutionary identity formation. "In state speeches, in homely skits acted out on radio station ELBC, and in other arenas," he writes, "Liberians were being admonished to refrain from inquiring into the ethnic identity of a countryman."[14]

Efforts at reconstructing national identity, Liebenow notes, also had to contend with "the language of national politics, commerce, education, and cultural development." Government efforts to deflate ethnic particularism in favour of a more homogenous Liberian world view were paralleled, paradoxically, by popular demand "to expand the number of hours station ELBC broadcasted in tribal languages."[15] The only scholarly work that dealt directly with radio in the 1980s, also by Bourgault, describes an extensive development project, initiated under William R. Tolbert (1971-1980) and perpetuated under Doe, in which a network of radio transmitters would be installed throughout the Liberian interior.[16] The idea behind the Liberia Rural Communications Network (LRCN), informed by economic development theory, was to foster a more inclusive national polity by linking Liberia's dispersed ethnic hinterland populations with the coastal citizenry. A central broadcasting site on the coast and numerous satellite transmitters spread throughout the

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11. Bourgault, "Occult Discourses in the Liberian Press Under Sam Doe," 206.
12. J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 255.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 238.

hinterland would provide the system with its technological capability. LRCN programming was to include multi-lingual, culturally relevant, educational, health and agricultural content. International development funds and expertise were made available, despite long-term evidence that national development in Liberia, Africa's oldest democracy, was taking on the attributes of totalitarian rule to be found in numerous other Third World states. The broadcast sites were built and some local staff were trained before the project's international overseers handed over responsibility to the Liberian government. The project atrophied thereafter, a passive victim of the regime's inept and corrupt management.

Co-opting the Wartime Free Press

Long-term trends in government-press relations and the severity of repression during the Doe years inspired a distinct survival-mindedness among some Liberian media. Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) entered Liberia from neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire in late December 1989, ostensibly to oust the much-reviled Doe. Doe was dead by September 1990, and the invasion degenerated into a seven-year campaign to seize control of the state. Liberia devolved into an amalgam of warring fiefdoms: official Liberia was boxed into the capital Monrovia, while Taylor and his forces generally controlled the rest from the north-eastern town of Gbarnga, along with a few other factions that were able to carve out their own portions of Liberia. "Every section of society suffered its share of the devastation," writes Liberian journalist Suah S. Deddeh, "and the press was no exception. Indeed, journalists were prime targets for those who viewed the media as an enemy simply because journalists exposed and uncovered their shadowy deeds."[17] Journalists were faced with stark choices between life and death, and their media output was usually defined by which side of ever-shifting front lines they found themselves on. Deddeh writes: "To stay alive, some journalists reluctantly joined the propaganda machineries of the warring factions. Others remained in [Monrovia]. Journalists somehow found themselves unwittingly promoting the

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15. Ibid., 239.
16. Louise M. Bourgault, "The Liberian Rural Communications Network: A Study of in the Contradictions of Development Communication," *Journal of Development Communication* Vol. 5, No. 2 (June 1994): 57-71.
17. Suah S. Deddeh, "Pushing For Press Freedom in Liberia," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2000), 161.

war songs of the belligerent forces. As a result, the divided into two groups, the 'Monrovia Press' and the 'Gbarnga Press'."[18] The conscientious journalists of the Press Union of Liberia could not prevent the split between a centrally controlled press based in the capital and a hinterland media headquartered in NPFL territory. "As the competing parties traded insults," Deddeh notes, "journalists became the conduits through which their verbal attacks were publicized and amplified. It is no wonder that some people held the press responsible for helping to fan the flames of war during that period."[19]

Stephen Ellis is more critical of journalists' ability to make choices, looking instead to a lack of professional media training and to the cultural context in which local journalists operated. Ellis argues that although Liberian newspapers at the best of times might be deeply problematic as sources of hard, verifiable facts, they are still quite valuable as historical documents.[20] Radio broadcasting, a relatively new technology that never truly enjoyed the autonomy of some of its print rivals, was innately political because it represented and spoke for authority. This was not due to a lack of industry standards, nor was it always out of choice. According to communications scholar and Christian missionary Ronald Joseph Shope, even ostensibly independent radio broadcasters such as ELWA eventually succumbed to government pressure to toe the government line.[21] In wartime, as during the Doe years, radio was politicized partly as a result of contending factions' desire to possess transmission sites and equipment. Patricia Holmes, for example, documents how the U.S. Voice of America (VOA) relay station, strategically located in Liberia, was overrun by rebels and stripped bare in September 1990.[22] For Holmes, however, the unfolding of events was less relevant to Liberian political communication per se than it was to the cooperative partnership between the U.S. and Liberia and to VOA's continued participation in Liberian affairs.[23]

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18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 161-162.
20. Ibid., 12-24; See also Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, 321-322.
21. Ronald Joseph Shope, "The Patron's Press: An Examination of Broadcast Press Freedoms in the Republic of Liberia Between 1976 and 1986." Ph.D. Diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1995.
22. Patricia A. Holmes, "The Voice of America in Liberia: The End of the Road," *Liberian Studies Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (1992): 79-93.
23. Ibid., 80-81.

