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Constructing Journalism Practice Between the Global and the  
Local: Lessons From the Rwandan Journalism Field

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**Abstract**

Constructing Journalism Practice Between the Global and the Local: Lessons From the  
Rwandan Journalism Field

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This dissertation shows how the journalism field in Rwanda is constructed, including how journalists learn their social role, how they decide what news they will publish, and what factors enable some journalists to produce news that does not fit the established norms. Using a network ethnographic approach, this study examined participant observation and interview data collected from fieldsites chosen based on a social network analysis of the Rwandan journalism field's Twitter presence. This dissertation brings new data to bear on a perennial question, highlighting the complexities of journalism practice and perception in a little-studied context. I answer the question, **In a field suspended between global demands communicated by field leaders and education and local pressures of governance and social context, what does it mean to be a journalist?** in three parts. The Rwandan journalism field is shaped by a series of institutions that structure action, sometimes reinforcing and perpetuating through social obligation and habit behavior that the journalist does not find ideal. While global influence is apparent in education and in field standards set in the Rwandan journalists' code of ethics and in the behavior encouraged by professional organizations, local factors specific to the Rwandan context intervene to shape how journalists view their social position and to encourage routines that result in a context-

dependent journalism field whose practitioners are persistently aware of the divide between what they practice and what they are taught. To resist those pressures, journalists must be able to consistently meet field standards in their news production methods and content and they must work for an organization with economic capital outside of the Rwandan media field. Journalists who resist also share a different conception of loyalty and patriotism as rooted in information sharing rather than positive image promotion. The findings have application in journalism studies scholarship because they extend theories of how journalists navigate local and global pressures to construct fields of practice. In addition, they suggest a new perspective on autonomy and power. In Rwanda, journalists generally have some autonomy to take a powerful social position, but instead they take a relatively weak social position in part because of a shared understanding of their social role as villains. This research provides insight on the specific case of journalism in Rwanda and also on how the journalism field might be constructed in similar contexts around the world.

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## Chapter 1

### UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISM IN RWANDA

On a warm evening toward the end of June 2017, a group of Rwandans and expatriates gathered at Cafe Neo, a trendy rooftop coffee shop that caters primarily to expats working on tech startups and other business ventures. Tables had been pushed to the edges of the room to accommodate rows of folding chairs and rain flaps rolled up to expose the evening sky as audience members listened to, and asked questions of, three panelists discussing the lessons Kenyan election coverage had to offer Rwandan journalists and the Rwandan media field. Empty Primus, Mutzig, and Skol bottles littered the countertops by the end of the evening as the three panelists — a local journalist who worked for the Rwandan Media Commission and the regional, weekly newspaper *The East African*, the European Union ambassador to Rwanda, and a Kenyan professor who studied the media system — described Kenya's 2013 election and the role journalists had played in keeping the election process relatively peaceful, drawing lessons for the Rwandan journalism field. The audience included some Rwandan journalists working for local and international media outlets, expats working for NGOs and other organizations, and local professors.

The purpose of the talk was to draw lessons for Rwanda from Kenya's election season, but there were in fact very few parallels between the upcoming Rwandan election and the past election in Kenya. For one thing, Kenya's 2013 election was hotly contested, with the winning candidate receiving just over 50 percent of the vote and the runner-up garnering 43 percent of the vote. By contrast, the most recent Rwandan presidential election in 2010 had not, strictly speaking, been contested at all: The presidency went to the incumbent, Paul Kagame, with 93 percent of the vote. The runner-up, Jean Damascene Ntawukuriyayo,

garnered 5 percent of the vote. Party identification and composition in Kenya tend to be divided along ethnic lines, with parties largely composed of people from one tribe or another. In Rwanda, ethnicity has been outlawed (Lacey, 2004). Kenya's parliament in early 2017 comprised a nearly even split between the two most popular political parties, with 167 members from the Jubilee party and 141 members from the primary opposing Orange Democratic Party (Oluoch, 2017). In Rwanda, the leading political party Rwandan Patriotic Front holds 47 of the 80 seats in parliament with the next most popular party holding only 7 seats. In short, the Kenyan political field is best characterized by chaos and open debate that often turns violent, while the Rwandan political field is best characterized by order and control under the strong influence of the majority party, with little real political opposition.

Everyone in the audience agreed that preventing political violence is an important goal and that the journalism field can be a powerful ally in achieving this goal, but a journalist friend and I discussing the event afterwards agreed that there was, in fact, no strong likelihood of violence around Rwanda's upcoming elections. The more pressing concern was that the election would be no contest at all (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Kenya's elections are routinely violent and the media tend to stir up ethnic and tribal divisions (Maina, 2017), something that doesn't happen in Rwanda, in part because it is illegal to publicly announce any information or sentiment that might stir up ethnic division. Rwandan journalists are not inclined to stir up division by publishing contentious information about public officials. In fact, an audience member pointed this out, noting that journalists are bound by money, and most of the money in Rwanda comes from the ruling party — thus, journalists would not likely be tempted to write critical or inflammatory news about the ruling party and government officials and processes. The real problem suggested by this person's critique was that, in order for journalism in Rwanda to aid the democratic process of an election, journalists needed to practice their occupation in a way that was more critical and observant and more independent from official narrative, not less.

In effect, the whole meeting served to divert attention, for the naive observer, from the real challenges of doing journalism in Rwanda. It did so by drawing false comparisons suggesting negative outcomes that were far from the Rwandan reality, while also introducing an undercurrent of warning about the dangers of political violence, thus drawing attention back to the role media in Rwanda played in the genocide without actually mentioning that event. While some audience members pointed out more present dilemmas of doing journalism in Rwanda — including the funding challenge — my friend predicted that this awareness would do little to change the nature of the field, in part because journalists themselves are divided: Many are supportive of the ruling party and also uncomfortable taking a position of power to hold the powerful accountable. Some journalists in the country practice a more critical and independent style of reporting, but the divide down the middle among Rwandan journalists about what strategies journalists should pursue and what freedoms they should fight for will prevent journalists from working collectively to change their social situation. Supposing a journalism field could be considered as a game, the meeting in effect assumed that Rwandan journalists would be playing checkers, like their Kenyan counterparts, and drew parallels and lessons accordingly — when in fact, Rwandan journalists are playing the visually similar but totally different game of chess.

This event highlighted the complex and somewhat contradictory nature of journalism in Rwanda. On one hand, there is a shared desire among officials and other powerful figures to publicly promote policies and practices that encourage and protect “free speech” and a journalistic role that rewards investigation and holds public figures and government officials accountable — a role that one might reasonably associate with the press in a country with democratic practices. On the other hand, there is a distinct authoritarian desire to control the message, highlighting only problems that are in the official interest to uncover, and emphasizing the idea that the problems of Rwandan journalism are all the fault of journalists themselves. Journalists themselves are uncomfortable claiming a powerful social role because of their profession’s history of inciting ethnic violence before and during the genocide. By

casting the upcoming election as one that could be violent, like Kenya's elections, Rwandan journalists were implicitly cast in the role of peacekeepers, not providers of potentially inflammatory information to aid a democratic process. In reality, Rwandan journalists were (and are), for a number of reasons, incredibly unlikely to criticize officials. However, this event implicitly upheld the journalism field as a democratic institution with great power to spread information or violence and great independence with which to choose between those paths, while seemingly ignoring the history and lived reality guiding Rwandan journalists to behave differently.

My dissertation explores the ways that the journalism field in Rwanda and the journalists in it navigate the tensions between Western standards of journalism associated with democratic institutions and ideals and an on the ground reality demanding a journalism practice aligned with authoritarian practices. Journalists' responses are complex and involve negotiation between local and global tensions over how they and others in Rwanda understand the social role of journalism, how journalists decide what news to publish, and what factors enable journalists to resist field pressures and publish different kinds of news. While the specifics are unique to Rwandan journalists in the particular social moment I observed, the broader tensions explored in this dissertation and the processes I identify have parallels in other societies that are authoritarian, have experienced conflict, or are heavily dependent on Western aid. Grounded in this context, my dissertation addresses the question: **In a field suspended between global demands communicated by field leaders and education and local pressures of governance and social context, what does it mean to be a journalist?** Within this guiding question, each chapter answers a specific, related question.

- Chapter 3: How do journalists learn their roles, individually and as a field?
- Chapter 4: How do journalists decide what to publish?
- Chapter 5: When journalists resist local pressure to produce a certain kind of news,

what factors enable them to do so? In other words, what factors enable some journalists to produce news that is consistently out of step with the editorial line expected of the field and is instead unpredictable and sometimes critical of the establishment?

This chapter proceeds by first outlining the current state of theory and research around these questions, then introducing the theoretical frameworks of new institutionalism and field theory and the case of Rwandan journalism explored in this dissertation. Finally, I conclude by discussing this dissertation's contributions to scholarship and a brief outline of the chapters to come.

### ***1.1 Influences on journalism fields***

There are, broadly speaking, two major sources of influence that scholars suggest have shaping power over any particular journalism field. Journalists are shaped by local context, including history, political system, and economic factors. Increasingly, they are also shaped by a shared, global culture defining the profession. Local policies and other regulations shape journalism practice by defining the nature of the market within media organizations operate, the political system journalists interact with, and the level of autonomy journalists have relative to other powerful fields (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). These factors, it has been argued, have a pervasive shaping power that leads journalists to do their work in certain ways. Empirical studies confirm the importance and relevance of contextual factors — press market, subsidies, and inclusiveness, ownership regulations, political parallelism, and journalistic professionalism (measures of autonomy and shared standards and ethics) — in shaping local journalism practice (Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014). Cross-national studies have found that journalists are influenced by political systems and media ownership (Hanitzsch, 2011). Journalists can and do adopt a variety of roles, depending on social constraints (Waisbord, 2013). Journalists are embedded within local ideological systems and are subject to political, economic, and other institutional constraints (Benson &

Neveu, 2005). This institutional context influences the journalism field and has an effect on news content (Moon, 2016). Thus, one can think of journalism as a field that is discursively and practically constructed in relationship with its environment, in a context that defines appropriate behavior and beliefs for the journalists occupying the field (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). Journalists articulate their own roles, but must do so in a way that the surrounding society accepts as legitimate (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). They are influenced in this task by contextual factors including the power and autonomy they have relative to other, surrounding fields (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009); field orientation toward politics and profit (Benson, 2013); and political and historical context (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Following this model of influence, there are several ways one might expect an authoritarian political system to influence journalism, primarily through mechanisms involving active control via ownership, censorship, and direct repression. In a post-conflict state journalists might be particularly motivated to align with government goals of development and peace, but this need not persist after the post-conflict reconstruction phase of the state; in fact, the research outlined above suggests that journalism fields gain more independence as part of the reconstruction phase. In strong, authoritarian state contexts, media systems tend to be state-owned, directly censored, or systematically repressed (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Those who resist face arrest, deportation, or assassination, and major broadcast outlets tend to be state-controlled (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Numerous examples substantiate this general observation. The latest Freedom House report documents the number of reporters in jail in authoritarian contexts like Turkey (81) and Ethiopia (16) (Freedom House, 2017b). As a result of these factors, journalists often (forcibly or by choice) publish messages aligned with government needs, and they receive information about desired behaviors through direct government or editorial communication. Where journalists practice resistance to state guidance in this context, it is often enabled by a marketplace model that incentivizes local owners to disobey government directives in favor of financial gain.

Censorship is the expected norm in authoritarian states, and has been documented extensively. For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1970s, laws in Ethiopia, Niger, and Cameroon establishing the government's right to prior review and ban objectionable news content (Jose, 1975). However, a close look at any journalism field in an authoritarian context makes it clear that the lines quickly blur between self-censorship and overt censorship. Censorship is often the result of third-party enforcement, and occurs when a powerful figure withholds or somehow prohibits the publication or broadcast of particular information, analysis, or debate. For instance, in China, social media sites employ thousands of censors who, along with Internet police and monitors, read posts and remove them if they do not comply with government directives (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2013). By contrast, self-censorship is a first-person activity that occurs when there is information to share and someone knows it but intentionally withholds the information from audiences (Smith, 1997). In either case, journalists who decline to follow the established editorial line face repercussions, often in the form of threats or physical violence.

Censorship and self-censorship often co-occur. In Argentina in the 1970s, the military under an authoritarian regime ordered news outlets to censor information about violence and disappearances, combining directives about content with vague death threats to provoke an environment of fear-prompted self-censorship with overt orders about content to avoid (Hughes, 2006). Likewise, in Guatemala in the 1990s, positive press coverage was ensured through a pairing of fear-induced self-censorship and overt censorship by government-appointed censors who read news content before publication (Hughes, 2006). In Mexico in the 1970s, government press officers would work side-by-side with journalists to spin stories, occasionally even producing content for journalists (Hughes, 2006). In Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s, federal police would deliver messages about prohibited content to media organizations by telephone, telegram, or written document, but they would also send indirect messages with suggestions about content to avoid and content to publish, leaving it to individual journalists to determine whether or not they would comply (Smith, 1997). In

Malaysia and Singapore in the 1990s, journalists were expected to comply with official narratives and compliance was enforced through a combination of government ownership of media organizations and legal restrictions on “seditious” content (Means, 1996). More recently in Turkey, censorship and self-censorship have been practiced concurrently to limit journalists’ ability to share critical news (Yesil, 2014).

On the other hand, it is also apparent that the global practice of journalism is influenced by a “standard model of professional journalism” (Waisbord, 2013, p. 174). Evidence suggests that journalists around the world are incorporating global standard practices, primarily informed by a Western, liberal democratic understanding of journalism as practiced in the U.S. For instance, reporting on foreign events looks similar in different countries: The 2012 Greek, U.S., and Chinese elections were reported similarly by news outlets located in quite different cultural contexts of Japan, China, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. (Curran, Esser, Hallin, Hayashi, & Lee, 2017). Evidence in recent decades suggested a spread of influence from Western democratic contexts to other countries as journalism fields around the world became commercialized and particular field structures like the party press model declined (Hallin, 2009). Some have even suggested that journalism is coming to be more strongly defined by a shared set of definitions and behaviors than by local contexts, or at least that this global culture has power to overturn or override some routines and field boundaries established by local systems. As Reese (2001) puts it, “More important than national differences may be the emergence of a transnational global professionalism” (p. 173).

For the most part, though, research suggests that these influences both have some shaping power, such that a journalism field in a particular context exhibits some locally distinctive qualities while also sharing some practices or values with other journalism fields around the world (Waisbord, 2013). Comparative research supports the idea that journalists and media fields are shaped by both local and global practices and pressures. At least in Western countries, journalism fields show some evidence of convergence in certain ways while also re-

taining persistent differences (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). Journalists share some values across the globe, including detachment and the provision of political information, while also holding some values, such as the importance of objectivity and separation of facts from opinion, that shift in response to local contexts (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011; Weaver & Wu, 1998). In authoritarian countries, where ownership is concerned, the majority of media outlets in many authoritarian states work under a high degree of state intervention, but some states have recently shifted designations from “state-owned” to “public” or other labels, providing some rhetorical distance between media outlets and state control. In Ethiopia, for instance, 80 percent of the journalists in the country are estimated to work for state media outlets, which the government designates as “public” (Skjerdal, 2017). In China, the media have been marketized, removing them from the position of government mouthpieces that they occupied previously, but in the process becoming more effective voices for state legitimacy (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011). In Turkey, media ownership and the censorship process have been privatized but the result is still state control over much of the news content produced (Coskuntuncel, 2018). These studies point to the reality that individual journalism fields exist within a global system and are making some changes that imitate liberal democratic market and political regulations around journalism.

The general assumption is that journalists somehow prioritize (consciously or not) the importance of various factors that influence individual behavior and shape the field. For instance, journalists are likely to prioritize shared commitment to professional norms over individual beliefs about what journalists should be and do (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). These can change from situation to situation; journalists in some Muslim-majority countries say that the Islamic faith is a more important determination of their work than is journalistic professionalism, perhaps because they are in countries with “emerging” journalism fields (Pintak, 2014, p. 482). In any case, in doing the work of prioritization, journalists work to bring any conflicting values into coordination. Pintak (2014) finds that journalists who identify as Muslim in some Muslim-majority countries reshape their perception of

global norms to better align with the more important religious identity so that they are no longer in conflict. There are other examples of this proposal that journalists combine local and global pressures into a consistent, hybrid “glocal” identity. In South Africa and India, journalists integrate local and global epistemologies and practices to consider global ethical statements in their development of local statements (H. Wasserman & Rao, 2008). Another model of glocal integration is for journalists to adopt international standards in some areas of the field, such as technological integration and audience engagement, while maintaining local priorities in other areas, such as the purpose and scope of news content (Rao, 2009). In Ethiopia, journalists working for state media rationalize their practice of self-censorship against the competing global norm of autonomy, justifying it as a socially responsible process similar to other editorial decision-making and gatekeeping processes, and claiming that audiences can read between the lines and that the organization, not the individual journalist, is responsible for justifying the practice ethically (Skjerdal, 2010). In other cases, the global influence might be ignored entirely, as was shown to be the case in Europe when graduates of an intentionally transnational, multilingual journalism program were unable to find jobs in the still-traditional and locally defined journalism organizations around them (Grieves, 2011). In China, journalists have recently incorporated a stronger practice of investigative journalism, but they do so within parameters set by government officials, thus incorporating some elements of Western journalism while still retaining ideological commitments linked with Confucianism, Communism, or mercenary interests rather than shifting to a more liberal democratic ideological concern for a “democratic public sphere” (C.-C. Lee, 2005; Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011).