Charles Taylor's Authority

Two of the most insightful analysts of the Liberian conflict, William Reno and Stephen Ellis, have considered specific examples of wartime communications and broadcasting and their relation to Charles Taylor's military, political, and financial success. In an edited volume on African guerrilla movements, Ellis, a senior research scholar at Leiden University's African Studies Centre and Africa Program Director with the International Crisis Group, acknowledges the rebel leader's early access to the BBC to craft a public image for himself that would play a key role in his claim to NPFL leadership. "Revealing a fine talent for public relations," Ellis writes, "Taylor used the media to build a national and international profile which gave him a vital advantage over other leaders of the NPFL in the early months of the war."[24] Reno, a political scientist at Northwestern University, has thought more than any other scholar about the nature of Taylor's personal and political authority and the political economy of the NPFL "shadow state". He writes: "At its zenith Taylor's territory boasted its own currency and banking system, television and radio network, international airfield and deepwater port."[25] Rudimentary public institutions contributed to the coherence of the parallel Liberian state, but it was the non-institutional fabric of Taylor's authority, rooted in his control of lucrative natural resources and unofficial communications with outside commercial interests, that held it together. Indeed, "the force of Taylor's political authority [lay] in his ability to manipulate foreign firms to secure foreign exchange, weapons, and political support to gain personal advantage." For Taylor, "personal obedience and the use of force" were necessary "to create, protect and discipline his political network which include [d] foreign firms." He relied on backchannel diplomatic ties, professional public relations, and the unorthodox application of conventional marketing techniques to promote and maintain his personal and political power.[26] He was able to do all of this, despite the dearth of formal state institutions, by staying connected to "publicists, overseas associates and representatives

24. Stephen Ellis, "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency," in *African Guerrillas*, Christopher Clapham, ed. (Oxford: James Currey; Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 159.
25. William Reno, "Foreign Firms and the Financing of Charles Taylor's NPFL," *Liberian Studies Journal* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1993), 178.
26. Ibid., 179.

through a facsimile and satellite telephone hook-ups."[27] The combination of radio capabilities and personal communications technology, in short, helped Taylor to circumvent or overcome limited infrastructure and resources. For Reno, the emphasis on charismatic personal power is central to understanding the success of the rebel leader, who "did not promulgate a political ideology as much as a political theology, an all encompassing commitment to a political authority across a wide range of realms."[28]

Rebel Command and Control

Quentin Outram, a management scholar at Leeds University, considers in much more general terms the command and control capabilities of Liberian rebel leaders. He notes that "[h]eads of warring factions have had few resources with which to exert authority, instil discipline and motivate their troops."[29] Outram suggests that the autonomous operational structure of guerrilla bands in the civil war implied a need for greater logistic and communications capabilities in order for rebel leaders to effectively exert their authority over them. All of the rebel factions, he argues, suffered from a lack of such resources. Looters naturally looked to United Nations and NGO stocks to obtain or replenish their own equipment. He makes a key observation here, concluding that "any commander seeking to maintain control over his troops by strategies based on close control and supervision would encounter substantial difficulties."[30] This point is in stark contrast to anecdotal and incidental references suggesting that quite the opposite might be true. Former UN human rights officer Kenneth Cain, for example, cites evidence that Taylor used radio broadcasts to threaten and terrorize local nationals of ECOMOG-contributor states: "In 1990, when ECOMOG first intervened in the war in order to prevent the NPFL from occupying its final unrealized objective, Monrovia, Taylor announced on NPFL radio that the NPFL would kill one ECOMOG national in response

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27. William Reno, "Reinvention of an African Patrimonial State: Charles Taylor's Liberia," *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 1 (1995), 113-114.
28. William Reno, "The Organization of Warlord Politics in Liberia," chapter in *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 93.
29. Outram, "'It's Terminal Either Way': An Analysis of Armed Conflict in Liberia, 1989-1996." *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 24, No. 73 (September 1997), 366.
30. Ibid.

to every Liberian killed by ECOMOG."[31] Cain also notes an early incident in which ECOMOG forces intercepted a transmission of "an order from the NPFL leadership to commence a 'reign of terror,' targeting civilian populations—soon to be followed by a series of civilian massacres."[32] Neither position should be overstated; suffice it that radio communications and broadcasting were much relied on in a complex set of political, military, and environmental circumstances that was not conducive to conventional concepts of command responsibility.