On the other hand, scholars have also identified instances where the clash between the journalism practice demanded from local contexts directly conflicts with that encouraged by global norms, with the resulting clash leading to a dramatic break between tradition and future practice, or splitting the field into two streams of practice. This is evident in the ways that journalists in some countries have advocated for and eventually established differ-

ent norms for their fields with higher levels of autonomy and a more normalized practice of journalism independent and critical of authorities. In Mexico in the 1980s, some journalists took on the role of institutional entrepreneurs, shifting from authoritarian to civic-oriented news production roles (Hughes, 2003). Under the authoritarian media model, journalists were ideologically aligned with authoritarian government figures. They routinely and comfortably acted as part of the authoritarian system, collaborating with the government to produce a stable social context with systematic growth (Hughes, 2003). Through this process, individual journalists “became committed, first, to changing their publications and, later, to influencing their wider profession,” facilitating a bottom-up reorientation of many news outlets from government collaboration to government investigation and civic engagement (Hughes, 2003, p. 99). A similar process occurred in some South American countries through the 1990s, with “watchdog journalism” gaining popularity across media outlets as individual journalists advocated for new approaches to journalism and taking advantage of coexisting, contradictory understandings of what journalism is and should be (Waisbord, 2000). In China, journalists are empowered to produce investigative stories — in some ways against the wishes of the authoritarian state — by the existence of a commercial media system where audience demands hold some persuasive power (Tong, 2011).

In these cases, the journalists act (as Hughes notes) as “institutional entrepreneurs.” Institutional entrepreneurship entails negotiation of multiple sets of expectations in order to promote one’s chosen organizational form or political goal by embedding it in an existing institutional foundation (Clemens & Cook, 1999). Entrepreneurs work by exploiting existing values or organizational forms to accomplish new or previously unpopular goals. Thus, a prevailing theory is that journalists who practice watchdog or investigative journalism against a status quo of authoritarian collaborative journalism find the power to do so by exploiting existing systems or definitions to serve their purposes, thus creating stability for occupational norms that had been unacceptable. An avenue open to journalists to provoke social change for the social relationships between their occupation and other fields of power

is that of collective action. If a large enough cohesive group of journalists shares professional values, identities, and norms, then journalists can lobby for and achieve changes in the laws regulating their occupation (VonDoepp, 2017). Over the past decade, journalists have harnessed collective action to successfully lobby for more accommodating media laws in Ghana, Zambia, and Malawi (VonDoepp, 2017).

When journalists navigate the tensions between the two forces — global professional norms and local systems — they either choose between one or the other dramatically, leading to a field crisis and reorientation like those that occurred around watchdog journalism in Latin America and South America, or they mix the two to create a new, symbiotic “glocal” culture as outlined by Rao (2009), H. Wasserman and Rao (2008), and others. Journalists either come to a stable equilibrium where pressures mingle together or are ranked to avoid daily competition, or they face conflicting pressures in direct opposition and use the conflict to create a new equilibrium that is more desirable. My fieldwork suggests that some journalism fields may in fact do neither. Instead, journalists and a journalism field may hold local and global pressures in tense equilibrium, using public rhetoric and rewards to signal the importance of one set of norms while using internal rhetoric and routine pressures to in fact enforce a different set. The Rwandan field of journalism seems to be suspended in equilibrium between the competing pressures of local forces, which demand a passive and positive style of news coverage amenable to authoritarian governance, and global norms, which demand an active, critical, and powerful style of news coverage more common to a liberal democracy. A number of forces lead journalists to adopt the locally approved authoritarian style, while still acknowledging that it is not the ideal type of journalism they were taught. Occasionally a few journalists flip over to a more critical style aligned with their training but to do so they must exit the field. This dissertation draws on field theory and new institutionalism to ground an examination of the ways journalists incorporate pressures from local and international sources into a field practice.

A common assumption made in the above arguments is that, given the freedom to shape their own social role, journalists will choose positions of power and will use that power to shape the journalism field to be coherent in either adopting practices and norms of global journalism or incorporating the global with the local. Stated another way, autonomy and power are to some degree granted or determined by state or corporate (or both) interventions in journalism fields. A field relatively free from state intervention or marketplace restrictions is autonomous and powerful, and will be governed by field-determined standards of quality and style (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Sjøvaag, 2013). This has implications for the roles journalists occupy, as is evident in the way some theorists tend to characterize “collaborative” roles of the journalism field as roles that exist when the media have low levels of autonomy and the government is strong (Christians et al., 2009), and in the way media professionalization and autonomy are treated as opposites of instrumentalization, or media service to corporate or political interests (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

My fieldwork in Rwanda complicates this assumption that journalists with autonomy will construct a coherent field. Of course, journalists in Rwanda face constraints from political and economic influences. However, I find that, in spite of having a degree of freedom and field autonomy granted by political forces, and having some past examples of news organizations that increased in popularity and ad revenue after taking more independent editorial stances and publishing critical and investigative news, journalists tend to not claim a field position of power, and they also tend to produce news content that does not align with the standards encouraged by field leaders. They are constrained by primarily noncoercive institutional forces to take a relatively weak social role and to produce content that aligns more with a development and government assistance role than with the independent and watchdog-style reporting field professionalization encourages. When journalists do take on more watchdog-oriented roles, they do so under the protection of organizations with economic capital outside the field, and they do so in service to development goals.

## ***1.2 Bringing new institutionalism to bear on the journalism field***

New institutionalism and field theory offer useful perspectives from which to examine and better understand the ways journalists interact with and respond to a variety of pressures. Field theory posits that journalists have at least some degree of autonomy to set rules for themselves about what constitutes good journalism, and that understanding those rules will help a researcher understand what the game looks like in a particular context. That local context also has an effect on the game, and institutional theory provides a broader set of theoretical tools to use in understanding what contextual factors might affect the game and how they could be expected to do so. An institutional approach is particularly useful in the way it broadens the realm of possible influences on behavior from regulations to include non-coercive forces like habits, convenience, and social obligation (Oliver, 1991). Together, these theories allow me to better understand the journalism field in Rwanda and the ways that journalists practice an occupation with a small degree of coherence, constrained by powerful social, economic, and political considerations, but occasionally motivated by idealistic beliefs and organizational protection to assert autonomy in the face of those constraints.

Field theory provides a theoretical framework to understand how agents interact with each other within a semi-autonomous social group, explaining individual action through comparison with others within and outside “the field.” It thus allows one to conceptualize a social group or occupation with some degree of autonomy that is also subject to pressure from forces outside and within the field (Martin, 2003). Fields are social spaces with some degree of autonomy that have internal “rules of the game” and reward systems to govern members, but that also interact with and parallel other fields in society (Benson, 1999). A field is “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” that are objectively defined and make objectively measurable demands on their members (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Field theory lends itself well to in-depth analyses and explanations of phenomena, rather than predictive power, since “the better established the rule, the more

advantage there may be in breaking it” (Martin, 2003, p. 34). Fields themselves are positioned in relationship with other fields; it is impossible to understand the field of journalism, for instance, without also considering the entire social space within which journalists as an occupational group (or field) reside, and where the journalistic field sits in relation to that society’s political field and economic field. Field theory also allows space for comparison within fields, as within a particular field a particular player may be closer to an economic pole or a political pole. This is similar to a game of tennis, where a given player may be closer to one side of the net or the other. Field theory thus facilitates multiple levels of comparison and encourages close analysis of causal mechanisms for greater understanding of social phenomena, the aim of this study (Benson, 1999). For this dissertation, field theory also provides a useful way to conceptualize the interaction of forces that have been suggested to shape journalists’ work as exerting pressure from within the field or from outside, providing a way to separate the concept of autonomy from the concept of pressure. Journalists can be autonomous while still being bound by constraints within the field.

In journalism studies, field theory has been used to pinpoint structural and macrosocial explanations for differences in news practices and news style. For instance, Benson (2013) conducts a cross-national study of media systems, comparing France and U.S. systems through a field theoretic lens to determine what differences across the media systems might lead to observed differences in news coverage, and finding that “commercialism is inversely related to ideological diversity in the news” (Benson, 2013, p. 20). He explicitly uses field theory to unpack the black box of “national culture,” arguing that a combination of factors come into play with different relative strengths to result in immigration news coverage that looks broadly different from France to the U.S., while also noting differences between individual news outlets in each country’s journalism field. Other studies based in field theory examine the development and diversity of journalistic subfields (or “beats”) (Marchetti, 2005), the ways journalists use social media (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2017), and the way the journalistic field compares with the social science and political fields (Bourdieu, 2005).

It can also be useful in conceptualizing how different organizations and individuals in the same field might act differently based on their position and incentives or, conversely, why it might be difficult or even impossible for anyone to break out of expected routines. This framework helps me assess how and why particular journalists and certain news organizations in Rwanda are able to practice journalism that diverges from the majority practice to match professional expectations rather than matching the expectations from social pressure and organizational routines.

Journalism fields tend to be mapped by placing organizations on a continuum from a more financially-driven economic pole to a more values-driven cultural pole (a practice I will call into question more explicitly in chapter 5). Using this framework, an entire field (for instance, the field of French journalism compared to the field of American journalism) can fall toward the financial side or the civic side of the continuum, as demonstrated by Benson (2013). Within a field, subfields like sports journalism or actors (organizations or individuals) take their positions along that continuum based on the levels of particular types of capital that they possess (English, 2016; Powers & Vera Zambrano, 2016).

The major types of capital that are often discussed in Bourdieusian field analyses are economic capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and social capital. Field theory ascribes capital to “actors,” which can be organizations (Vandevoordt, 2017) or individuals (Anheier, Gerhards, & Romo, 1995; Bourdieu, 1985). Economic capital is captured more or less by one’s access to financial resources (Benson, 2006). On the individual level, this manifests in the form of paycheck or other income linked to work; for organizations, it can be captured by access to advertising, sales, or other forms of revenue. Cultural capital revolves around the individual or the organization’s ability to produce work that is high quality by field standards. In journalism, this includes individual skills like investigative reporting, skillful questioning in interviews, and compelling writing, and an organization’s reputation for supporting and producing news reports relying on these practices (Benson, 2006; Marlière, 1998). Symbolic

capital represents one's recognition or prestige in the field, and can be thought of in terms of awards and other factors that contribute to a reputation for excellence on the individual or organizational level (Benson & Neveu, 2005). Social capital encompasses access to connections via social network, including powerful contacts in important fields (Portes, 1998). Social, symbolic, and cultural capital are often considered to work together to form a sort of professional capital that is in tension with economic capital (English, 2016). Here again, capital provides a useful explanatory tool for conceptualizing the ways global and local pressures might manifest in different ways to journalists within the field, with some interacting with cultural capital while others interact with economic or social capital.

Institutional theory intersects with field theory in focusing on mid-level analysis by examining the interorganizational and professional environments shaping work norms, products, and routines (Benson, 2006). New institutionalism as used by organizational sociologists allows the researcher to examine relationships between and within organizations in a field to gain a better understanding of how organizations group themselves within that field and how external pressures are internalized as organizational practices and beliefs (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Martin, 2003). Institutional theory suggests mechanisms by which organizations within a field develop processes and frameworks for behavior (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). A focus on institutional theory allows an examination of the ways journalism as an occupation is shaped by its environment, while field theory provides space for deeper exploration of differences among organizations and individuals in that environment. It is particularly helpful for conceptualizing how social positions and events — such as the genocide, in the case of Rwanda — generate shared beliefs that have an enduring impact on behavior despite not being reflected in any written rules or enforced through coercion.

Institutions are “cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior” (W. R. Scott, 2013, p. 33). Institutions define appropriate behavior for particular actors in given social situations. They can be conveyed in

a variety of ways, through culture, structure, and routines, and they can operate at individual, organizational, or field levels (March & Olsen, 1998, 2010). They are cultural messages that “define the way the world is and should be. They provide blueprints for organizing by specifying the forms and procedures an organization of a particular type should adopt if it is to be seen as a member-in-good-standing of its class” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 93–94). Institutions can be strong or weak; a strong institution is at least somewhat stable and enforced, while a weak institution is routinely violated, widely contested, and changes frequently (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009). While the power and existence of institutions in the journalism field is recognized, little work has been done to identify particular institutions and the ways they are communicated and enforced (Ryfe, 2006a, 2006b). Institutions support and encourage particular patterns of organizational development and they also constrain and guide individual actors, such that “individual preferences and choices cannot be understood apart from the larger cultural setting and historical period in which they are embedded” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 188).

In the U.S., institutions governing journalism include a set of rules about how journalists should produce stories, including the practice of indexing, where journalists rely on official sources and fit stories within the prevailing customs of political culture, until credible sources with dissenting views are available to challenge that narrative (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2006; Ryfe, 2006a). They also include routines and rules — assumptions or expectations about appropriate behavior in particular situations, including beliefs and behaviors encompassing journalists’ roles, obligations, and values in the context of news production (Ryfe, 2006b). They can be codified in laws or organizational structures, or they can exist as unwritten social norms and expectations (W. R. Scott, 2013). Powerful forces, whether coercive or non-coercive, whether codified or implicit, can be institutionalized to have lasting shaping power in a field. The variety of forces originating globally and locally that shape a journalism field can thus be considered in an institutional framework.

Institutions have a few key properties that are particularly useful in this study as tools for understanding the ways this variety of forces operating on journalists might be reinforced, and particularly in understanding how journalists in a semi-autonomous field might nevertheless operate in ways that do not seem to be ideal to the field, the organization, or the individual. Institutions are often learned through processes of isomorphism, by which organizations and individuals adopt the behavior of successful field organizations, particularly in the face of financial uncertainty. Institutions are also relatively stable and perpetuated by routines and habits, rather than by collective action or other unusual behavior. Thus, a pattern of routine practices might emerge in response to environmental uncertainty that perpetuates institutions not conducive to field goals but which nevertheless persist and are primarily enforced by practices within the field, rather than by external forces.

Institutions are often adopted and communicated through processes of isomorphism, by which people and organizations evolve over time to adopt similar behaviors as other organizations and people in the field. Through isomorphism, organizations and individual behaviors develop similar characteristics that allow them to pursue their goals while accommodating various pressures. Institutions are created through negotiations between various parties, leading to shared expectations that regulate appropriate behavior and relationships among categories of social actors (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; March & Olsen, 1998; Zucker, 1977). Some institutions are less stable than others, and all can be modified over time (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Benson & Neveu, 2005). Organizations and individuals within fields must then respond to the pressure imposed by particular institutions, modifying their behavior (or choosing not to) in order to occupy particular roles within the field. This process by which organizational structures and individual behaviors come to reflect institutionalized rules is isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The process of change, or isomorphism, tends to happen along one of three paths. Normative isomorphism is pressure to reflect particular values, particularly those prioritized within a profession; coercive isomorphism is the result of pressure from organizations upon which particular organizations or people are

dependent; and mimetic isomorphism is a response to uncertainty by which organizations or people respond to uncertainty by copying others in the field who are perceived as successful (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Glynn & Abzug, 2002).

Journalists in Israel constructed a financial journalism subfield through isomorphism and boundary work (Davidson, 2013). Lowrey (2005) found that newspapers partnering with TV stations followed practices consistent with isomorphism, with normative isomorphism as a primary motivating factor. Taiwanese newspapers in the 1990s responded to economic uncertainty by modeling mimetic isomorphism (S.-C. S. Li & Lee, 2010). The concept appears as well in foundational newsroom studies, for instance where it is identified as newsroom socialization or “learning the ropes” (Breed, 1955). In understanding how particular styles of news production come to be, it is helpful to consider these processes of isomorphism and gradual shaping as patterns of behavior that lead to pervasive practices.

Importantly, institutions are not perpetuated by invasive or extravagant behaviors like collective mobilization or extraordinary action (Clemens & Cook, 1999). Rather, they are social patterns that persist because they are reinforced by “routine reproductive procedures” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 145). In the absence of a shock to the system, routines reinforce and perpetuate institutions. Identifying and analyzing routines is thus central to this dissertation. Journalism studies scholarship has already shown how routines are essential to understanding journalism work. Routines are written and unwritten rules that guide media workers in doing their jobs within particular organizations, and they affect the kinds of stories that become news and the ways those stories are reported (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The news values reporters use to rank possible news items can be considered routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). A study of Congressional news coverage in the U.S. found that routine factors had greater influence than individual-level factors over how the news would be covered (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). Tuchman (1972) discusses the importance of routines to the daily process journalists undertake of producing and disseminating news.

The daily routines of newswriters can highlight important structural and ideological foundations of journalism, from socialization practices (Breed, 1955; Gans, 1979; Singer, 2003) to foundational norms such as the practice of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972) the introduction and evolution of interviews as a journalistic practice (Schudson, 1994), and the ways journalists wrestle with technological change (Boczkowski, 2009, 2010; Usher, 2014). In short, daily routines can reveal the ways news is constructed from reality by particular newswriters in particular organizations (Molotch & Lester, 1974). Routine practices can also shed light on the ways organizations interpret and implement external, institutional pressures, including legal restrictions and social expectations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; W. R. Scott, 2013). In the context of journalists' roles and news production, this lens of routine provides a useful counterpoint to the narratives of practices constructed from either dramatic breaks from expectations or from coercive mechanisms, instead giving some agentic power to routines enforced within particular organizations as workplace tools.