Electoral Media Dominance

In 1997, Taylor won an internationally supervised Presidential election in a landslide victory. Monitors deemed the campaign a success, a relatively clear example of free and fair proceedings that effectively sealed a previously elusive peace. Critics have sought to explain how Taylor, who presided over the dismantling of the country and whose forces looted, raped, and killed as a matter of course, could legitimately win a democratic election. All look to Taylor's electoral media dominance as a contributing factor, although not all attribute to it the same level of importance. Victor Tanner, a former aid worker in Liberia, writes, "[i]n a country where there is little access to print media and no television, Taylor controlled Liberia's only nationwide short-wave station, Radio Liberia International." Counter-measures were inadequate: "[a] western-funded independent station, Star Radio, that would cover the whole country only managed to get on the air a few days before the ballot."[33] Tanner also looks to the implications of Taylor's control of large tracts of Liberia for extended periods. "In some places,» he writes, echoing Reno, the NPFL "provided embryonic services to the population. As a result, Taylor was the only candidate with national standing."[34] Terrence Lyons, a conflict management specialist at George Mason University, similarly suggests that Taylor's superior media resources helped win him the presidency. "Taylor controlled the formerly state-owned short-wave radio station," he notes, "and thereby dominated the airwaves through which most Liberians outside

31. Kenneth L. Cain, "The Rape of Dinah: Human Rights, Civil War in Liberia, and Evil Triumphant," *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 21, No.2 (1999), 274.
32. Ibid., 288.
33. Victor Tanner, "Liberia: Railroading Peace," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 25, No. 75 (March 1998), 137-138.
34. Ibid.

Monrovia received their news."[35] David Harris, a Resource and Information Officer at London's Africa Centre, puts a finer point on Lyons' argument. "Taylor's Kiss-FM radio station was singled out as a major advantage," he notes. "Kiss-FM and its sister station, Radio Liberia International, were the only Liberian short-wave stations, until a few days before the election, to reach far beyond Monrovia or to play throughout the night."[36] Harris, however, downplays the significance of mass media resources and propaganda wielded by Taylor and the National Patriotic Party (the NPFL's political incarnation). "Despite the fact that NPP resources could take their message much further afield, with greater inducements and a certain amount of intimidation," he argues, "this cannot indubitably be presented as a decisive factor" in explaining Taylor's election victory. Harris claims that similar imbalances have been overcome in other African elections. He also suggests that such an argument would necessitate a rather condescending view of Liberians' ability to critically respond to radio propaganda.[37]

2. Expanding the Debate

Each of the five themes discussed in the previous section provide important insights into specific aspects of the war and mass communications, but their limited foci suggest the need for broader conceptual frameworks within which to situate scholarly study of conflict-based communications, broadcasting and propaganda. A number of authors have each already broached the issue, with great success. Radio, however, is a peculiar and eccentric medium and form of political communication in Africa, and requires special handling as a subject of inquiry. Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss, editors of a path breaking volume of radio in transitional states, suggest that because radio is so widely accepted as a fact of daily life in Africa and generally taken for granted as a source of information, it has escaped scholarly inquiry. "Perhaps there is something too pervasive, transient, and self-evident about the way that

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35. Terrence Lyons, "Liberia's Path From Anarchy to Elections," *Current History* (May 1998), 231-232; see also Lyons, *Voting For Peace: Post-Conflict Elections in Liberia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 58.
36. David Harris, "From 'Warlord' to 'Democratic' President: How Charles Taylor Won the 1997 Liberian Elections," *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 37, No. 3 (1999), 438.
37. Ibid., 440-441.

broadcast cultures pervade the African ether," they write. "Until something striking occurs, the buzz of the radio is simply there."[38] Fardon and Furniss also suggest that the putative researcher faces significant obstacles: "[b]ecause radio is so pervasive, it is virtually impossible to study it per se in all its ramifications. Perhaps it deserves to remain the prerogative of diverse interests, relying upon occasions of dialogue to make the connections between these interests."[39] Nowhere in the literature on the Liberian Civil War has there been a thorough exploration and assessment of wartime radio and its impact. The stakes of this continued elision are Liberia's post-war, post-Taylor reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. In the following section, I suggest possible approaches to rethinking the evidence. More precisely, I discuss eight related problems of interpretation. They are meant to be preliminary forays into avenues of future research, not comprehensive surveys of theoretical fields. They are not hermetic categories, but are meant instead to be mutually reinforcing conceptual pillars that incorporate and expand existing themes of charismatic power, command and control, resource dominance, statehood and the free flow of public information.

Historicity And Causation

Existing assessments of Liberian wartime communications and propaganda are complicated by the fact that they examine specific types of evidence and isolated incidents of media manipulation, rather than longer term patterns of behaviour, thus limiting the potential for broader historical understanding and useful generalization. Reno looks to Taylor's use of personal communications technology to manage foreign commercial ties and his reliance on a cult of personality as a control mechanism, but does not discuss the role of radio broadcasting per se in promoting his message to a wider audience. Ellis notes a singular phenomenon, the competitive advantage Taylor gained by early self-promotion through foreign media. Outram argues that the rebels had insufficient communications resources to exert effective control over dispersed forces, without considering how broadcasting might be relevant to the matrix of command and control capabilities. Tanner and Lyons suggests

38. Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss, "African Broadcast Cultures," chapter in *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition*, Fardon and Furniss, eds. (Oxford, UK: James Currey; Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 8.
39. Ibid.

that Taylor's media dominance contributed to his successful 1997 political campaign, while Harris argues that this could not have been a critical variable in the overall formula of Taylor's electoral success. Both Lyons and Harris take Taylor's possession of such capabilities for granted, without exploring the specific historical circumstances that led to his dominance of campaign resources.