In spite of the theoretical and practical importance of routines, study of journalistic routines outside the U.S. is a relatively recent phenomenon. Current research unpacks particular behaviors, such as the practice of bribery in East African journalism (Skjerdal, 2010). Other scholars compare news content across countries (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006) and compare the values and ideologies of journalists across geographic boundaries (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). But much of this research is based on surveys, content analyses, or, occasionally, interviews with journalists — research methods not well-suited for understanding the common rules and norms in a given environment or the routines undertaken in particular places (Becker & Geer, 1957). Quantitative comparative methods like surveys and content analyses in particular are problematic in the way they ignore “diverse real-world contexts” (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018, p. 3). Atton and Mabweazara (2011) notes that contemporary journalism studies of Africa tend to focus on issues related to democratization of news media and its role in political processes while sidestepping any examination of journalists' routines and

practices. This dissertation fits in this research gap, unpacking a news field through the use of participant observation along with interviews and network analysis. This is important because, for one thing, development programs aimed at “capacity-building” among journalists in many countries across sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere are designed from assumptions about systems that are often unverified, and observation of routines can verify or discredit these practices.

### ***1.3 The context for Rwandan journalism***

The journalism field in Rwanda has roots in the colonial press and a tradition of political alignment and has been studied extensively for its role in and development following the 1994 genocide, which is commonly treated as a critical juncture, a defining moment that upended the field from its status quo and reshaped it to look how it does today. As the country’s politics have taken an authoritarian turn in recent years, the field is thus situated as a key example of a journalism practice that has been recreated from near decimation in a country with strong internal political forces alongside strong links with global communities of practice through early funding and ongoing training opportunities. It thus presents a case that combines both strong local pressure from an authoritarian context and powerful shared history with the likelihood of international pressure from the global journalism field. The findings should, therefore, have broad interest to scholars in communication, policy research, and political science, and shed light on field processes in similar contexts.

Journalism in Rwanda exists in a post-conflict social context with a strong, authoritarian system of governance. In fact, the country’s development has progressed so rapidly since the genocide that many observers feel Rwanda has passed the post-conflict stage and provides an example of a country that has successfully transitioned from conflict through post-conflict reconstruction to development (World Bank, 2009). There is some messiness around the definitions of these terms, but in general “post-conflict” refers to a period of time

immediately following a violent conflict, during which a country is dedicated to rebuilding fragile political institutions and sporadic acts of violence may be ongoing (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008; Strand & Dahl, 2010). Politically, Rwanda is typically considered to have emerged from its fragile state following the 1994 genocide and is even “often seen as an example of reconciliation and social reintegration” (Barbera & Robertson, 2014; World Bank, 2009). In 2013, the United Nations invoked a cessation clause ending the refugee status of people who had fled Rwanda for reasons related to the genocide violence, generating complications for many but further signaling the end of the post-conflict transition period (Edwards, 2013; Kingston, 2017). This “post” post-conflict environment provides an opportunity to examine the ways a journalism field has adapted in the wake of violent conflict and the role it fills in a state that has experienced pervasive violence. Of course, political transition out of post-conflict reconstruction does not signal personal transition. In many ways, Rwandans still grapple on a personal level with the violence of the genocide, as is evident in many studies, including this one.

The work of journalists can be critical to peace and stability, and the international community has dedicated hundreds of millions of dollars to assisting the news media in post-conflict and democratizing societies (R. Howard, 2003). There is good reason for this; the news media play a critical role in the development of conflict, transition out of conflict, and post-conflict reconstruction. Journalism impacts democratic processes and social interaction, and media independence and peace-promoting capacity constitute an aspect of post-conflict recovery (World Bank, 2010). Journalism can be a socially responsible process capable of creating peace in conflict situations (Bläsi, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2004; Shaw, Lynch, & Hackett, 2011). News media are critical to democratic processes like elections (Mattes & Bratton, 2007; Paluck & Green, 2009), legal proceedings including truth commissions and trials (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009), and general community identification (B. Anderson, 2006; Höhne, 2008). As many African states transition into peaceful countries, scholars predict that journalism will play a critical role in the transition out of conflict to post-conflict reconstruction

and beyond. In the late 2000s the number of post-conflict states on the African continent surpassed the number of states in conflict, suggesting that a number of states are currently or will soon have the potential to transition from post-conflict to peaceful status (Nkurunziza, 2008). In spite of these signals that the journalism field has an important and growing role in governance and state transition, little is known about how journalists in such contexts operate. International donor interventions are often based on broad generalizations from Western experiences (Karlowicz, 2002), even though models of governance and even democracy are varied, with varied implications for the media systems (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). Even in the West, there is no one model media system, and outside the West generalization is even more difficult (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2012; Waisbord, 2013). The Rwandan case provides an opportunity to examine how a particular journalism field has weathered a transition out of conflict through post-conflict reconstruction to political stability.

The bulk of English-language research on the history of Rwandan journalism focuses on the genocide and the period immediately before it.<sup>1</sup> In the East African region, print media appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with settler presses established as extensions of European news outlets and following home country journalism norms to carry news to the colonies (Abuoga & Mutere, 1988; Scotton, 1973; Sturmer, 2008 [1998]). Local language newspapers began to develop soon after, and through the early 20th century, they focused primarily on internal conflict of little interest to the colonial presences. However, starting in the 1920s news outlets in Uganda and elsewhere began to publish social and political commentary pushing for independence (Scotton, 1973). Starting around then, journalism fields in the region began to occupy a social space of political engagement and alignment with particular policies and parties in support of a national interest (Carter, 1968). In many African states, journalism fields have grown within a context of historical tension between democratic liberation movements and Marxist and Africanist one-party statism (Rønning &

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<sup>1</sup>Francophone histories on Rwanda and neighboring countries also tend to invoke the media only in passing until the late 20th century.

Kupe, 2000). Rwanda is one example: Through the 1970s it, along with a dozen other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, had a legally enforced one-party political system that shaped press freedom and role (Jose, 1975).

More recent scholarship on journalism in Rwanda has primarily revolved around the role journalists played in the 1994 genocide. Indeed, few studies of Rwanda since 1994 have attempted to focus on anything *but* the genocide and its aftereffects on this culture, particularly where news media are concerned. In brief, as Cruikshank (2016) summarizes, throughout the early 1990s leading up to the genocide, journalists — particularly those in radio — worked with the government to propagate messages of division and violence between the two major ethnic groups in Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi. The division between these ethnic groups was due, at least in part, to a census practice instituted by Belgian colonial leaders in the 1930s. Belgians assigned ethnic identities based on physical features, providing Rwandans with identity cards to proclaim those identities and then assigning roles of power to those identified as Tutsi who, Belgians declared, looked more European and thus were superior (Barnett, 2002). This division persisted through decolonization in 1961, with Hutu-identifying Rwandans claiming many positions of power. By the end of the 1980s, almost 500,000 Rwandans, many Tutsi, were refugees in neighboring countries (United Nations, n.d.). The Rwandan Patriotic Front formed in Kampala, Uganda, in 1988. The RPF, composed primarily of Tutsi refugees, began an attack on Rwanda in 1990, and the media along with government launched a campaign to label all Tutsi as RPF accomplices and all Hutu members of opposition parties as traitors (United Nations, n.d.). Peace talks in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1993 ostensibly ended the conflict between the two groups, but an extremist Hutu group continued to plan violence. On April 6, 1994, the Rwandan president died when a rocket attack crashed the plane he was aboard. The death sparked the genocide, in which at least 800,000 people, primarily of Tutsi ethnicity, were killed over the course of about 100 days. The genocide ended in early July when RPF forces took command of the entire country.

Media outlets mirrored and enhanced this ethnic division throughout the genocide and the period leading up to it. Political alignment among media outlets in the late 20th century primarily consisted of ethnic alignment, as political divisions aligned with ethnic divisions (A. Thompson, 2007). Leading up to the genocide, news content was reviewed by official censors prior to publication to ensure that it replicated official messaging aligned with the anti-Tutsi government regime (Barton, 2001). Radio dependency combined with messaging around division and violence contributed to the genocide (Kellow & Steeves, 1998). Along with this broad messaging, particular media outlets, including Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines and the newspaper *Kangura*, were responsible for stirring up violence and preparing the way for the genocide, which took place in April, 1994. This role is memorialized locally as well as in global scholarship: A portion of the Genocide Memorial in Kigali is devoted to the media's role in the genocide. According to this exhibit, more than 20 newspapers and journals spread hate messages against the Tutsi leading up to the genocide. The exhibit depicts examples of racist cartoons and other forms of media coverage that deepened the perceived divide between Hutu and Tutsi. A. Thompson (2007) further details the role journalists and media outlets in Rwanda and abroad played in creating and perpetuating the genocide, and McIntyre and Sobel (2017) outline ways journalists have responded to this background by filling socially responsible roles and practicing "constructive journalism" today.

The first school of journalism in Rwanda was inaugurated at the National University of Rwanda in Butare in 1996; prior to this, journalists were trained on the job or internationally (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007). The 2003 Rwandan constitution imposed regulations on journalism practice and instituted licensing practices for media houses starting with the constitution in 2003 with modifications in 2009 (Rwandan Parliament, 2009) and 2013 (Rwandan Parliament, 2013). The constitution instituted an external regulatory body, today called the Media High Council, to oversee media freedom, responsibility, and professionalism (Puri, 2014). The 2009 law also required all media houses operating in Rwanda to register with

the government (Kagire, 2010; Puri, 2014). Media analyses routinely find that these latter developments in Rwanda's political system restrict media freedom and prevent journalists from reporting or publishing the news freely (Freedom House, 2017a; Gonza, 2012). Current political structures are designed to keep the ruling elite in power and prevent the return of hate media, and they accomplish this by limiting media freedom through legal sanctions and harassment (Cruikshank, 2017). However, Rwandan laws also provide some protections for a free press. The constitution guarantees press freedom and freedom of speech, with some supporting media laws, including one mandating information availability (Gonza, 2012). While citizens have access to comment functions online more readily now than in the past, they are not yet using the platforms to foster a vibrant sphere of public debate; they tend to be reluctant to comment on or highlight events or problems that would incriminate superiors or government officials, even when journalists seek them out as sources (Nduhura & Prieler, 2017). Recent research has pointed out that metrics such as those prepared by Reporters Without Borders tend to overlook the importance of economic context in limiting the freedom available to the Rwandan journalism field, and that self-censorship tends to be much more common than overt censorship (Holliday, 2017).

This journalism field exists in relationship with a strong state. The term "strong state" can have many meanings, but there are a few commonly agreed-upon characteristics. A strong state is able to create and enforce rules and norms that penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use those resources in determined ways; in a strong state, leaders can get people to do what they want (Migdal, 1988). Strong states effectively deliver political goods, including, most importantly, security from other forces within and outside the country; they also provide methods of adjudicating disputes and they regulate social norms (Rotberg, 2004). They have the power to tax and regulate their economies and to withstand political and social challenges from non-state actors (Acemoglu, 2005). They are relatively stable, with enforced regulations, and are able to generate shared expectations about appropriate behavior (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009). States can be

strong while having limited scope for that strength. In other words, they enforce capably, but the scope of regulations they enforce is limited (Fukuyama, 2004). While it is common to assume that “developing” or “non-Western” countries, especially in Africa, have weak or transitional states (Mentan, 2004; Migdal, 1988), this is not always the case.

While the status of the Rwandan government fuels much scholarly controversy, scholars generally agree that it is, in many ways, powerful and effective. Scholars and world leaders have recognized that, even in the years leading up to the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was a strong state with a high degree of state legitimacy, undeserving of the “failed state” label many applied at the time (Barnett, 2002; Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). In the late 1980s, financial institutions “flocked to Kigali . . . finding in Rwanda a relatively sophisticated administrative structure” and a “model of efficiency,” in spite of the country’s few natural resources and unstable neighbors (Barnett, 2002, p. 54, 60). Since the genocide, the ruling party under the leadership of president Paul Kagame has created and enforced powerful regulations around economics, politics, and other aspects of social and political life; government officials have tried to deviate from Kagame’s policies, but have not succeeded (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). Political elites acquire and centralize economic holdings, with many of the major income-generating businesses in Rwanda owned in part or in full by government entities (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). “Politically generated opportunities for profit are comprehensively institutionalized and centralized” and attempts to oppose this practice are quickly rejected (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012, p. 387).<sup>2</sup> Rwanda is known for taking independent and unpopular policy stances in spite of its dependence on international aid (Straus & Waldorf, 2011).

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<sup>2</sup>While it is outside the scope of this dissertation to examine the political and social factors that make Rwanda a strong state, a few are worth noting as they are relevant to the field of journalism: Language, ethnic identity, and geography. The country is small (Herbst, 2014) and the entire country shares one indigenous language (Migdal, 1988). It is one of the world’s 50 smallest countries and is one of the 10 smallest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Since the 1994 genocide, the country’s leadership has gone to great lengths to erase any outward sign of division between the country’s Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, instead enforcing neighborhood-style community organizations called *umudugudus* and promoting unifying slogans like “we are all Rwandan.”

Residents of Rwanda enjoy a secure existence with a low crime rate. This is particularly noticeable in Kigali, the capital city, in contrast with nearby capitals such as Kampala in Uganda and Nairobi in Kenya.

After a few very difficult years (after the genocide), Kigali swiftly became a regional anomaly characterized by orderly urbanization and low levels of crime, rather than becoming a space of endemic violence as might be expected given the circumstances. A recent study of policing in Rwanda noted that the vast majority of Rwandans — city dwellers included — feel secure (Goodfellow & Smith, 2013, p. 3186).

Expats and locals in Kigali corroborate this statement; one editor said he would not consider newsworthy a story on how clean Kigali's streets are, because clean streets are the norm in town, in contrast to other capitals in the region. A direct counterpart to this safety and security is that the government also enforces strong penalties for breaking laws. Rwanda's urban spaces are carefully zoned and construction projects are subject to the swiftly enforced zoning plans, with corrective state action to remedy illegal construction being "the rule, rather than the exception" (Goodfellow, 2013, p. 89). In short,

There is no doubt that the RPF has a vision that it has successfully implemented, particularly in economic development, and an ambitious modernization drive more generally. ...Kigali has seen a building spree, and the city is clean and safe. Elites are competent and cosmopolitan, civil servants are at their desks, and there is little petty corruption" (Reyntjens, 2013, p. xvi).

By many measures, then, the Rwandan state is strong.

The Rwandan government is nominally democratic and provides significant public works and services, but also tightly controls most of society, leading some to categorize it as a

hybrid form of government (i.e. “development authoritarianism”) and others to simply label it authoritarian (Matfess, 2015, p. 182). Authoritarianism is typically determined by four measures: lack of competitive, free, and fair elections; a legislature that is controlled by the ruling party or is nonexistent; lack of independent judiciary; and lack of civil liberties, particularly freedom of the press and freedom to criticize government (Levitsky & Way, 2002). The Rwandan government’s development program, called “Vision 2020,” has itself been described as authoritarian for its reliance on Kagame’s individual connections, lack of political dissent, and destruction of civil society even while it encourages rapid economic growth (Friedman, 2012). Rwandan governance also meets most of the particular criteria to be considered authoritarian. While Rwanda has held regular elections since 2003 and multiple parties can run, in the most recent election, incumbent president Paul Kagame ran for a third term after a special election in 2015 extended his term limits from two to five. In the August 2017 election, Kagame beat the opposition candidate, Frank Habineza, with 99 percent of the vote (Baddorf, 2017; Muvunyi, 2017). An election is considered competitive when the incumbent wins by 70 percent of the vote or less (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Other democratic institutions around voting and representation, particularly the practice of proportional representation, have also been shown to in fact support single-party rule in Rwanda rather than diversifying the perspectives represented (Guariso, Ingelaere, & Verpoorten, 2017; Stroh, 2010). Samset (2011) points out that presidential and parliamentary elections in 2003 and 2008 were characterized by strong pressure to vote for the ruling party and by ballot box fraud.

The Rwandan constitution grants the president power to dissolve Parliament and appoint the Prime Minister (Rwandan Parliament, 2015). The *gacaca* transitional justice program, a community court system implemented to address domestic genocide crimes based on historical, local dispute resolution practices, has been critiqued as a vehicle for the ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, to consolidate power (Loyle, 2018). Under this argument, the courts provide a way for political opposition to be silenced by oppressive government

authority acting in the interests of genocide prevention and bridging ethnic division (Loyle, 2018). Under legislation passed in 2001, the Rwandan government controls the finances and projects of all NGOs in the country, resulting in a lack of opposition and independent NGOs (Mwambari, 2017). One particular way the government in Rwanda emphasizes central control is around memory and history. The RPF tends to carefully control genocide-related history and even personal stories, creating a centralized process of remembering a shared history. In so doing, the party “disparages blind obedience to history while demanding the very same thing from the population” (Eramian, 2017, p. 642). This shared historical narrative is enforced by laws limiting expression and suppressing alternate narratives about the genocide and other aspects of Rwandan history; people and organizations who question the approved narrative are accused of the crime of genocide ideology (Jessee, 2011; Kelley, 2017). In 2015, the BBC was accused of genocide denial and banned from Rwanda for airing a broadcast about the genocide suggesting that Kagame may have played a role in shooting down his predecessor’s airplane, a main event that triggered the genocide, and suggesting that many of the Rwandans who died in the genocide may have been Hutu, not Tutsi (Baird, 2015).

In Rwanda, political regulations are generally supportive of information technology, and the country is an incubator for creative tech projects like Zipline International, a California-based startup that plans to use drones to deliver medicine and blood to rural hospital patients in Rwanda. The World Economic Forum hosted its 2016 forum on Africa in Kigali, touting the country’s competitive economy, business environment improvements, and “rapid evolution as a knowledge economy” (WEF, 2016). Indeed, while the country ranks in the bottom third of all countries measured on technology infrastructure, affordability, and access, it ranks in the top third worldwide for its supportive regulatory politics and an environment encouraging business innovation. Rwanda also measures high on the Alliance for Affordable Internet’s Affordability Drivers Index, ranking 11th out of 51 countries. Thus, while the typical Rwandan’s network access is limited and expensive at present, relevant measures suggest that technological innovation is being encouraged. The context of my fieldwork was thus one

that provided limited technological availability but encouraged an innovative mindset.

The political environment also makes Rwanda a valuable case for observing the journalism field. Rwanda used media policy as a tool of state reconstruction following the 1994 genocide. That event served as a critical juncture, spurring the creation of peace-building media policies (Allen & Stremlau, 2005). There is in general little consensus on best practices for such policies, which can involve contradictory strategies. In Rwanda, for instance, media regulatory policy implemented in steps after the genocide both guarantee press freedom and mandate that the media avoid defamation and discussions of ethnicity or discrimination (Bonde, Uwimana, Sowa, & O'Neil, 2015; Harber, 2014). The Rwandan context provides a case study of a media system intentionally rebuilt in policy and practice over a relatively short period of time. Because many journalists were killed or fled the country in 1994 (Morse, 2008), Rwanda offers a chance to examine a media system constructed from policy in the absence of much of the institutionalized tradition that is often passed down within newsrooms. Because this influence from newsroom tradition is likely to be weak, examining Rwanda's journalism field means examining a system that may be particularly subject to influence by external factors such as policy and the availability of technology. This provides me a chance to more clearly identify the influences of policy and technology access and the ways those factors have influenced the field.

The country's news media are often studied in the context of their role in and after the 1994 genocide (Allen & Stremlau, 2005; Alozie, 2007; Frère, 2013; A. Thompson, 2007). In the wake of the genocide, which evidence suggests was supported by press freedom (Allen & Stremlau, 2005), the Rwandan government implemented regulations both guaranteeing press freedom and prohibiting certain coverage. Constitutional regulations (passed in 2003 and amended several times since) mandate that the media avoid defamation and discussions of ethnicity or discrimination (Bonde et al., 2015; Harber, 2014). There is evidence that government regulations have negative consequences for the press. One journalist reported

death threats and visits from security officials after reporting on taboo topics, including the army, corruption, and the president (A. Thompson, 2007).

Alongside these regulations, Rwanda is held up in recent scholarly and popular writing as “an example of reconciliation and social reintegration” post-genocide (Barbera & Robertson, 2014). This success could be linked with government information control strategies over news media and other forms of communication (Reyntjens, 2011). Thus, evidence suggests that the Rwandan news field is subject to strong and cohesive government pressure to produce news in a particular way. On one level, this calls into question the validity of calling it a field at all. In Bourdieu’s original conceptualization, to be considered a field, an occupational group must enjoy some level of autonomy; Bourdieu considered journalism already to have a low degree in general, so a particularly low level of autonomy in a particular site of practice might call the field-ness into question (Benson & Neveu, 2005). However, recent expansions of field theory suggest that “heteronomous” cultural fields can be particularly important sites of culture creation (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Hesmondhalgh further points out that it is worth examining the nature of particular types of autonomy in contemporary production. In addition, research on journalism in Africa suggests that the heteronomy of journalism practice on the continent is in fact a fundamental value to practitioners, with studies identifying deference to authority as an important value peculiar to African media systems alongside universal values like truth-telling and accuracy (Mfumbusa, 2008). I suggest that close examination of border sites like the Rwandan journalism field, which fall along the margins of the traditional definition of a field, are necessary to bring field theory to bear on the diversity of global journalism practices in the 21st century.

In this dissertation I highlight several factors that shape the contemporary Rwandan journalism field. Some of these factors are internal, including the fact that rules and norms within the field are unevenly, and seldom, enforced, and the fact that media organizations and, to a lesser extent, journalists themselves have competing and strongly-held ideas of what

role journalism should hold in society. Some factors are external. These include the effect of shared social narratives create strong myths guiding journalistic practice on individual and organizational levels and pressure from influential advertisers shaping news narratives.

The journalism field is a critical contributor to political culture with the potential to, among other things, enhance the stability or insecurity of states. Understanding it in the context of authoritarian states that have experienced conflict both adds to the scholarly conversation and has the potential to enhance journalistic practice and policymaking endeavors in these countries. This dissertation defines and unpacks layers of influence on news organizations and individual journalists and leads to insights on regulatory oversight of the media that can be useful to scholars, policymakers, and analysts. My research draws on media sociology studies in Western and non-Western contexts, on new institutionalism and field theory, and on what those fields say about different influences combine to shape the journalism field. This research is crucial to understanding how social, political, and professional forces impact journalists and how they view their social role in post-conflict and authoritarian-leaning environments, and extends communication research in these areas.

#### ***1.4 Implications: Understanding influence on the journalism field***

This dissertation brings new data to bear on an old problem, highlighting the complexities of journalism practice and perception in a little-studied context. I answer the question posed earlier — **In a field suspended between global demands communicated by field leaders and education and local pressures of governance and social context, what does it mean to be a journalist?** — in three parts. To sum up, the Rwandan journalism field is shaped by a series of institutions that structure action, sometimes reinforcing and perpetuating through social obligation and habit behavior that is not the journalist's ideal behavior. While global influence is apparent in education and in field standards set in the Rwandan journalists' code of ethics and in the behavior encouraged by professional

organizations, local factors specific to the Rwandan context intervene to shape how journalists view their social position and to encourage routines that result in a context-dependent journalism field whose practitioners are persistently aware of the divide between what they practice and what they are taught.

Some of the institutions shaping the journalism field are formalized, such as the obligation to write a certain number of stories per month in order to get paid. Some are part of the social milieu, such as the shared belief that casts journalists as social villains because of the influential and violence-perpetuating role they played in the genocide and places on them a responsibility to redeem their image. Many of these institutions are more restrictive with more shaping power on the journalism field than the rule of law, suggesting that even in an authoritarian country with restrictive media policy, coercive and non-coercive institutions within the field and broader social understanding have substantial shaping power over journalism practice.

I show that journalists understand themselves in light of past events, which form myths that both constrain and guide the normative and practical possibilities of the contemporary field. Working within these constraints, journalists decide what news to publish based on often contradictory implicit and explicit expectations communicated from within and outside the field. In the Rwandan context, journalists are unlikely to break from their expected routines of self-censoring to publish positive, events-focused news, but those who do produce news that is more independent and critical are enabled to do so both by their individual ability to produce good content but also by their access to and protection from an organization that is outside the field and thus not subject to the financial constraints binding local organizations and journalists working at them.

This dissertation examines the ways that the field of journalism in Rwanda is institutionally constructed at organizational and individual levels. In so doing, it takes an institutional

approach to understanding how journalists construct a social role that defines the boundaries of appropriate behavior in the field and the ways they learn to practice self-censorship, further tightening the boundaries of acceptable behavior in the field. Finally, I examine the factors that allow some journalists to redefine their social role to practice watchdog journalism, taking a more critical monitorial role rather than a collaborative role of partnership with political and business authorities. In the background of this discussion is the broader concept of press freedom. Inherent to institutional theory is the idea that no social agent acts from a position of complete freedom; rules of the game are set by a combination of forces, at least some of which are outside the control of the individual actor. As Christians et al. (2009) say, “it is a libertarian illusion to assume that some media are free while others are unfree; they are all extensions of social forces of some kind” (p. 221). I show the ways that external constraints typically separated — politics and business — can intersect to put pressure on journalists in new ways, and I also show that even in very politically constrained environments another form of liberty, informed by field interaction with social history and shared myths about journalism, can add additional, powerful constraints on “freedom.” Many people I interviewed immediately assumed I was asking about political freedom when I asked whether they felt free, and they pointed out that the laws protect journalists who are practicing their occupation appropriately. If a journalist writes a report that is accurate and follows rules of professionalism, he or she would not be taken to court or thrown in jail, many pointed out. Of course, this is a somewhat simplistic presentation of the reality of doing journalism in Rwanda, but I interviewed journalists who were routinely producing critical news and had not faced recent government harassment, and others often pointed to these real-life examples to justify their feeling that the law more or less protects journalists, even those who investigate power.

However, the following pages highlight the ways that journalists are, nonetheless, constrained. A variety of historical, social, and organizational factors in the Rwandan context ensure that journalists for the most part are not tempted to test the boundaries of their

political freedom, instead self-policing to freely embrace a position of relatively little social power. Y. Li (2017) observes a similar phenomenon taking place in U.S. journalism, where a shift to native advertising in recent years has accompanied a shift in journalism fields to willingly cede some autonomy. My analysis suggests that it would be worthwhile to revisit standard measures of press freedom to examine more holistically the flow between different possible constraints. The strong link between political and economic power in Rwanda creates an environment where one kind of freedom is offset by constraints in another form. The collaboration between social forces moreover means that it is unlikely that the field of journalism will change as a result of institutional entrepreneurship. Journalists who choose to follow different rules do so by exiting the game and working for an organization with financial backing and a primary audience outside the country.

My research also highlights strategies journalists practice to embrace a socially undesirable form of journalism when it is not possible to exploit competing demands or ideals within the system. Journalists in Rwanda who wish to practice critical journalism are discouraged from doing so at local outlets by a combination of factors including social stigma, personal misgivings, organizational routines emphasizing timeliness and high rates of productivity, and identities formed in response to shared memories of historical events. As a result, journalists who wish to critique the status quo do so by exiting the local field and entering a parallel field of transnational organizations whose news production processes are subject to different constraints and incentives than those binding local organizations and individual journalists working independently. I find that the only journalists able to interrogate their surroundings in a way demanded by journalism educators and field-supporting organizations is by, in a sense, trading the field of local journalism for that of transnational journalism. Journalists who do this exist in a precarious position, because they choose to snub much of the unspoken, de facto professional guidance of the field in favor of de jure policies that, on their face, enable a journalistic practice that is in fact highly discouraged. This finding builds on recent research around the position of foreign correspondents in their communities

(Bunce, 2012), a field that merits further exploration. Essentially, I argue that journalism in Rwanda is a game where the rules are set such that it is highly unlikely that journalists within the game will act in a way contrary to the government's interests. They possess a degree of autonomy, but the framework is constructed in a way that there is little to gain and much to lose by straying from government expectations. Thus, journalists don't need to be directly controlled in ways one would expect from a strong authoritarian government. They instead face a set of definitions around appropriate and possible behavior that restrict their actions to government-approved behavior that produces news content that is generally not investigative or invasive and does not challenge authority. The only actors with power and incentive to consistently break the government's rules are, in a sense, playing a different game, because they work for organizations based outside the field.

This dissertation highlights the gaps between the relatively Americanized, liberal-democratic style of journalism that Rwandan journalists say they aspire to — a style of journalism that, at its idealized best, investigates authority, speaks truth to power, and stands up for the powerless with a powerful social voice of its own — and the socially disempowered, government-aligned style of journalism that they tend to practice that involves more waiting for the official narrative than striking out for a compelling story. In so doing, it builds on recent scholarship examining the gaps between what journalists want to do, what they say they do, and what they actually do. As recent critics have pointed out, journalism scholarship tends to conflate journalists' attitudes and performances, rather than distinguishing between normative ideas, cognitive orientations, narrated performance, and actual practice (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). The observational and interview data collected for this dissertation provide evidence for unpacking some of the distinctions between these aspects of journalism work. I highlight some of the ways that journalists make sense of practice requirements in a particular social context (Ryfe, 2018).

One of the most common narratives I heard to explain why journalism is the way it is

in Rwanda is that journalists don't know how to "think critically." I heard this from every point of view, from expats employed to train young (and older) journalists in the country, to frustrated editors wondering why their reporters wouldn't produce more investigative journalism, to reporters themselves. According to this narrative, journalism in Rwanda is weak, mistrusted, and rarely critical of political power because journalists haven't been taught — or even more dangerously, cannot learn — how to question the obvious, to write extended narratives that rely on document analysis rather than soundbite-focused interviews, or how to decide what stories will be interesting to their audience. Popular narrative takes this criticism to an extreme to announce that, in fact, there are no "real journalists" left in Rwanda at all, because those who do produce news in the country only toe the party line (Sundaram, 2016).

This dissertation shows instead that journalists in Rwanda and, potentially, in other authoritarian systems are motivated by financial, social, and political considerations to act strategically in ways that primarily extend the hegemonic power of the regime, but occasionally undermine it by producing, primarily for transnational outlets, news stories that critique powerful figures. It does not seem to be the case that journalists in Rwanda are unable to think critically. Instead, I found it apparent that an extraordinary amount of strategic thinking is required on a daily basis to stay employed as a journalist in Rwanda. It just happens to be the case that journalists must balance their desire to be paid and not lose their jobs against their desire to practice journalism as it is taught in journalism school. In some ways, journalists perpetuate their own disempowerment, in part as a response to the genocide. But in other ways, journalists respond to the realities of the cultural and political environment and make strategic decisions to produce news coverage in a style that will not rock the boat. This has implications for future journalism research and for policy interventions. My findings suggest that structural factors play a strong role in bounding the behaviors available to journalists in any particular context, and that these deserve a stronger research focus especially in non-Western countries. On a policy level, my findings suggest that interventions aimed at teaching individual journalists to "think critically" — a style of

intervention and a critique I observed frequently during my fieldwork — are bound to be ineffective as long as they focus on the individual and ignore the system that perpetuates and rewards journalism that is uncritical.

To extend the game metaphor of field theory over the specific journalism field in Rwanda, I propose that it is a game where the rules are set such that it is highly unlikely that journalists within the game will act in a way contrary to the government's interests. They possess a degree of autonomy, in that journalists are not typically censored overtly or systematically punished by the government for critical coverage. However, the framework is constructed in a way that there is little to gain and much to lose, in terms of financial stability and job security, by straying from government expectations. Thus, journalists don't need to be directly controlled in ways one would expect from a strong authoritarian government; they instead face a set of definitions around appropriate and possible behavior that restrict their actions to government-approved behavior. The only actors with power and incentive to consistently break the government's rules are, in a sense, playing a different game, because they work for organizations based outside the field. Organizations that are funded primarily by subscribers based outside of Rwanda and are not dependent on Rwandan advertising to stay solvent lack the financial incentive to play by Rwandan rules and many are instead driven by a commitment to a relatively libertarian style of news reporting and investigation that subscribers demand. Those organizations have the power of international audiences and funding behind them, and the ability to protect and reward journalists who practice investigation and critical news coverage.

This understanding redefines the challenges and potential solutions that have been identified by observers. If the restrictions on independent journalism lie at an organizational and institutional level, changing individual journalists' orientations and approaches through skills training, "critical thinking" training, and capacity-building are unlikely to have an effect. However, these were the most common interventions I observed, and the interventions most

often recommended by editors and other field leaders. This focus is perhaps strategic on the part of leaders, as focusing the “blame” for poor field performance on individual journalists also serves an important goal of abdicating senior leadership from responsibility. If the problem is individuals, then the solution also lies with individuals, and there’s not much that anyone else can do but hope it gets better. However, my analysis suggests that journalists are motivated by a number of factors, each of which presents a possibility for change. This dissertation uses observations and interviews to construct a portrait of a journalism field that has been rarely studied, thus adding new, detailed data to the study of journalism as it is practiced in countries around the world. My observations lead me to suggest a new model of authoritarian pocketbook power — a model in which journalists are controlled not by overt authoritarian oppression but by a combination of rules, which are socially constructed and enforced with financial incentives, that lead them to take particular positions of relative weakness and unwillingness to question the status quo. As authoritarian rule gains traction across sub-Saharan Africa and other regions, this research is particularly relevant (Shapiro, 2017).

### **1.5 *Dissertation outline***

This dissertation proceeds in the following way: chapter 2 describes the methods used to collect data and the basic structure of the journalism field in Rwanda. In chapter 3, I explore the ways that the social role of the journalism field is constructed, by journalists themselves and by those outside the field. In chapter 4, I unpack the process by which journalists decide what to publish, shedding light on this complex process. In chapter 5, I outline the factors that allow some journalists to resist these field and social pressures to produce different kinds of news content. Finally, I conclude in chapter 6 by summarizing my findings and suggesting implications of this dissertation and directions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### **A NETWORK ETHNOGRAPHY OF RWANDAN JOURNALISM**

The previous chapter (chapter 1) lays out the reasons it is important to study journalism practice and how the journalism field in Rwanda can add to scholarly understanding. In this chapter, I explain the methods I employed in this study and describe the journalism field in Rwanda.

This study is informed by a desire to both “observe what people do” (Gans, 1999, p. 540) and understand the motivations for those actions. To study journalism culture in Rwanda, I conducted a network ethnography, combining traditional ethnographic methods with case selection guided by social network analysis (P. N. Howard, 2002). This methodological approach has been widely adopted as a way to accommodate the importance of networks — physical and virtual — in information economies while not neglecting the physical spaces where work is largely done (C. W. Anderson, 2009, 2013; Boyles, 2016, 2017). In journalism studies, it has been suggested as a way to track members of a community of practice that may be more distributed than a traditional newsroom network (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Reese (2016) also highlights the utility of network ethnography as a method that allows the researcher to explore news creation in forms that may be dispersed and decentralized. Lewis (2010) points out that a site-selection method that encompasses multiple methods and field “sites” is necessary to understand the complexity of newswork today. Ethnographic methods guided by digitally aided site selection have been particularly recommended as a way to study African newsrooms, where virtual networks impact news decisions and journalism culture but physical locations are still important (Mabweazara, 2010; Mabweazara & Mare, 2017).