The observations of these scholars are critical in that they point to a range of activities occurring at different stages of the Civil War. Some of them draw long-term generalizations from singular events, or fail to explain the development of conditions that led their understanding of particular criteria. Two factors in particular offer distinct analytical challenges: the historical proximity of the war and its relative obscurity. Many analysts produced premature assessments that pre-date the ultimate conclusion of hostilities—not surprising in light of the countless peace talks that were convened and then disrupted between 1990 and the election of 1997. Among post-Cold War conflicts the Liberian case was neither the media darling nor the foreign policy focus of comparable episodes of violence in Bosnia and Rwanda, the failed interventions in Somalia, or war in the Gulf. Prospective researchers are thus faced with broad gaps in relevant scholarly analysis and substantial difficulties in locating appropriate primary materials. Taken together, previous analyses do not establish a detailed or comprehensive portfolio of specific military actions and propaganda practices, oriented around radio communication and broadcast resources, anchored in place and time. Thus the need to establish who possessed the necessary resources to transmit or relay proprietary content, when they were in possession of them, when such facilities were in operation and when they were not, and where they were located. Only then can Liberian wartime political communications be explored and discussed with any degree of accuracy.

Hardware and Software

The complexity of the debate is due in part to its conflation of hardware and software issues, and the context of endemic violence and resource extraction within which they became the concerns of rebel leaders and pro-government forces. Taylor's early access to the BBC, for example, had symbolic meaning for listeners, depending on who they were. The rebel leader had aligned himself with a coterie of regional and international interests in preparation for his bid to

take on the ruling order. For Doe and his henchmen, Taylor's ability to communicate with international media was a particularly subversive example of foreign intrusion in Liberian politics, and represented a direct challenge to the regime's long-standing efforts to control public information. The BBC's reputation for objectivity and reliability made it the preferred source of news among most Liberians, allowing Taylor to circumvent resource limitations and rival the statewide networks of radio transmitters that ultimately served Doe. Taylor's running dialogue with the BBC countered official news of the war, enhanced perceptions of rebel success, and identified Taylor as Doe's chief competitor. Access to foreign media thus provided an alternate path to legitimacy for Taylor in the first eight months of the war.

Access, however, is a poor substitute for ownership, making it difficult in this case to discern hardware from software in terms of real-world effects. For command and control, the issues are more easily and clearly distinguishable: possession of broadcast resources imparted symbolic messages of power and legitimacy, while broadcast content provided an important informational link between commanders and their troops in the field. Likewise with broadcasting during the 1997 electoral campaign, and the many other applications of radio broadcasting between 1990 and 1997. Communications scholar William Hachten notes, "[a] mass media system is… a kind of mirror image of a nation's political and economic structure. Each is sensitive to the other. Newspapers, radio, television, and other media do not operate in a vacuum; their content, their reach, their freedom, and their audiences are determined by the context of the nation in which they operate."[40] Former OSCE media advisor Mark Thompson similarly writes, "[n]ews is a composite product, the result of an industrial process" made up of "human producers", technology, the target audience, and content "that cannot be isolated from ulterior meanings which reflect the wide social and communicative matrix."[41]

Making distinctions between broadcast capabilities and broadcast content is thus critical to better understanding the breadth and depth of Liberian wartime discourse. Equally important: dis-

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40. William A. Hachten, *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971), xv.
41. Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina.* Rev. Ed. (Bedfordshire, UK: Article XIX/University of Luton Press, 1999), 355.

tinctions between types of broadcasting (radio, television, video, internet, verbal transmission), types of broadcast content (news, disinformation, hate propaganda, public relations, eyewitness testimony, rumour), types of producers (rebel forces, government media, foreign media, refugees and internally displaced), and types of consumers (convinced, willing, indifferent, pragmatic, resistant, opposed). This bears directly on a number of related themes: how the violence is defined, determinations of criminal culpability for the commission of various atrocities, comprehension of top-down expressions of power and authority, and appropriate attributions of agency to perpetrators, victims, interveners, and bystanders.

Defining the Violence

The intentional deployment of broadcast communications has implications for some of the larger issues of the war. Efforts to seize broadcast transmitters quite clearly fall under the rubric of "resource conflict". The killing of members of particular ethnic or national groups has given rise to allegations of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The conflict in Liberia, however, has generally defied conventional notions of warfare and political violence—as have numerous other internal wars in the post-Cold War era. This has led to much discussion of a "blurring of the lines" between traditional concepts of organized violence. Here, terrorism, criminality, and state coercion overlap and become indistinguishable. Martin Van Creveld writes of the transformation of war and the growing reliance of sub-state actors on alternate approaches to violent engagements with political opponents—terrorism as warfare.[42] James Ron notes the plausible deniability of the sub-contractor relationship between paramilitaries and state authorities in the Balkans, noting that "[f]aced with restrictions on who and how they can kill, state actors may hand the violence over to semiprivate gunmen, hoping these fighters can accomplish what the state was prevented from doing by courts and human rights activists."[43] Mary Kaldor looks to the evolution of late twentieth-century guerrilla warfare into "new wars", in which conventional military clashes are avoided, territory is acquired through

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42. Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).
43. James Ron, "Territoriality and Plausible Deniability: Serbian Paramilitaries in the Bosnian War," Chapter in *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder With Deniability* Bruce B. Campbell and Arthur D. Brenner, eds. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 308-309.