Social network analysis aims to conceptualize and quantify the “structure of the social world,” often by producing a visualization and quantified measurements of network connect- edness that can be investigated using formal mathematical reasoning (J. Scott, 2000, p. 37). Social network analysis capitalizes on the ideas that there are several possible kinds of ties between people or things; that those ties and an individual’s location in a network determine the individual’s power and potential outcome; and that network ties and tie formation are important to study (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009). Research using social net- works has shed light on the ways people share information, spread diseases, and interact in other ways (Barabási, 2016; Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Granovetter, 1977). As noted above, social network analysis has been used effectively to capture networks of news production and identify nodes for in-depth study (C. W. Anderson, 2013; Boyles, 2016).

There are, of course, challenges with this approach, both with the method itself and with the sampling procedure. First, because social networks are not created by random sample and are intended to portray a complete network, any omission caused by missing data or an inaccurately drawn boundary alters network measurements (Kossinets, 2006). Another challenge is that of ascertaining what meaning should be assigned to the observed network connections, since often the observable link only represents part of a pattern of interaction between two actors (S. Wasserman, 1994). For these reasons, the method can be particu- larly useful when paired with interviews and physical observation as P. N. Howard (2002) suggests. A second challenge of doing social network analysis lies in identifying a social network to analyze. Past network ethnographies of journalism fields have relied on software to collect links between news websites (C. W. Anderson, 2013; Boyles, 2016). However, the limited web presence of news outlets in Rwanda proved this network choice to be ineffective for this study’s population; few Rwandan news outlets had websites in late 2016, and those that did tended to not hyperlink to other sites. Twitter networks presented a reasonable alternative to ground the social network for this study. Twitter is a commonly used social

media platform whose popularity is exploding across sub-Saharan Africa, and is especially popular for its information-sharing capabilities (Hussey, 2016). Journalists use the tool to share information, share breaking news, live-blog, and cultivate sources (Habel, Moon, & Fang, 2017; Hermida, 2013; Verweij & van Noort, 2014). Because of this, this dissertation builds a network ethnography from a Twitter-based social network dataset.

Ethnographic research has a long tradition within journalism studies as a way to better identify and understand the process of news production (Cottle, 2000). Classic newsroom ethnographic studies helped researchers better understand what news values reporters and editors rely on in deciding which stories to pursue (Gans, 1979), how editors and reporters define the value of “objectivity” and how that influences newswork (Tuchman, 1972), and other elements of the relationships and negotiations involved in news production. Participant observation is often paired with interviews to help the researcher better understand the meaning behind observed behaviors. Using these ethnographic methods I attempt to shed light on some underexamined newsroom realities and question some of the “orthodox ideas and heresies” presented as dichotomies by Cottle (2000, p. 21). This research is theoretically grounded in field theory and organizational sociology with an aim to understand journalism culture, particularly as it is shaped by technology access or lack and by the policy environment. But I also approached fieldwork with a conscious effort to remain aware of other factors at work in the field, driven by the understanding that “participant observation, perhaps more than most other methods is destined to be reflexive, open to the contingencies of the field experience and therefore less than strictly linear in its execution or predictable in its findings” (Cottle, 2007, p. 5). In unpacking the phenomenon reported here, I benefited from the strengths of ethnographic work in its ability to highlight the dynamic and embedded nature of cultural production and reveal the complex interactions of forces, constraints, and conventions that shape the news (Cottle, 2007). A triangulation of research methods including observation, document analysis, and interviews shed further light on these interactions.

This study faced limitations incurred by the context of study. In choosing to study physical and virtual spaces of news production in Rwanda, I faced data-gathering challenges imposed by cultural, political, and infrastructure constraints. First, Rwanda is notorious for its culture of secrecy and indirectness, even at levels of organization one might expect to be forthcoming. As one scholar notes,

Rwandan public policy has been characterized by unnecessary secrecy and its inevitable counterpart, unrestrained rumour-spreading. One of the effects of this is a remarkably low level of knowledge and understanding about some of the topics that concern us, even at quite senior levels in government and in the resident international community (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012, p. 384).

This culture, of course, shapes news production in the country in ways I note in following chapters. It also has an impact on data-gathering within the country. Throughout my research it was difficult and often impossible to verify information through paper trails or other publicly documented forms of information. In addition to the closed nature of Rwandan discourse and relationships, infrastructure in the country presented challenges of its own. Rwanda ranks eleventh worst in the world for household penetration and diffusion of ICTs. It ranks in the bottom 50 countries in the world for its technology and electricity infrastructure and affordability (Dutta, Geiger, & Lanvin, 2015). However, mobile technology is ubiquitous. Perhaps as a result, many people communicate over WhatsApp, Facebook, and SMS, and they tend to only respond to messages if they already know the sender or have been introduced through mutual acquaintances. Thus, it was difficult to build a network of journalists in the country before arrival, and I spent a significant part of my early fieldwork visiting with different journalists and building connections. Rwanda is ranked relatively high in a final challenge to fieldwork in Rwanda is that of language. While there are now four official languages in Rwanda — Kinyarwanda, English, French, and Swahili — Kinyarwanda, the majority language, is spoken by nearly 95 percent of the population (U.S. Government, 2015). Less than 0.1 percent of the population speaks French or English (U.S. Gov-

ernment, 2015). Most journalists I encountered in Kigali were relatively elite and educated and spoke at least some English, which has been the language of instruction in Rwanda since 2008, or French, which was the primary language of instruction until then (McGreal, 2008). However, I entered fieldwork with the expectation that I would need to work with a local translator to conduct interviews and observations in Kinyarwanda in order to best understand my fieldsites.

## **2.1 Data collection and analysis**

Using a Python script, I scraped data from Twitter to construct a network composed of news outlets listed as authorized to operate in Rwanda by the country’s Media High Council in November 2016. I also included nodes followed by at least two of those news networks, in order to visualize and measure the ways those news outlets were connected on Twitter. In this way, I mapped the Rwandan journalism field as it was represented online in late 2016 (C. W. Anderson, 2013). The goal of this analysis was to capture the important points of news production in Rwanda by casting a net broad enough to include traditional and non-traditional news producers. The starting point for this network analysis was, by necessity, a list of traditional news producers, but the network scraping tool was implemented to capture nontraditional producers as well in the final network visualization. The map, shown in Figure 2.1, illustrates how Rwanda’s journalism network looked in November, 2016, based on these data. Nodes in Figure 2.1 are sized relative to their betweenness centrality, a measure of a node’s relative connectedness to other nodes in the network.<sup>1</sup> This figure highlights the centrality of the *New Times* in the Rwandan journalism field. The *New Times* has the highest measure of betweenness centrality of any officially recognized news outlet in Rwanda, suggesting that this is an influential news outlet likely to serve as a role model for others in the field and best placed to relay information around the field. Figure 2.2 shows the same

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<sup>1</sup>The full visualizations and the list of organizations used to seed the network map are included in Appendix D.

media map with an emphasis on eigenvector centrality rather than betweenness centrality. Eigenvector centrality is a measure of centrality that prioritizes nodes with many connections to well-connected nodes (Bonacich, 2007; Borgatti, 1995). This figure essentially highlights a list of the most prominent and often-consulted news subjects in Rwanda — the top five, in order, are an official Twitter handle for the Rwandan government (@RwandaGov), Rwandan president Paul Kagame (@PaulKagame), Kagame’s executive office (@UrugwiroVillage), the Rwandan minister of foreign affairs (@LMushikiwabo), and the Rwanda Governance Board (@governancerw).

These two figures offered some useful foundational knowledge for my fieldwork, and suggest some findings that my fieldwork allows me to flesh out in further detail. First, in setting the groundwork for participant observation and interviews, Figure D.1 suggests that the *New Times* occupies a prominent role in the Rwandan journalism field, possibly serving as an example that other organizations in the field look to as a model of good business and news decisions. The next most prominent organizations in terms of betweenness centrality are Contact Rwanda (a radio station, @ContactRW); Umuseke (an online news outlet, @Umuseke); Izuba Rirashe (a print news source, @IzubaRirashe) and Rushyashya (an online-only Kinyarwanda news outlet, @rushyashya). While the *New Times* does not have the highest overall number of network connections or the most connections coming in or going out (in-degree and out-degree, respectively), it is the outlet most well-placed in the network to influence others and relay information between news organizations. This makes the *New Times* the ideal starting point for on-the-ground ethnographic study, both from a practice-based perspective as an organization likely to be of and influential in the news practices of other organizations in the country, and from a networking perspective, as an organization likely to be well-connected and able to recommend me to other organizations for observation and interviews. In fact, the editor, Collin Haba, is also on the board of directors of the Rwandan Association of Journalists — so this hypothesis proved to be true in more ways than a network visualization can suggest. The other two organizations where I spent the most time conducting

## Simple visualization of communities in Rwanda's journalism field

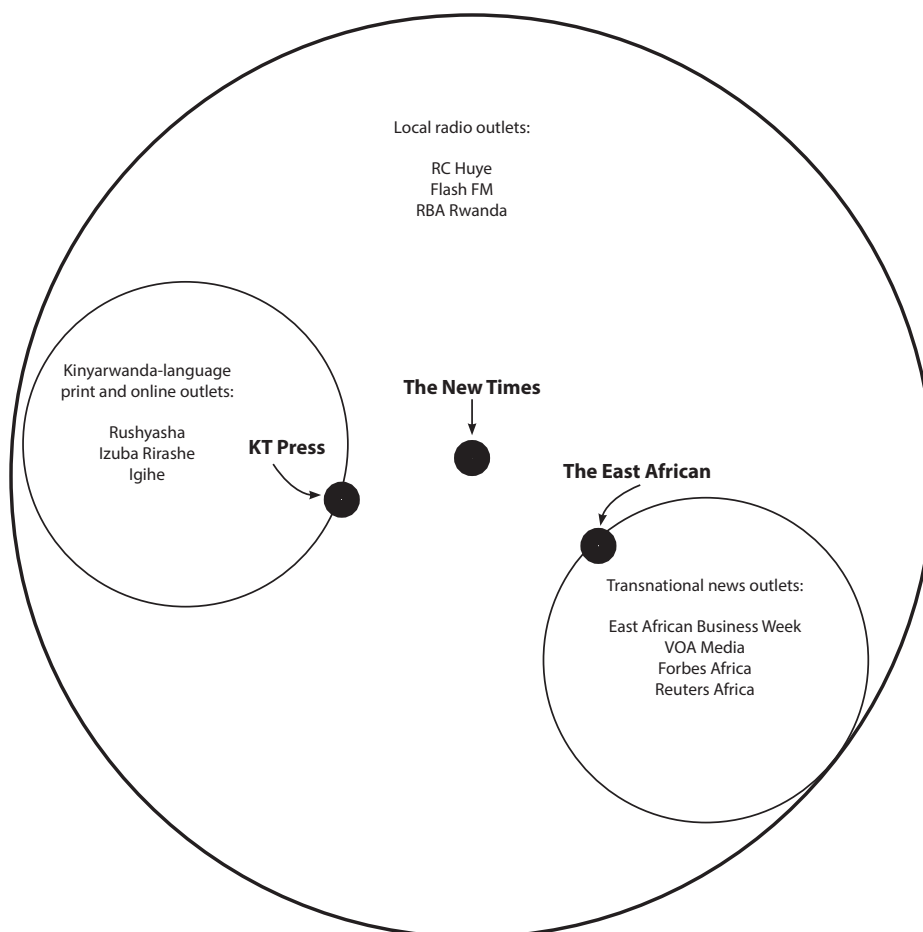


Figure 2.1: This simple visualization shows the relative placement of communities within the field of journalism in Rwanda. The three newsrooms where I conducted most of my fieldwork, the *East African*, the *New Times*, and *KT Press*, are labeled and shown in reference to the communities they bridge from the *New Times*, which has the highest proportion of in-links and out-links in the network.

## Simple visualization of influencers in Rwanda's journalism field

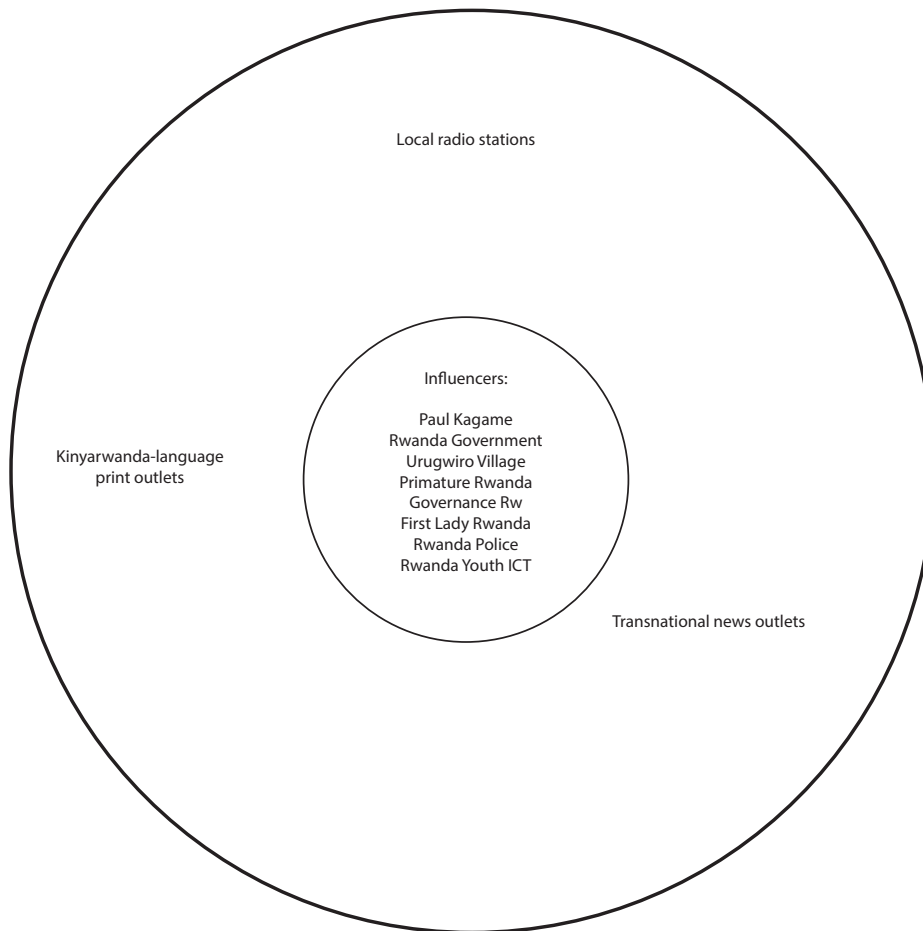


Figure 2.2: This simple visualization shows the major influencers in the Rwandan journalism field, measured by eigenvector centrality — a measure of connection to other well-connected nodes. By this measure, the major influencers across all news outlets are government figures, not journalists.

observations, *KT Press* and the *East African*, are both indicated with circles. *KT Press* is located on the left side of the figure and the *East African* is toward the bottom, under the *New Times*. Both are situated in strategic locations. *KT Press* is a bridge between the *New Times* and many Kinyarwanda-language outlets, including *Izuba Rirashe* and *Rushyashya*. The *East African* is situated among other prominent transnational organizations, including the *East African Business Week*, an outlet with many Twitter followers and a print audience in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Burundi.

The second observation one can draw from these visualizations is that publicly visible networks of news production in Rwanda revolve around officially established channels of information production and consumption. One could argue that this result is inevitable, given that the network started with “official” voices of news production authorized by the Rwandan Media High Council. However, the 20 or so most influential nodes ranked by eigenvector centrality are not news organizations included in the original network, so it is conceivable that they could be voices from outside the institution, or voices generating some sort of opposition. Instead, they are official voices of government and some influential telecommunication businesses, such as MTN. This network configuration is by no means unique and is likely not even unusual, but it does visually communicate the importance that official voices play in the public networks of news production in Rwanda.

Based on the above network analyses and supplemented by guidance and affirmation from my Rwandan research supervisor, a University of Rwanda professor and expert on East African media, I began fieldwork at the *New Times*. From the *New Times*, I branched out to observation and interviews at other sites using a snowball sample approach, aware of how the nodes fit in the network map I had produced but flexible to include outlets not apparently prominent in that network. I conducted the majority of participant observation at the *New Times* and *KT Press*, with shorter observation periods at the *East African*, the *Great Lakes Voice*, and a newsroom hosted by the Association of Rwandan Journalists, which is open

to journalists reporting independently or working for wire services and other news outlets without offices in Kigali. The *New Times*, of course, is a central node in the Rwandan news ecosystem. The other outlets where I spent time were not immediately apparent as prominent outlets from my network analysis but featured prominently in my interviews and were mentioned by editors and observers as outlets doing different kinds of journalism work in Rwanda. In social network terms, *KT Press* is an important bridge node, as one arm of an organization that also produces news in Kinyarwanda online, radio, and TV. The *East African* occupies an interesting location as a peripheral outlet in Rwanda but one of the only sources of news about Rwanda for the East African region — thus, it represents another type of bridging organization. The *Great Lakes Voice* is a peripheral organization, one that is poorly funded with a small newsroom and few staff but that is trying to produce a more oppositional brand of news than is practiced in most Rwandan newsrooms.