political control of the population, and the traditional counter-insurgency approach to winning hearts and minds has given way to psychological warfare meant to terrorize and divide audiences.[44]

Journalist and writer Robert Kaplan describes a "pre-modern formlessness" that dominated the battlefields of the 1990s, a symptom of man's "re-primitivization" in the face of resource scarcity and overpopulation.[45] In Kaplan's dyspeptic vision of post Cold War chaos—informed by extensive field research in many of the world's Third World war zones, including Liberia—the lines between warfare and criminality have indeed blurred. Armed conflict is reduced to its most essential feature: the militarization of peoples rather than confrontations between armed professionals. Here collective security has degenerated to the point where "national defense…. may be viewed as a local concept."[46] In this context, the commission of atrocities against civilian populations has less to do with ideological commitments to policies of extermination than with the practical implications of success. For all the pessimism Kaplan brings to his explanation of primordial ethnic conflict, he also understands that a reversion to pre-modern forms of warfare should not imply an aversion to modern methods: "Technology," as he puts it, would still be applied "toward primitive ends."[47]

Although Kaplan's analysis begs an *a priori* philosophical orientation, in Liberia, such phenomena were indeed readily visible, particularly in the first year of the war. The significance of this paper is that it turns the culturalist argument on its head by explaining the power of radio and oral traditions while simultaneously relying on it to demonstrate Taylor's intentionality and deliberation. Most scholars of the conflict have shied away from rigorous study of the nature of the violence or the particular forms in which it appeared. There have been a few notable exceptions, such as Ellis' discussion of religious and spiritual manifestations of the conflict or Reno's political economy of the parallel Liberian state. This does not address more pressing issues of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide, and although Kaplan's work is erudite and entertaining, it occludes careful consideration of motives, intent, and individual

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44. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 8.
45. Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 48.
46. Ibid., 49.
47. Ibid., 48.

criminal responsibility. The focus of this paper redirects attention to such issues. Deliberate acquisition of physical broadcast facilities, and control of the images and ideas transmitted through them, played a central role in shaping the war in Liberia and in defining the violence for combatants and non-combatants, perpetrators and victims. Foreign journalism and local audience response to warlord radio also contributed to the verbal atmospherics of the violence, in ways that will be explained throughout this paper.

Resource Conflict

Many arguments regarding conflict over natural resources look to their role in fuelling or sustaining conflict or to the Malthusian pressures that lead to such behaviour. The Liberian case offers an interesting opportunity to examine a different type of extractive practice. NPFL dominance, according to Reno, meant that Charles Taylor was able to control international commercial access to the lucrative iron ore, gold, timber, and diamond resources within rebel territory. Despite the criminal-political-financial nexus that defined Taylor's wartime control over a large percentage of Liberian territory, his access to strategic markets challenged the authority of the rump Liberian state and provided the NPFL with an alternative path to legitimacy. Taylor's personal wealth grew, official Liberia was starved of income, and rebel efforts were, for a time, self-sustaining.

Other scholars have argued that the rate and character of natural resource extraction became sufficiently aggressive and predatory as to be unsustainable, thus leaving the country stripped of even the basic necessities of life. Outram, for example, writes that "the fragility of the warlords' control over their territories put a premium on the short-run maximization of the rate of exploitation."[48] The unsustainable rate of predatory rebel extraction during the war, he argues, was most evident in the logic of "core zones" and "contested areas". In the latter, "the incentive to limit predation to a sustainable maximum diminishes and may vanish; those who consider restraining their exactions calculate that not only they, but also their competitors, will gain the benefits of their restraint. Indeed, because in military competition a stronger enemy threatens one's survival, the benefits of restraint may, in truth, be costs."[49]

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48. Outram, "It's Terminal Either Way," 362-365.
49. Ibid., 365.

Scorched earth warfare, by design, was a pragmatic military means of denying resources to enemy factions. Natural resource extraction and commercial exploitation were conducted in much the same way—including efforts to control Liberian and foreign radio. Taylor and the NPFL consistently targeted the country's radio facilities, destroyed those that they could not seize and control, eliminated enemy broadcast capabilities, and attempted to control the flow of public information by virtue of their monopoly of the medium. Taylor and the NPFL were thus empowered, while the implications for official Liberia were dire: Cain writes, "[t]he pursuit of looted material—both at the operational, platoon level and at the leadership echelon—inspired the factions to systematically disassemble the state, the *body politique*, and in the process, the physical corpus of the citizenry."[50]

Broadcasting and Intent

Western media coverage of the war propagated an image of primitive acquisition devoid of ideological dimensions, rebel leaders interested only in the ruthless pursuit of personal wealth. There is little doubt as to the corruption and brutality of warlords like Taylor, but the emphasis of the relevant arguments on resource conflict limit consideration of the exact scope and character of warlord acquisition, and the full depth of predatory intentionality and motivation. Close examination of NPFL efforts to control Liberia's broadcast resources suggests an altogether different perspective. Radio transmitters located throughout the country could disseminate timely propaganda over broad swaths of difficult hinterland terrain. Radio was cheaper than television, and few Liberians could read printed news, which was expensive to produce and difficult to transport beyond the capital and a few coastal cities. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, radio is also a culturally relevant communications medium: oral traditions are deeply embedded in every day behaviours and practice, particularly with regards to the free flow of information.[51]