In choosing to spend my time primarily at two news outlets with shorter observation periods at the others, I sought maximum understanding of news routines while choosing a large enough sample that I could determine what news routines were shared and which might be idiosyncratic to a particular organization's practice. This allowed me to test expectations that journalists in different news organizations within the same field would likely share some routine practices and influences but might also show variance, depending on the network location of a particular news organization within the broader news ecosystem. In field theory terms, I expected that a particular organization's news emphasis and routines might differ depending on its field location relative to external pressures. An analysis of my observations and interviews spanning several newsrooms resulted in information about commonly shared practices within the political and social context of Rwanda, while also uncovering some practices unique to particular newsrooms as a result of their locations within the field. This set of data allows me to better understand the structure of the news field in Rwanda and the organizational behavior of news media in positions of power and on the periphery.<sup>2</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup>The network ethnography strategy's iterative mapping of the news ecosystem allows for the possibility,

levels of data collection, combined with short trips to interview journalists in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Tanzania, allow me to draw conclusions about the journalism field and news production at individual, organizational, and field levels of analysis.

After I received approval from the Rwandan Ministry of Education to begin research, I spent an average of 20 hours per week observing and interviewing journalists, primarily in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.<sup>3</sup> Rwanda is a small country and most of the country's news outlets are based in the capital, thus making this geographic location most practical. I was based in Rwanda from January through August, 2017, and conducted formal research through that period beginning in late January. I collected data in the form of notes from participant observation and interviews, interview transcripts, WhatsApp chatroom transcripts extracted from newsroom groups I joined and stored as text files, and files of news articles I edited, upon request, at several news outlets. In the field, I acted primarily as an observer and occasional volunteer, participating and observing as much as possible at the margins of the workplace (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). I attended editorial meetings regularly (these were primarily conducted in English with many side conversations in Kinyarwanda), edited news articles to provide English fluency and editorial feedback, and accompanied reporters on trips to press conferences, parliamentary hearings, and other events. I ate lunch with staff at newsroom canteens, where we typically ate some form of newsroom-subsidized local food while discussing current events and joking about reporters' personal lives. Throughout these experiences I jotted notes on paper during my observations and then spent several

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proposed in the U.S., that the boundary of a news ecosystem is no longer confined to traditional media (i.e., newspapers, radio, and television). Important work happens and routines are negotiated within newsrooms, which will be my primary sites of observation. However, media messages are shared back and forth across many channels, some of which are traditional newsrooms and some of which might not be immediately recognized as such. Thus, Anderson's case boundary of the "journalistic ecosystem" extends beyond the newsroom to include traditional journalists and editors, along with activists and bloggers. These expanded boundaries allowed me to capture the nebulous boundaries of contemporary news production, including periphery actors.

<sup>3</sup>This research was conducted with clearance from the Rwandan Ministry of Education and the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board; Rwandan clearance no. MINEDUC/S&T/414/2017 and UW IRB approval no. 52693.

hours after each field interaction transcribing and elaborating these notes in a password-protected computer document. I typically carried the paper fieldnote journal with me when I traveled around Rwanda, and when I left it behind it was in a locked closet. I carried the key. I adopted these precautions around notetaking and data security as best practices to protect my subjects based on the reports of several scholars that, over the past decade or so, they have been closely watched by the Rwandan government as they go about their research (Ingelaere, 2010; Susan Thomson, 2010). To take notes and guide my observation in the field, I used an observation guide, included in Appendix B, adapted from commonly used ethnographic reference points.

To assist in interpreting these observations and shed light on the motivations behind the practices of Rwandan journalists, I conducted interviews with 84 journalists and key observers of the news field in Rwanda and surrounding countries. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Most of these interviews were conducted in one-on-one, private interactions, and I recorded and took some notes. My paper note-keeping was minimal in order to protect the identity of people I interviewed. I transcribed many interviews myself immediately after conducting them and then deleted the recording; recordings that I could not immediately transcribe were uploaded to a secure server and the recording deleted from my physical recorder. I occasionally interviewed journalists in group situations, particularly when I was interacting with students who I felt would be more likely to discuss their opinions openly when they were interacting with peers. I conducted some interviews in private areas at workplaces, and others were conducted at local restaurants away from workplaces. My goal was to conduct interviews in places where the subject would be most comfortable speaking freely, so I usually suggested a location and offered to meet elsewhere at the subject's preference. The interviews were semi-structured, based around questions included in the Worlds of Journalism survey (adapted interview protocol included in Appendix A). I asked followup questions based on responses to this interview protocol, and the interview often took a conversational turn when the respondent would ask me questions about journalism

in the U.S. I would mention differences I observed but tried to hedge these responses with statements about how journalism is subjective and can be practiced differently in different places, and there is not a “right” way to do it.

To analyze the observation and interview data, I entered it in Dedoose and coded iteratively for major themes, using an open coding process to identify and analyze my observations, as suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). Some of the themes I included in my coding stood out to me as I interviewed, so when I went through data later I looked for these things outright. Other themes only became apparent as I read through transcripts and observation later. I recorded semi-structured interviews with subjects in Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. My analysis is based on verbatim quotes from these interviews as well as fieldnotes documenting informal conversations with many of these and additional journalists who I encountered in the course of my daily observations. The recorded interviews were transcribed; some I transcribed myself in the field, and some I sent out for transcription by confidential, professional transcription services including Rev.com and Verbal Ink. I organized the transcribed interviews and field notes through an open coding process to identify and analyze themes (Emerson et al., 2011).

While the interview protocol I used did not include any questions I considered sensitive, interviewers occasionally did share information with me that they explicitly warned would put them in danger if connected with their identities. In addition, many of the people I interviewed would be easily identifiable by looking up job titles or articles at associated publications; in the case of transnational news organizations, many wire services employ only one stringer in Kigali, so naming the wire services I included in my interviews would amount to publishing the names of certain sources. Because of this, while I quote from specific interviews conducted with individuals across news outlets, I identify them in this dissertation as composite figures with only a select amount of identifying information — the news outlet or type of news outlet (*New Times*, *KT Press*, *East African*, wire service, or radio) and the

position held (reporter, photographer, or editor).<sup>4</sup>

## **2.2 *My place in the field***

I began my interviews from a power center, and that shaped the sample of Rwandan journalists and media organizations I observed. The managing editor of the *New Times* is one of the most powerful journalism figures in Rwanda; he leads one of the most financially stable and well-resourced news organizations and also chairs the board of the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes, which provides guidance and some protection along with best practices recommendations for journalists throughout the country. In addition, this editor and the *New Times* more broadly have a reputation for being strongly government-aligned. Because I used a snowball sampling system, relying on people I knew to introduce me to other journalists, it took several months of fieldwork to expand my interview pool to include subjects who were outside the power center of elite, government-aligned news publications, such as community radio journalists. One source in particular who is well-respected in Rwanda and also known as being a critical and honest observer of the media system never responded to my repeated requests for an interview — perhaps because my interview and observation records suggested I was primarily interested in, or even sided with, the well-established, government-aligned outlets in Rwanda. While I interacted with many people whom I did not interview, and some people did not respond to my requests for interviews, only one person directly declined my request for a formal interview. This person occupied a key mid-level editorial role at the *New Times*. As a result, my data lacks a current mid-level editorial perspective from the *New Times*, though I talked with others who had previously served at this editorial level at the *New Times* and some currently serving at that level at *KT Press*. I began to face bureaucratic roadblocks on several levels when I began to contact individuals with reputations for producing news critical of the Rwandan government, and as a result I have a limited

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<sup>4</sup>To further ensure that interview subjects cannot be identified by linking multiple quotes together, I do not identify interviews by date.

number of these interviews in my dataset.

I spoke no Kinyarwanda when I entered the field, and I quickly decided that bringing a local translator into my interviews and newsroom observations would be more likely to reduce trust than to yield more detailed and informative data. I decided this partly because a Rwandan journalist studying in the U.S. told me before I left that many journalists would be uncomfortable with me even recording interviews, because they would be concerned that I was spying for the Rwandan government. As I learned more about the nature of government control in Rwanda during my first few weeks of fieldwork, I decided that I was not comfortable incorporating a local person who would know my sources and the content of the interviews with as much detail as I myself knew them. Several accounts of fieldwork in Rwanda include descriptions of researchers being called upon by government authorities to reveal details of their data collection, names of subjects, and other information, and I did not want to place that burden of trust or responsibility on anyone else, especially a Rwandan who would likely not be able to leave the country if needed.

While I entered the field aware that many cultural differences would likely make interview communication a challenging process, I was unprepared for the way my own past journalism experience would color the perceptions of people I interviewed and, in some cases, present an obstacle to my communication. I introduced myself as a researcher with past journalism experience, thinking this would help bridge cultural divides and signal to journalists and editors that I was “one of them.” Occasionally, this had the desired effect. However, it also changed my interactions with others in the field. In my first interactions with top editors at the *New Times* and *KT Press*, the editors repeatedly insisted that I should provide an “expert perspective” for the newsroom, to “help them learn.” At the *New Times*, this took the form of a training that editors requested I provide for staff on any topic I wished. I chose interviewing, since I conducted many interviews as a journalist and had taught a course on this several times in the U.S. While the presentation itself turned into an unexpectedly lively discussion with reporters about the real constraints of doing interviews in Rwanda (many of

which are, of course, quite different from constraints facing U.S. journalists), this “training session” put me in the position of “expert,” a position that I did not find particularly helpful in setting common ground with interview subjects. I felt occasionally that this and other signals of my own journalism experience signaled to interview subjects that they needed to defend Rwandan journalism against U.S. journalism, and this led to occasional misunderstandings to overcome in interviews.

This often occurred in discussions around the mission or social role of journalism. Often, when I asked someone about the social role of journalism or of a particular news organization in Rwanda, the first response revolved around an idealized, normative or aspirational role, rather than a descriptive role, and needed followup questions to separate that idealized role from the actual social role the journalist or editor thought that journalism or a particular news organization plays. For instance, I asked an editor of the *New Times* to explain that newspaper’s social role. I first asked, “Where do you see the *New Times* fitting into the media scene in Rwanda? What do you see the role of the *New Times* as?” and the response was: “I think we do the traditional roles of the newspaper, to inform, educate, and entertain. I don’t think it’s any different from that. I would say that’s it, like any other newspaper.” In this response, the editor responds to my question with a true but vague and short statement about the way he saw the *New Times* conforming to a traditional understanding of the role journalism should play in a society. I followed up with a more specific question: “Compared to say, Kigali Today and RBA and maybe *Igihé* and other outlets, what niche does the *New Times* fill?” The response was much longer and more accurately (and interestingly) answered the question I had intended to ask about how the *New Times* fit in Rwanda’s journalism field. It also hints at the *New Times*’ mission of promoting the reconciliation process and national development, and particularly at a pride of identity around the choice to publish in English:

We tend to focus on people who use English. If you look at how we came about,

after the genocide there were many people from different countries coming back to Rwanda, but English speaking was common and many people who were refugees were from English-speaking countries. As part of the reconciliation process, the people who had gone abroad, we needed them to come back home and help build the country, so they needed to know what was going on, and the language they were comfortable with was English. So we just needed to work on that a lot.

This conversation illustrates a common type of interaction I had, where a subject assumed at first that I was looking for a type of answer aligned with universal values of journalism and perhaps looking for an answer that would correspond with my experience of journalism in the U.S. Only in a followup exchange did a more contextual and more fully developed answer emerge from the conversation.

Another term that involved a lot of negotiation to come to a common agreement on was “freedom,” especially around political freedom or restrictions on journalists in Rwanda. I sometimes asked directly how free journalists were in Rwanda, and other times the topic came up obliquely in an interview. In most cases, the interview subject immediately invoked a narrow political definition of freedom to explain that Rwandan journalists are free. This response tended to revolve around legislation. For instance, when I asked if there were “any political constraints on journalism,” one reporter responded:

When you look at the laws, the government has put all the laws there. There is a law for access to information — the law is there. There is a law to protect journalists, there are some articles in that law to protect journalists.

When I asked about politics, journalists would often assume I meant laws or discuss “government” as an entity, separating that entity from individual behavior. It often took one or two followup questions to sort out all of the elements of political influence at work on journalists.

I had been conducting fieldwork for less than a week when I began to see concrete ways my presence would impact the work I was observing. Some funding parameters prevented me from reporting or writing anything that would go in print with my byline, but this did not prevent editors at the *New Times* and *KT Press* for asking if I would write a reflection on my time in Rwanda; when I declined because of the funding restriction, they suggested I could write under a pen name. I declined. However, thus barred from the most obvious “participation” I could do as a participant observer, I was quickly put to work as an English-language expert, editing stories for the coming day’s newspaper at the *New Times* and for the Web at *KT Press*. In both newsrooms, I found myself quickly to be occupying a position in a power dynamic between reporters and editors. After a week or two, I was asked to lead training sessions for reporters at the *New Times*. I thus quickly found myself expected to provide expert assessment and instruction to members of a field I knew very little about, mostly on the basis of my credentials as an American researcher and the brief amount of time I had worked as a journalist in the U.S.

My goal in choosing the methods outlined above was to understand and articulate the Rwandan journalism experience on its own terms. The majority of research on Rwanda over the past two decades has focused on ethnic conflict and post-genocide development, thus defining many facets of Rwandan life by the one lens of genocide and conflict. However, I chose Rwanda as a field site for reasons primarily independent of this historical event, with the idea that the political, social, and technological environment within which Rwandan journalists do their work might shed light on the processes of journalism in ways difficult to identify by studying journalists in the US or other well-studied, Western, and democratic contexts. In spite of my desire to let Rwandan journalists speak for themselves, I undoubtedly influenced my own research findings and the context within which I gathered this data.

My early interactions in the field were also colored by a presumption that journalists would hold some similar base values as U.S. journalists, primarily around autonomy. I pre-

sumed that journalists in Rwanda would want to be powerful and autonomous from the government. I show in chapter 3 that many, in fact, do not. But many of my early questions around press freedom stemmed from this assumption, and I only realized my error after reporters directly corrected me in interviews and after several interactions that surprised me. One happened in my first week of fieldwork, when reporters who had turned in their assignments for the day were relaxing and watching TV news before they went home for the evening. We were watching CNN, and Donald Trump, who had just been inaugurated, was making comments about the press. An editor, who was waiting for copy to proofread, commented that he thought the relationship between the news media and the U.S. president was too antagonistic, and that U.S. journalists had an inflated view of their own power, and then asked what I thought. I began to defend the journalists against Trump and then hedged my conversation in an attempt to maintain neutrality. But I was surprised that a journalist anywhere would not defend the press against President Trump. I later remembered this interaction when a journalism student mentioned an incident where Rwandan President Paul Kagame treated a reporter belligerently — the reporter asked a question about how Kagame had planned for his succession, and instead of responding straightforwardly, Kagame turned the question around and accused the reporter of wanting to be his successor (essentially accusing him of a power grab). This sounded quite similar to Trump's recent behavior, and made me wonder if reporters in Rwanda had been less surprised by Trump's behavior than I had been.

I quickly learned that one factor I found, and still find, quite interesting would yield very little meaningful data from my interviews. I started fieldwork expecting to explore in depth the ways technology access impact journalists, but I found it quite difficult to get anyone I interviewed to reflect on the ways technology impacted their work as a journalist. The exceptions I found were reflections from a handful of journalists who had spent time in newsrooms abroad, in Kenya, Canada, and elsewhere. For the most part, interview subjects could not reflect on the ways technology aided or impeded their work. The technology

limitations that, to me, seemed to clearly affect their workplaces and impede their ability to work most productively were such a part of life that very few people mentioned these as challenges when I asked a broad question, and few discussed it even when I probed to ask directly about technology. This led me to eventually drop the technology line of questioning and focus elsewhere, but it also reminded me that, because many technological tools are so embedded in daily life that we cease to notice them, it is likely that one would only notice a lack of access or equipment if one had a comparative experience from a different environment. Many of the journalists I interviewed in Rwanda were well acquainted with other countries from news broadcasts and interactions with international workers in Kigali, but few had been far outside the country. As a result, the journalists I observed rarely complained about a tool not working, with the exception of power outages. These occurred occasionally and would inevitably generate a newsroom-wide sigh of frustration, especially at the *New Times*, where many reporters worked on desktop computers and a power outage meant they would lose some of their work for the day.

### **2.3 Capital in the Rwandan journalism field**

To set the scene for the analyses in coming chapters, I will briefly describe the nature of various forms of capital and the key players in the Rwandan journalism field. As noted in chapter 1, capital can be accrued and analyzed at several levels within a field, including the levels of individuals and organizations. Both individual and organizational levels of capital influenced the behavior of journalists in Rwanda. Journalists accrued cultural capital on an individual level, building up recognition of an individual byline — the author’s name, which is often published at the top of a news story — that would facilitate movement between organizations in the field. They benefited from social capital linked with economic capital bestowed by particular news organizations. News organizations in Rwanda were often ranked by journalists in terms of economic capital, simply understood as having the means to pay employees in a timely fashion. Only a few news organizations headquartered in Rwanda had

the reputation of consistently providing timely paychecks to fulfill employment promises, and those organizations were often considered “the best.” Journalists would quickly clarify, though, that “best” in terms of economic stability did not mean “best” in terms of cultural capital, or reputation for producing “good” and independent news content. Some forms of social capital were conferred by organizations on their employees. Many public officials would build relationships with reporters where they would share information off the record — not for publication — because they knew that the organization employing the reporter would not publish information seen to be critical or inflammatory, even if the individual reporter deemed it newsworthy.