The spoken word is thus widely accessible and readily manipulated whether it emanates locally, is broadcast nationally, or appears in the international media. The populist appeal of radio should not be taken to mean that listening audiences were ready dupes for

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50. Cain, "The Rape of Dinah," 287.
51. Stephen Ellis, "Tuning in to Pavement Radio," *African Affairs* Vol. 88, No. 352 (July 1989): 321-330.

rebel propagandists or uncritical of their messages. Instead, radio broadcasting—particularly in the context of the civil war—should be considered Liberia's most commonly accessed source of information and platform for public communication. Military efforts to control such resources and deny them to the enemy imply an understanding of their strategic utility and an interest in controlling and shaping public information. This simple acknowledgment, by extension, establishes responsibility for the content of messages transmitted under conditions of conflict and for the consequent behaviours of listening audiences.

This is a substantial advancement over some of the critical issues that might complicate future judicial responses to the record of wartime abuses, particularly given the long-term patterns of ethnic confrontation that came into play long before the ascension of Taylor and his warlord ilk. Cain argues that "[t]houghtful human rights lawyers, schooled *ab initio* on the premise of individual criminal accountability, are nevertheless forced by these facts to confront the implications of traditional patterns of attribution of responsibility."[52] Primordialist arguments are not necessarily inconsistent with the view that individual guilt can be recovered from the history of the war. Rather, culturally relevant perspectives on the medium and content of Taylor's propaganda are potentially fruitful analytical tools for assessing command responsibility. Cain quite rightly points out the apparent contradiction between the two, without succumbing to racist apologetics or orientalist dismissiveness about the root causes of African ethnic conflicts. "Recognition of this theme is immaterial as to criminal culpability," he writes, but "[c]ultural arguments regarding the potency and potential ramifications of ethno-tribal group identity… cannot be wished away, and are ignored at the peril of the putative analyst."[53]

Incitement and Identity

Analysts of the Liberian war are clearly faced with substantial challenges in accurately assessing its various incarnations, which perhaps bears most directly on the subject of this paper and its implications for incitement and identity politics. Cain, for example, writes that following the Doe regime's ethnic repression of the Gio and Mano tribes, Taylor, who claimed Gio lineage, "proceeded to lead a

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52. Cain, "The Rape of Dinah," 270-271.
53. Ibid.

lethal campaign of ethnic cleansing."[54] Citing UN documents, he asserts, "[d]espite the ineffably violent character of the war that took place there between 1990 and 1997, no single ethnicity was targeted to a sufficient extent to warrant the special opprobrium of 'genocide'."[55] The latter statement is problematic for several reasons, not the least of which appears to be its emphasis on the *actus rea*, or the physical result of the crime, as the defining element of rebel atrocities.[56] Targeting, it should be noted, involves more than just physical attacks. It presupposes a degree of psychological preparation in which perpetrators select, identify, and collectively demonize their victims in the public mind.[57] This requires significant planning and the deployment of sufficient communications resources to accomplish prearranged goals.

It also follows a compelling hegemonic logic that political scientist James Der Derian has labelled a "mimetic war of images". Der Derian, whose syncretic, post-modern assessments of information, technology, war, and peace read like a hybrid cognitive manifestation of Michael Ignatieff's moral philosophy and William Gibson's cyberpunk thrill ride through the digital chasm between politics and society, notes the importance of this process of alienation. "People go to war," he writes, "because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine, and speak of others: that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representations." Historically, such discourse has had a profound impact on the minds of human beings. "From Greek tragedy and Roman gladiatorial spectacles to futurist art and fascist rallies," Der Derian notes, "the mimetic mix of image and violence has proven to be more powerful than the most rational discourse."[58] Public statements and the images they generate are thus a significant measure of *mens rea*, or criminal intent. The sophisticated and varied radio propaganda wielded by Charles Taylor and the NPFL provides much clearer evidence of this than erroneous issues of scale or implementation.

54. Ibid., 271.
55. Ibid., 265-266.
56. Cain's award winning article is otherwise brilliantly written and thoughtfully reasoned, including some compelling statistical arguments regarding the extent of human rights violations during the 1990-1997 period.
57. Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Case Studies and Analyses* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 28.
58. James Der Derian, "9.11: Before, After, and In Between," *After September 11 Archive: New War?* Social Science Research Council (Available at *www. ssrc.org/ sept11/essays/der_derian_text_only.htm*).