Social capital would also accrue to individual reporters from organizations as the individual came to be associated with an organization’s pro-government or critical editorial stance. For instance, I recommended a friend who is a senior reporter at the *New Times* as a copywriter to another friend of a friend looking to produce advertising materials for a new business. My friend’s friend rejected the senior reporter recommendation without considering his personal characteristics (which included good English writing ability and a deep understanding of Rwanda’s political and social spheres) because, my friend said, this reporter worked for the *New Times* and thus would not be able to write with the appropriately neutral or critical voice that the project would demand. On the other hand, reporters from the *New Times* would frequently be hired away to public relations positions for government organizations, in part because their standing at the *New Times* sent a message that they understood the government’s position and could support it in public communication. In reality, journalists working for elite organizations in the news field would often move back and forth between organizations critical or supportive of government officials and policies, suggesting that not all journalists really adopted the social orientations of their employers. However, it was clear that organizational social capital conferred particular benefits and challenges on associated individuals. In the absence of a strong union and other signals of field leadership, organizations hold a fair amount of power to bestow particular types of

capital on their employees, even as individuals build up cultural capital associated with their particular bylines, which are portable across organizations. Thus, understanding the broad types of news organizations in Rwanda in terms of their relative levels of capital provides a useful background to the actions of individual journalists in the field.

My fieldwork revealed four groups of news organizations in Rwanda. A significant number of news organizations possess a very low amount of economic capital and cultural capital, meaning they are discussed by fellow journalists as organizations that “try their best” but produce low-quality journalism and often do not pay their reporters on time. Many community radio stations fall into this category. A second category of news outlets is relatively financially stable and advertiser-funded, and produces news that is aimed at elite readers with a goal to shape the political discussion in and global perception of Rwanda. A third category of news outlets is owner-funded, so they have short-term financial stability dependent on the owner’s personal funds but face long-term instability unless a stable funding solution is established. The fourth category of news outlets are transnational. These outlets are financially stable and subscription-funded, with a large funding base outside Rwanda’s borders, and they tend to rely on news produced by standards aligned with Western watchdog ideals to maintain the funding base. The funding mechanics and their impact on news production will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, but the journalism field and these organization types have characteristics that are worth noting here to set up the later analyses. As Davidson and Meyers (2016) note, Bourdieu’s forms of capital can take different shapes in different contexts. I observed the following characteristics of each type of capital as they were displayed and discussed among Rwandan journalists.

### *Economic capital*

Economic capital varied extensively, even among employees at the same news organization. The two main measures of economic stability journalists discussed were reliable paychecks

and contracts. The first measure, reliable paychecks, were standard at all four organizations; employees at each acknowledged that they were lucky in the Rwandan journalism field because they were typically not waiting weeks or months for delayed paychecks<sup>5</sup>. The second measure of economic stability, contracts, was rarely seen even at these media organizations. Only a few highly placed positions were marked by contracts, which guaranteed employment for some period of time. Contracts represented an important mark of stability. As a subeditor at *KT Press* noted, “Not many journalists here have contracts, and that is a challenge. Start with this one — you thought I had a contract? I don’t. Even I don’t have a contract.” What that means, he said, is, “I just get paid. If they told me tomorrow I was not coming back, I would just say bye to you. . . . That’s why I joke with [name omitted] and say we are mercenaries.” A *KT Press* editor who did have a contract also acknowledged that a big problem with journalism in Rwanda is that many had no contract, which meant they had no financial stability. “You may get a good salary, but if you don’t have a contract, that’s another problem,” he said. “Here, if you don’t have a contract, you can’t have a loan . . . for a journalist to get a loan for a house, you need to be married to a civil servant.” Kigali Today promised employees it was working on getting contracts, but most employees still did not have them. “It’s a challenge,” he said. “Apart from a contract, you don’t get health insurance. That one is the cause of many headaches in Rwanda.” The organization perceived to have the highest ratio of contracts to employees was the *New Times*, where some reporters and some editors, along with senior editorial staff, held contracts. A reporter at the *East African* explained the importance of contracts to personal financial stability:

The loan that you normally are supposed to get when you are on payroll is what they call a personal loan, and you are given that loan because you have an employer who has approved that you are a full service member of the company. So you can keep a number of obligations, but if you don’t have that contract then

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<sup>5</sup>Delayed paychecks are not exclusively a problem of the journalism field in Rwanda: employees at the nationally subsidized University of Rwanda, for instance, experienced a several-month paycheck delay in the late spring and early summer of 2017.

the bank will not trust you.

What this means is that, without a contract, many financial benefits are unavailable to employees, who essentially cannot prove that they will be employed for any foreseeable amount of time. Thus excluded from bank loans, the majority of journalists in Rwanda are unable to purchase houses or even vehicles, which tend to be quite expensive and are themselves signals of high levels of wealth.

Many journalists, when prompted to rank the best news organizations in Rwanda, did so based on their economic stability. One journalist explained that Igihe (a Kinyarwanda-language online organization) is “the best, next to the *New Times* and Kigali Today.” Being “the best,” he explained, meant:

Those are the media houses that can have more than five staff members — maybe 10 or 20. The worst, and many people here are used to that, is when you will wait a month or two months and have salary. For local journalists, it is possible . . . the company doesn’t have means to pay you. And journalists will keep working because they will say maybe the salary will come, maybe, maybe. And sometimes it reaches nine months without a salary

Journalists in Rwanda tend to work on spec, producing news content for organizations to publish and hoping that those organizations will hold up their end of employment agreements and pay out a wage at the end of the month. For some, this wait stretches out for multiple months while an employer scrambles for funds to pay news producers. Many journalists, especially those working for community radio and other smaller news organizations, work months in the hope that a paycheck might materialize down the road. Thus, news outlets like the *New Times* and *KT Press*, which pay their reporters regularly, are considered elite outlets, even though they rarely offer contracts and still impose stringent demands on their reporters in exchange for a paycheck (as will be explored further in chapter 4).

### *Social capital*

Social capital varied across organizations in close alignment with the organization's perceived editorial line and their geographic reach. I observed three primary types of social capital among journalists: networks with people and sectors outside journalism, networks within the journalism field, and individual social capital based on personal brand (though few in Rwanda referred to this practice as branding). All three forms of social capital were to some extent defined or limited by the journalist's news organization.

On an organizational level, social capital was conferred alongside an understanding of what the news organization would and wouldn't print, defined as the organization's "editorial line." This editorial line was generally public knowledge but unwritten, and sometimes contradicted written statements of organizational objectivity. Reporters at *KT Press* and the *New Times* would often hear more gossip from state officials who assumed they were "safe" confidantes because those organizations would not publish very critical news. The news outlet's reputation played a stronger role in this calculus than did the individual reporter's views. One reporter at the *New Times* told me she was good, personal friends with a newly appointed judge. I watched her interview him and she asked pointed questions, which he answered verbosely with the caveat that he wouldn't want them printed. This was not a foolproof way of protecting the source's interests: Reporters with these relationships at the *New Times* and *KT Press* would sometimes pass along news tips to their colleagues at the *East African* and wire services when they felt a story was newsworthy but did not fit with their employer's editorial line. But sources could be confident that news that highlighted a negative element of Rwandan politics or governance would be unlikely to appear in the *New Times* or *KT Press* without their approval or the approval of another government figure; thus, they would share such information more freely than with reporters at outlets that were unconcerned with government vetting of stories. In addition, journalists at the *New Times* and *KT Press* knew that one future career path for them would involve working in govern-

ment. Many reporters referred to an employee pipeline or constant flow of workers from the news business to more lucrative and stable public relations work, especially between the *New Times* and government PR offices. This career path would be more likely to be available to a particular journalist if he or she had friends, not enemies, in government. One reporter summed this up by saying, “Local journalists . . . want to be nice to the state because they are trying to get a job from them, they are going to get money from them.”

Within the field of journalism, social groups formed based primarily on language. A reporter at the *East African* explained the groupings:

There is the English-speaking group, most of them just came from Uganda, they are Rwandese but they stayed there, and then there is the Kinyarwanda-speaking group, and then there is the Francophone group. We do hang out, we play football together, we drink, we get drunk — we do all these things together. We discuss, we share tips, we share contacts, and things like that. We sometimes have created a barrier, because there are so many elements in journalism you cannot trust, because it’s a bit closed. So you cannot just open up to someone, say, who writes in French or Kinyarwanda, who you barely know.

In this reporter’s observation, journalists in Rwanda tend to group themselves by language, with the English-speakers, the French-speakers, and the Kinyarwanda-speakers each sticking to members of their linguistic group. There are likely many reasons for this, including linguistic aptitude — several Rwandans who had immigrated from Uganda told me they had learned Kinyarwanda as adults or older teens, and did not feel as comfortable speaking it as their peers who had grown up speaking that language. Whatever the reason, though, this language divide bred division among journalists, who tended to socialize with their fellow language-speakers. One place I saw this in practice was at a press conference for Diane Rwigara, a presidential candidate hopeful who did not make it into the Rwandan presidential campaign but made the local and international news several times through the spring

and summer of 2017 as she attempted to meet the requirements for entry into the presidential race. More than 100 journalists attended the press conference, packed into a small living room in a house in Nyamirambo, a neighborhood of Kigali, where she hosted some pre-campaign events. Rwigara was more than 30 minutes late for the event, so journalists broke into small groups to converse as they waited. One distinct group included several wire service reporters and a reporter for the regional *East African*, all of whom worked in English. They bantered about Rwigara's tardiness and their deadlines while we waited for her to arrive, as other journalists milled around speaking Kinyarwanda in small groups.

Journalists also worked to build up individual social capital within the journalism field so that they would be known and trusted as journalists who could and would routinely produce certain types of news content. One reporter described this as "playing the game." He had come from Uganda, and described his transition this way:

You are coming from this background where the media is independent and you are attacking government policy and corruption. Now you are coming to [the *New Times*], a newspaper which is very closed. So now what you do is you decide, are you going to go back to Kampala? If you are going to stay [in Kigali], you have to play the game. You have to write that kind of story.

Even though it frustrated this reporter that he felt a lack of real editorial freedom to pursue stories independently of government oversight or approval, he persisted in following the established editorial line because he had a vested interest in being able to pursue a career as a journalist in Rwanda. If he had decided to return to Uganda, he explained, he would feel less invested in that editorial line and would have been more likely to pursue critical stories regardless of the consequences. Another way journalists built up individual social capital was in the way they interacted with sources. One editor explained how important this was: "When you write a story for the first time, someone has given you some information, protect him. And with time, he calls you and tells you ... some story." The environment within

which journalists operate in Rwanda is highly relational, and a substantial amount of information that is legally specified as public information is still only available to journalists who have good personal relationships with sources. Thus, maintaining and building good relationships with sources is a key way journalists would find stories.

Finally, journalists measured individual social capital in terms of byline recognition and social media reach. One editor told me he felt successful when a news organization approached him to offer a job.

It means a lot if someone approaches you, asks you, “How much will you charge us, can you join, will you please come? Can you join us?” That means my byline — when people see your byline, they feel it is a good story. My seal has always been my byline. I bring my degree as an administrative requirement, but no one asks me “yeah, bring your CV, this and this” — no. In this country, in this career, people head hunt. You don’t see people calling for applications.

A media manager at *KT Press* confirmed this, noting that he preferred to find the appropriate candidate and court that person, because publishing an open position would result in a flood of unqualified applications. Thus, building name recognition as a journalist in Rwanda would serve the journalist both at their workplace and beyond, providing them greater freedom to move around the field. Organizational backing conveyed a message about a journalist’s ideological leaning to those outside the field; for instance, one small business owner rejected my suggestion of a *New Times* journalist as a copywriter because, this business owner said, anyone working for the *New Times* would have a perspective that was too pro-government. But to those within the field making hiring decisions, more personal quality metrics, such as stories written, seemed to carry more power. A number of reporters had moved at least once and sometimes more than once between organizations with vastly different and even opposing editorial lines, conveying different perspectives on what it means to be a good journalist — but no reporter mentioned encountering ideological resistance from

editors when shifting across organizations in this way. Occasionally journalists were told they could not work for transnational media outlets and local outlets concurrently, but it seemed to be acceptable to switch back and forth for at least some people.

### *Cultural capital*

Journalists across media organizations shared a common understanding of what they called “real” journalism. This was set in contrast to media work that was sometimes labeled “PR” and sometimes labeled development journalism.

“Real” journalism included independent investigation and stories critical of the government, especially the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the majority political party. One wire reporter described it as harder work than its “non-real” counterpart. “The real journalism is not just this kind of local journalism where you are working for someone who just tells you ‘go and bring the story’ and the story will be published,” he said. “At [wire service], even though I go to this event, is it really newsworthy?” To this reporter, real journalism involved a thought process of looking for values of newsworthiness beyond an event’s occurrence. Others described real journalism as that which they felt or perceived to impact some in their community. One editor described the impact of “real journalism” he had done at a past job, contrasting it with his current job at a pro-government news outlet:

“You could do a story and you feel that this is going to shake the country, this is going to shake people. People would call even from the U.S., Kenya, whatever, and say, ‘Wow, good story man!’ But in pro-government media, you just wait for the month to end and you get your pay.”

Part of doing real journalism also involved having an editor who would push the reporter to ask more questions and write clearly and well. As one editor explained, speaking of a past job:

My boss was a PhD, and he could guide you, he could ask do this, and you find that at the end of the day you produce quality, with the right story. And he was also good at editing. So you could produce, publish this story, and when you read it you say, “Wow, I really did my job, and the editor made it look great.”

This editor felt he had done real journalism when he was working as a reporter and interacting with an editor who demanded skilled reporting and writing from him, pushing him to craft what he felt was quality content.

Journalists discussed this sort of work in contrast to a type of journalism that some called development journalism and some just called “PR.” The determination of who referred to this style of news as PR or as development journalism seemed to do with personal investment or alignment with the mission: Those who felt they were doing important work practicing this form of journalism tended to call it “development journalism,” while those who had felt more fulfilled practicing independent journalism tended to call it “PR.” In this sort of newswork, often tied to pro-government media organizations, journalists were less motivated to do investigation and legwork. Instead, one reporter said, “People are kind of relaxed because they dictate what you are supposed to publish or talk about. It’s like, I do what my boss wants me to do.” This kind of journalism practice also lacked analysis, another reporter said; instead of digging into the background of an issue, reporters would “just report,” giving the facts of an event instead of unpacking the meaning behind it. A photographer summed up a common view of this sort of journalism, practiced at many media organizations in Rwanda:

It’s all PR. All the media houses, they await invitations from people with the conferences, the events. All our news is based on events. So for me, the challenge I see . . . many people say, I know, that it’s money — you can have that issue, that problem of not having enough money, but at least one article that is out, it is good. It is that one article that everyone, even journalists themselves, among

themselves, they are sharing it. But we don't have them. Maybe it's because . . . owners, including the journalists, they fear that if I say this, in the way I feel I have to do, I will get troubles.

This analysis of “PR” journalism highlights the importance of gathering news — enterprise reporting — as a component of “real” journalism vs. PR. This journalist also highlights a more personal, feeling-based element that, to him, accompanies real journalism: the feeling that you have written a good story, “that one article” that everyone is sharing and talking about. To these reporters, journalism that does not at least occasionally accomplish this agenda-setting role doesn't qualify as real. It is important to note, though, that not everyone felt unfulfilled by practicing less independent journalism; one reporter told me that he felt he was doing what was best for Rwanda by writing positive stories at the *New Times*. People had seen enough hardship and sadness through the genocide and its aftermath, he said, and needed encouraging stories to come together as and work to develop the country.

### *Workplace autonomy*

This form of capital reflects the observation from organizational management literature that employee experiences at particular workplaces are shaped by the amount of workplace autonomy they are given. In Rwanda, different organizations afforded employees different levels of freedom in daily routines, and some journalists said they had moved around within the field to work in a less constricting workplace. At organizations with low levels of workplace autonomy, senior and sub-editors would take a detail-oriented approach to management, sometimes giving reporters lists of questions to ask, names of sources to talk with, and clearly directing the angle a story should take. At organizations with higher levels of workplace autonomy, journalists would often have more freedom over their daily schedules, meet weekly instead of daily, and sometimes even worked remotely as part of their routine.

## 2.4 Organizational environments

Media outlets in Rwanda fall across a broad spectrum that I loosely group into four categories. **Elite local outlets** include the *New Times* and *KT Press*; these are outlets that are financially stable enough to guarantee regular paychecks to their employees and produce news relatively regularly. A few radio stations, notably Rwanda Broadcast Agency, also fall in this category. **Transnational media outlets**, including the *East African* and various wire services, are also known for providing stable financial support to their employees. In addition, these outlets depend on international audiences that often demand particular kinds of news coverage in order to maintain particular reputations. The remaining local outlets tended to fall into one of two camps. On one hand were organizations that produced news primarily in Kinyarwanda for local audiences and had minimal financial security. Many local radio stations fell into this category, along with some online-only publications. On the other hand were organizations that tended to produce news in English and aimed at countercultural news angles that defied local pressure to align with state goals, as outlined in chapter 3. These outlets tended to be self-funded by one or two wealthy owners and have relatively few employees. Thus, while they attempted to change the news field in Rwanda, there was widespread skepticism about how long they would survive and what kind of change they would effect in the interim.

Partly based on field limitations and partly based on personal interest, I conducted most of my fieldwork at elite and transnational media organizations, including *KT Press*, the *New Times*, and the *East African*; I also interviewed several journalists who work for wire services, and visited the open newsroom where journalists without offices in Kigali are welcome to work. Table 2.1 sums up the types of capital present at the five media organizations I visited in Rwanda. In the following sections, I describe each workplace.