Moreover, the particular forms of wartime political communi-cation in Liberia bear directly on processes of identity-based victimization and militarization that are critical to understanding the root causes of the war and the consequences of culturally-attuned populist mobilization. Taylor's propaganda, rife with themes of membership, exclusion, and fear of the foreign, reinforced cultural preconceptions of regional, national, and local identities. He also advocated revolution and national self-defence in absolute terms that left no room for compromise, misunderstanding, or mercy. The paradox is that that which divided Liberians also bound them together in an analog version of Der Derian's virtually packaged, digitally delivered, mimetic war "of escalating and competing and imitative oppositions."[59] The role of radio, in short, cannot be overestimated as a means through which Taylor and others incited audiences to acts of extreme violence—however such confrontations might be defined. It also means that archived transcripts of radio messages can be used to hold Taylor, who relied heavily on the medium of radio to construct a free-floating social fabric of fear and hate, accountable for its consequences.

Propaganda and Psychological Warfare

Political expressions of power in Liberia traditionally relied on cults of personality, extensive public image making, and a pragmatic leadership approach to religion, tradition, and other forms of ideologically defined belonging, to cultivate the loyalty of Liberia's diverse ethnic constituencies.[60] Under conditions of war, the stra-tegy used to achieve the same ends took on a much more holistic and aggressive quality, incorporating a broad range of persuasive behaviours that surpassed the limits of simple propaganda. Armed revolt and military confrontation were used to seize control of the country's political and economic life, but such methods were always used in conjunction with an array of activities meant to influence or complement the military outcome. As Emmanuel Kwesi Aning puts it, understanding Charles Taylor's approach to confrontation is important "because this constituted part of the reason that kept the conflict going for seven years."[61] Aning also notes, "[i]nterrelated

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59. Ibid.
60. J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy*, 116-134.
61. Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, "Eliciting Compliance From Warlords: The ECOWAS Experience in Liberia, 1990-1997," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 26, No. 81 (September 1999), 339-340.

military, political, and economic factors guided Taylor's negotiation position."[62] Taylor's long-term behaviour, in short, suggests a deliberate plan for seizing power the psychological aspects of which were key.

Propaganda is critical to shaping public understanding of conflict and legitimating its conduct, and inflammatory and misleading rhetoric was a significant component of Taylor and NPFL strategy. For analytical purposes, however, to focus too narrowly on propaganda is to neglect the grander scheme of things. Aning's description of the complexity of Taylor's diplomacy is a close approximation of much earlier work on cold-war era mind control and political power. Writing in the 1950s, political scientist Terence H. Qualter claimed that psychological warfare "is more than propaganda… it is propaganda tied and coordinated with military, political and economic strategy and policy."[63] In this context, the virtual and strategic importance of radio broadcasting takes on a much larger meaning. Control of physical communications and broadcast resources meant that Taylor could disseminate proprietary content at will and retain the initiative, despite military vulnerability, relative political weakness, or the cynicism of listeners.

Taylor was a consummate gamesman, constantly outmanoeuvring his opponents. He would have been unable to do so without the physical resources to wage psychological war against his opponents, sophisticated propaganda with which to beguile and revile them, and the ability to use both in support of and in conjunction with diplomatic, military, social and economic goals. Qualter noted the advantages of such versatility, writing, "…while psychological tricks may increase military effectiveness, so may a military operation supplement a propaganda campaign."[64] This fluid, adaptable, pragmatic approach to manipulating information, people, and events bears directly on the character and psychology of Taylor's leadership. A deeper understanding of the influence of his personality on political authority, of the importance of narcissism to charismatic power, will thus contribute to greater understanding of his propaganda themes, and vice versa.[65]

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62. Ibid.
63. Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare* (New York: Random House, 1962), 103.
64. Ibid.
65. See, for example, Jerrold M. Post, *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World : The Psychology of Political Behavior* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Jerrold M. Post and Robert S. Robbins, *Political*

Oral Culture, Symbolism, and Power

Collected assessments of Liberian wartime communications and broadcasting offer only a partial sketch of just how far warlords were willing to go to influence the minds and manipulate the behaviours of the population. In Africa, the ability to cultivate and convey power from the centre, and thus gel populations along national lines, drew from statist abilities to install the necessary physical infrastructure across great distances within fixed cartographical limits.[66] Radio broadcasting has filled a corollary need. Physical state structures—highways, for example—helped to organize national communities. State-wide communications transmitted the ideas that would bind and homogenize them, capabilities "without which the state is like a body without a nervous system, unable to transmit the instructions from the brain to the members or the needs of the members to the brain."[67]

Radio broadcasting was a quite literal means with which to promote notions of authority and power. The effectiveness of the medium was not based simply on its capacity to communicate messages to largely illiterate communities of people. It also played on the country's cultural particularities. Personal and public power in Liberia, intimately bound to traditional spiritual practices and conceptions of real and invisible forces, is characterized by "the cultivation of secrecy and the hiding of intention."[68] In West Africa, where oral traditions and political life are similarly intertwined, "the spoken word, subject to a thousand different interpretations and meanings, is not regarded as the deepest level of truth, but must be sifted for clues as to the real causes of visible events."[69] This quite clearly relates to the broadcast word as well as the spoken one.[70]

Some basic features of radio-based political communication can be extrapolated here. *Ownership* and *control* of broadcast

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Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

66. See Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially pp. 139-172.

67. Rosalynde Ainslie, *The Press in Africa: Communications Past and Present* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 10.

68. Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, 13, 265.

69. Ibid., 13. See also Ellis, "Tuning in to Pavement Radio," *African Affairs* Vol. 88, No. 352 (July 1989): 321-330, for an interesting description of politicized oral culture and its significance in West Africa.

70. I am indebted to Stephen Ellis for this insight.

resources define the public role of radio facilities as symbolic representations of power—captive physical platforms through which the voice of authority speaks to listening audiences. *Deception* and *inference* are also vital characteristics of public communication and political practice that explain the overall shape of broadcast content in Liberia and its social, political, and military relevance as a source of information and direction. Thus, mutual *perceptions* of authority and power and *imaginings* of membership and exclusion bear directly on Liberia's wartime existence as a virtual construct. Power, hate, and identity filled the Shadow State with meaning, cohering fighters and civilians, perpetrators and victims—by virtue of their cooperative witness of Taylor's hubris—into a polity the dimensions of which were almost entirely ethereal. Amid the destruction, this was the consensual hallucination the warlord built.[71]

Conclusion

The overall intent of this paper has been to both narrow and expand study of political communication during Liberia's seven-year civil war. It limits its focus to radio as a culturally specific medium and form of political communication. It expands it by exploring possible historical and political contexts in which radio communications and broadcasting occurred. It attempts to make sense of both by locating in them a framework of prosecutable offences and their implications for identity politics, information culture, and the state. Overall, it has sought to develop an analytical platform which locates critical gaps in existing scholarly discourse and incorporates complementary theoretical debates in such a way as to offer maximum conceptual leverage to the primary evidence. In the interest of concision and of preserving the conceptual orientation of this paper, I have avoided in-depth discussions of my own findings in favour of brief insights into the nature of Charles Taylor's political communication. This is, admittedly, a somewhat

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71. The reference is to William Gibson's classic science fiction text, *Neuromancer* (New York, New York: Ace Books, 1984). Gibson refers to cyberspace, an evolved version of the internet in which participants are immersed in a multi-sensory simulacrum, as a "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data."

frustrating deferral of evidentiary discovery in favour of much more ephemeral discussion of historiographical practice and conceptual breadth. My experience as a researcher, however, has been one of frequent bewilderment at the pervasive nonsense and seeming wrong-headedness of Liberian propagandists and their messages. The framework that I have articulated in this paper does not pretend to be a comprehensive consideration or the final word on those subjects. Quite the opposite, it is meant as an introduction, a primer of sorts, for thinking about political communication in wartime Liberia.

Taylor's tenure as Liberia's most powerful warlord and consequent embezzlement of its human and natural resources is long past. Between 1999 and 2003 a follow-on conflict between armed rebels and the forces of Taylor's democratically elected government prorogued any possibility of constructive rapprochement between former friends and foes. Taylor, under extreme international pressure, militarily weakened, and no longer certain of the loyalty of his own troops, stepped down from the Presidency in 2003 before his fighters could be defeated or turn on him. He has been afforded sanctuary in neighbouring Nigeria, and with an Interpol warrant out for his arrest, his options are fading. He has been indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his role in atrocities committed during that country's own civil war, but there is no corresponding court for Liberia. That the two country's conflicts are not so easily separated hardly seems relevant. The International Crisis Group, for example, has identified Taylor as a long-standing source of West African instability,[72] and earlier scholarship has similarly identified a regional nexus in his wartime policies of internationalization.[73]

Despite this, Liberians are entitled to their own pound of flesh. Taylor's evasion of justice is a lingering obstacle to their prospects for reconciliation and reconstruction, and an affront to the human security interests of local, regional and international players. This is not the place for a full-blown argument regarding why the foreign policies of numerous non-African states are served by seeing Taylor

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72. See International Crisis Group, *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm* Africa Report No. 62 (Freetown and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 30 April 2003); and *Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability* Africa Report No. 43 (Freetown and Brussels: International Crisis Group, 24 April 2002). Full text available at *www.crisisweb.org*.

73. Yekutiel Gershoni, "Military and Diplomatic Strategies in the Liberian Civil War." *Liberian Studies Journal* Vol. 22, No. 2 (1997): 199-239.

prosecuted for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in his own country. It is sufficient to suggest here that ten years after Rwanda, they have made somewhat of a cottage industry of the "responsibility to protect". Taylor at large represents a persistent menace to Liberians and West Africans. As scholarship continues into the details of his wartime conduct, foreign governments should be prepared to endorse an expansion of the Special Court's mandate, the creation of a parallel institution for Liberia, or referral of the matter to the International Criminal Court. They should also be prepared to support juridical and academic efforts to build the case against Taylor and others like him. Pleas for the establishment of a Liberian truth and reconciliation commission, particularly from Taylor and his supporters, should be rejected—or at least postponed—in favour of more immediate criminal proceedings. Taylor has yet to be apprehended, however, and it would be naïve to think that he will surrender willingly without first negotiating the best possible deal for himself. Time will tell.

List of Abbreviations

ECOMOG: ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS   Economic Community of West African States
IGO: International Government Organization
LRCN: Liberia Rural Communities Network
NGO: Non-Government Organization
NPFL: National People's Patriotic Front
PRC: People's Revolutionary Council
UNOMIL: United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
VOA: Voice of America

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