### Capital at key media organizations in Rwanda

News Outlet	Economic Capital	Social Capital	Cultural Capital	Workplace Autonomy	Organizational Climate
The <i>New Times</i>	high	high	low	low	Formal, structured, hierarchical
<i>KT Press</i>	high	high	low	high	Informal, structured, hierarchical
Web startup	low	low	low	high	Informal, unstructured, flat
Local radio (non-elite)	low	moderate	low	low	Formal, unstructured, hierarchical
The <i>East African</i>	high	low	high	low	Formal, structured, flat
Wire Services	high	low	high	high	Formal, unstructured, flat

Table 2.1: This table summarizes the relative abundance of four types of capital at six kinds of media organizations in Rwanda.

Source: Author analysis and interviews.

#### *Elite local organizations*

The *New Times* is the oldest newspaper in Rwanda and is a central node in the social network of Rwandan journalism mapped from Twitter follower data, with the highest number of news outlet followers of any registered news outlet in the country. The *New Times* is the most structured of the four newsrooms I observed. The newsroom is a classic open office, set up with many similarities to a U.S. newsroom — most editors sit along the front wall close to the entrance, and reporters routinely sit at the same desks around the newsroom. Desks are arranged in rows and reporters are grouped roughly by area; the *New Times* does not have beat reporters, but they do group reporters by section of the newspaper — so news reporters sit in one area, lifestyle reporters sit in another, and so on. Workers' time is as structured as the office space. The morning begins with an editorial meeting at 8 a.m. every weekday, and copy is due to editors by midafternoon for the next day's edition. The organizational

hierarchy is as structured as workspace and time; employees relayed rumors of how reporters who questioned the direction of senior editors would be reprimanded or let go. In editorial meetings, this was evident in the general interaction style and in the way editors assigned stories. In editorial meetings, reporters spoke with a low volume and rarely spoke unless an editor called on them directly. Editors would give instructions and the reporters would take notes and listen. It was rare to hear a reporter question an editorial statement — this happened twice during the six weeks I spent at the newsroom, and I attended nearly every morning meeting. One reporter in particular was critical. When assigning stories, editors would give instructions at a minute level of detail, including often a list of questions to ask and instructions about how to approach events like press conferences. Overall, the *New Times* was formal, structured, and hierarchical.

When I spent time in it, the *New Times* newsroom was located primarily on the ground floor of an office building that also housed the Star Times, a cable TV provider. It was next door to Rwanda's parliament and across the street from the Ministry of Justice, National Public Prosecution Authority, and Rwanda's Supreme Court. Reporters would routinely walk over to these locations to report, and guards recognized them by sight. Reporters at the *New Times* generally enjoyed high social capital, courtesy of the organization. "The *New Times* is famous," a reporter from *KT Press* explained. "It came before us; it is an established newspaper." Because of this, sources would bring certain kinds of news tips to reporters, eager to have them investigated and sure they would be investigated in a particular way at the *New Times*.

The *New Times* is ostensibly independent, but it is common knowledge among Rwandan journalists that it is in fact a government-aligned publication. The editorial line supports the government, and stories that critique the government are unlikely to be published unless they fall within strict boundaries and investigate matters that a government official has already approved for investigation, a phenomenon I explore in more detail in chapter 4.

This editorial direction is never explicitly conveyed to reporters, but it is enforced through actions: Reporters who wrote stories that were “too investigative” or too critical would find those stories embroiled in multiple cycles of editing, be asked to find additional sources to make it more neutral, or just have the story disappear from the story budget — the list of stories scheduled for the next day’s newspaper — without explanation near the end of the day. Editors would hear more direct instructions to refrain from publishing particular stories. One reporter who had since moved to an independent publication explained it this way:

When I was still at the *New Times* investigation desk, we would want to run a story about corruption, for instance. Of course, you go through many sources, you call people to react. But before you publish the story, you get a call from someone telling you, “please don’t write that story.”

The pro-government editorial line at the *New Times* and other local elite outlets was generally not explicitly communicated but was generally understood to exist. Editors would be penalized for letting a too-critical story appear in print, sometimes with a warning and sometimes by losing their jobs. Reporters generally did not face overt criticism or instruction about avoiding particular stories, but they would be penalized and instructed in other ways (as explained in more detail in following chapters).

*KT Press* was less hierarchical and more collegial than the *New Times*, but similarly government-oriented. When I was there, this newsroom was located in a residential neighborhood in Kigali, with offices in two large houses that had been repurposed into office space. Broadcast reporters primarily worked in one building and text-based reporter worked primarily in the other. Rooms throughout the house had been transformed into work spaces, with small groups of desks scattered in each. The *KT Press* investigative web team worked out of one room on the ground floor of a building in the back of the gated compound, when they worked from the office. On any given day, two or three reporters and editors worked

remotely. The newsroom routines were more individualized than those at the *New Times*. Reporters met with sub-editors and the chief editor on Monday mornings to critique what had been published the week before in a postmortem and discuss ideas for the week ahead. After this meeting, individual editors and reporters conversed in the newsroom about particular stories and deadlines. The head editor stopped in occasionally but more often would send updates or questions by WhatsApp to the entire group. Editors would proofread stories as they were submitted and post them to web platform, which had a WordPress like blog interface. Reporters at *KT Press* routinely expressed of their frustration with editors; one reporter spent nearly 30 minutes arguing directly with her editor in a group meeting called because reporters were not meeting deadlines. They were more subdued when interacting with the head editor, but several reporters vocally disagreed with him or grumbled in frustration at editorial decisions during Monday meetings. Editors tended to not list specific questions for reporters to ask in interviews but would give detailed instructions on angles to cover and to avoid. Kigali Today, like the *New Times*, was known to be a pro-government news outlet. “Kigali Today, whenever they break a story, just know government has given it to them,” one reporter told me. “Even if it looks nice, that’s nice government — they are totally government.” Reporters working at *KT Press* and those working for other outlets confirmed this perception.

### *Transnational organizations*

Transnational organizations included wire services, which typically had one reporter, often local, paid a retainer and a per-story fee. Another transnational organization was the *East African*, a weekly regional paper published in Nairobi with a bureau of around a dozen people working in Kigali and reporting on Rwanda.

The *East African* — a weekly regional paper printed in Nairobi — was the smallest single-publication newsroom that I observed. About a dozen staff worked in an office suite

above Simba, a local grocery chain. The *East African* office was almost directly across the street from the *New Times*, so reporters would often run into each other eating lunch or shopping at Simba or would catch rides with each other to field events. The editor at the *East African* called a Monday meeting for reporters to discuss content for the coming week. He expected each reporter to come to the meeting with at least one idea of a story to pursue for the following week, and he went around the room in the meeting listening to pitches. Each reporter would pitch one or more stories, and then the editor would give feedback, suggesting sources if he liked the pitch, or explaining why he did not like the pitch and wanted to go in a different direction. The *East African* was most likely to position itself against the other papers — the editor several times said he wanted to write stories that the *New Times* would not write. Editor and reporters met in a glass-walled conference room for the pitch meeting. The editor's office was also glass-walled and separated from the newsroom, which consisted of two rows of desks where reporters worked, most with laptops but a few with desktop computers. There were few personal items at desks but most reporters sat at the same desks day after day.

The *East African* is known in the region for its independent editorial policy. One reporter explained that the *East African* has a longstanding reputation of running the news as reporters had written it, rather than editing it to fit a pro-government editorial line. This earned the newspaper a reputation for being “liberal” and set it apart from most local Rwandan news outlets.

The difference is the independence as a journalist that you have to discover stories, to investigate stories, and as long as you have your facts correct, as long as you have your facts backed up on a computer somewhere or a recorder somewhere, the editor will run the story. There is no censorship, no censorship at all. You know? As long as you can demonstrate that this story is clean and all the facts are there, then you run the story. Unlike many other media houses here, where

even if it is right, as long as it's critical or it's a bit negative, it won't run — it won't see the daylight.

The *East African* stood in contrast to other local news outlets in that it could be expected to run stories that criticized local and national officials and policies, even if those officials did not want the story to see the light of day.

Financially, the *East African* offered baseline benefits comparable to the other elite outlets discussed here, with specific salary and benefits negotiable on an individual level. One reporter said that a senior reporter at the *East African* would earn a slightly higher salary than someone filling the same role at the *New Times*. “It’s always negotiable, it’s not fixed — you have to negotiate your salary,” he said. “You get so many benefits with the *East African* — you get training, you get people trusting you as a journalist.” To this reporter, intangible benefits associated with the organization’s independent editorial line were important along with the salary offered by the publication.

However, the *East African* conferred some social capital drawbacks along with some benefits. Government sources would often be reluctant to talk with reporters from the *East African*, a point the editor brought up in editorial meetings. But sources who were unhappy with the status quo would be more likely to bring their woes to this newspaper over the *New Times* or *KT Press*, expecting these reporters to have more leeway to pursue and publish a critical angle. One reporter used this point to his advantage in an editorial meeting; he brought up a story idea and noted that the source who brought the idea was fed up with a bureaucratic process. The editor responded with a pleased smile, noting that these are the kinds of stories the *East African* can and should run, because the other outlets would not. In addition, reporters at the *East African* could experience the viral nature of social media when they published critical stories. One reporter noted that the reach of his tweets would often spread — “in the thousands and tens of thousands actually if it’s a critical story,” he

said. “The *New Times*, they don’t get that. So, I feel like this is satisfactory, in a way. I don’t earn much, but I feel like journalism satisfies me.”

Wire service reporters shared a similarly independent editorial line with the *East African* but had more independent work environments. None of the wire services whose staff I interviewed had bureaus in Kigali, so the reporters affiliated with the services had freedom to choose where they would work and, to some extent, freedom to structure their daily routines. Some wire reporters worked from home, where they would listen to and read the news for the day and do much reporting from home offices. Others worked from a state-owned workspace that served both as the office for the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes — a union-like organization that worked to represent Rwandan journalists’ working rights — and as an office space for journalists whose employers didn’t have separate office space in the city. In this office, about 15 desks were set up in a narrow, open room, and reporters worked at those desks on desktop or laptop computers. Wire service reporters also had the freedom to write stories critical of the government. They generally wrote fewer stories on a more sporadic schedule than any of the other outlets, as they were dependent on global news norms and competing with a larger pool of newsworthy stories. The wire service reporters I interviewed were paid on some variation of a monthly retainer and a per-story fee.

One reporter who worked from home said his daily routine was widely varied, depending on whether he heard of a story that he thought would be newsworthy for his employers. Much of his job consisted of listening from his home office to what others were reporting. “I go to my office, look at the stories that are there, then say this is not good for me. Then I wait for when there is a big story. But I will be listening to radio stations, monitoring whatever is going on, talking to local journalists, because I do not have a local job.” Social capital within Rwanda tended to be weak for wire service reporters. One reporter went so far as to say that one challenge of working for a wire service was that, “Many will say if you are working for international people, you are betraying the country.” The government would send this

message in meetings, he said, particularly in training sessions it held for Rwandan journalists.

### *Web startup publications*

There are several news outlets in the Rwandan journalism field that have moderate levels of economic and cultural capital and are driven by a desire (generally stated and promoted by the editor-owner) to do independent reporting of a somewhat watchdog-oriented nature. These organizations face many challenges. They are trying to take an independent editorial line, which means local advertisers are unlikely to support them. They are funded from their founders' pockets, which are relatively deep in relation to the average Rwandan's wealth, but are nonetheless limited. The dependence on personal finances means these organizations have relatively small staffs and in some cases work out of small, one-room offices packed with equipment. They also have some challenges in appearing professional. The *Great Lakes Voice*, for instance, is called "one guy with a laptop complaining" by a source I interviewed at *KT Press*. *Taarifa*, another web startup publication I encountered, is also trying to produce investigative journalism independent of local advertiser influence, but has a small staff and limited resources, so faced criticism during the summer of 2017 for producing a minimally sourced story on telecommunications giant MTN that accused the company of pocketing customer fees in order to pay a fine it owed the government. These organizations as a category are on the fringes of the Rwandan journalism field, with some economic capital and some cultural capital but not large quantities of either.

### *Local-language radio and publication*

The final type of news outlet I encountered was relatively low in economic and cultural capital. These Rwandan news outlets tend to produce news in Kinyarwanda for a local audience, but have little money and few resources for training or retaining quality journalists. They tend to rely on news published in elite print outlets to rebroadcast or publish,

and this is the group of outlets journalists typically refer to when they discuss journalists going months without a paycheck in hopes that one will turn up eventually. This group of news organizations occupies an interesting role in the field, because they are low in both types of capital but tend to be prevalent — most outlets in the country fall into this category.

### **2.5 Conclusion: Exploring the field**

The following chapters examine ways external and internal forces exert pressure on journalists in the field to behave in particular ways and produce particular kinds of news. In chapter 3, I examine the ways narratives about the field's history, origin, and links to the genocide impact its relationship relative to other fields of power in Rwanda, and how this impacts the work and mission of organizations and individual journalists, leading many to embrace a role as development journalists. In chapter 4, I show how business constraints and organizational routines pressure editors and reporters to create news that is primarily positive and events-oriented. And in chapter 5, I explore the factors that enable some journalists to practice watchdog journalism in defiance of these cultural, economic, and organizational pressures.

## Chapter 3

### **“20 YEARS IS JUST THE OTHER DAY”: THE ROLE OF GENESIS NARRATIVE IN CONSTRUCTING JOURNALISM CULTURE**

In my first weeks of fieldwork, a courts reporter at the *New Times* invited me to accompany him to a session at the national parliament, which convened in an imposing, security-patrolled complex next door to the newspaper’s office. The reporter wanted to write a followup to an earlier story about the Rwandan government adopting Swahili as an official language, to be added to the three official language already recognized (English, French, and Kinyarwanda). As we waited at the guard station, where we turned over our IDs to receive press badges, another *New Times* reporter passed us, leaving Parliament to head back to the office. He said he was coming to cover the Swahili discussion, and she responded that it was done, she covered it, and it was “very short — maybe five minutes. They were favorable toward the proposal.” As we continued to Parliament, the reporter accompanying me said he hadn’t been on time to the hearing because he was finishing a different story, but he would still write a followup later to examine the costs involved in adding a Swahili translation to all official documents. The process would probably be very expensive and complicated to implement, he said, even though it breezed through the parliamentary hearing.

Even though we had missed the hearing, the reporter continued to show me around the grounds and building. Parliament is inside a gated wall and the grounds are covered in thick, neatly trimmed grass, flowering trees, and bushes. A drive curves up to the main entrance and several other entrances are scattered along the front of the building. We go first to the Senate, the upper house, and look in to the empty meeting space. Next we walk along an out-

door corridor on the side of the building close to the gate and the reporter with me walks into two unmarked doors that lead to office spaces. In each office there are four desks spaced out and one person is working. He greets these people and asks how they are, in Kinyarwanda, followed by a question that I do not understand. Outside the offices he explains that these are the media relations officials for parliament and that they are very nice and easy to work with and happy to send documents. They send out the docket schedule every morning so he knows when things are happening and can schedule his day, and they also send documents that he needs for his work. We stop in the walkway to look at the outside wall of the main Parliament building. It is covered in holes that look like bullet holes and he says these are bullet holes from the 1994 genocide. The government has decided to leave them open as a reminder of what happened, even though the rest of the building has been renovated. The reporter tells me some of the building's history — Rwandan dignitaries camped out here at Parliament as the genocide began. Then he tells me some of his own history. His parents fled to Uganda with him before the genocide and lived there for a while. They came back to visit Rwanda in late 1994, just after the genocide, when he was 10. He remembered seeing bodies everywhere in the streets. He said everything that has happened in Rwanda since then is a response to the genocide in one way or another, trying to encourage and create a society in the wake of that. The most imposing feature on the Parliamentary grounds, aside from the building, is a memorial to the RPF soldiers. It sits in a clearing to one side of the parliament building and depicts, larger than life, several RPF leaders grouped together with guns.

My interaction with this reporter, from the quick passage of a bill with extensive financial and social ramifications for Rwandan government and citizens to our observation of the public reminder of genocide violence and his personal encounter with the genocide, helped me begin to understand the many levels on which the shared and present cultural memory of the genocide shapes public life in Rwanda today, and how it guides and constrains the social space journalists occupy by setting the rules for discussion. The bill's quick passage

was due, at least in part, to a shared social understanding that conflict should be avoided, especially in public contexts like a parliamentary hearing or a newspaper article. And the tour of the parliament building and grounds provided a visual indication of how present the events of the genocide are in the public arena of Rwanda today, especially in matters of politics and public discussion. In chapter 2, I described the methods employed in this study and described the data I gathered and the journalism field they represent. In this chapter, I begin to answer the question: **What social roles do journalists occupy in Rwanda, and how are they learned?** I examine history and social narratives to show how the field is shaped by myths related to its role in the 1994 genocide. These myths create boundaries defining what is and is not appropriate behavior for journalists in Rwanda.

As Bird (2000) points out, it is impossible to understand the effect of particular practices and trends in journalism without also understanding the cultural context within which such things take place, since journalism in fact “emerges from and responds to cultural specificities” (p. 29). Research solidifies the importance of cultural specifics in shaping journalism fields. For instance, in northern Mexico, an atmosphere of violence with journalists as targets leads to a fragmented journalism field with colleagues in particular states pulling together while others hesitate to assert autonomy as a group (González de Bustamante & Relly, 2016). In Australia, journalists are shaped by their territorial contexts, with journalists in small localities behaving more as community advocates while those those in large metropolitan areas act as neutral observers (Hanusch, 2015). National factors like press freedom and models of media ownership have also been shown to shape journalists’ work by influencing the relative weight journalists place on different professional values, including detachment, non-involvement, and advocacy for social change (Mellado, Moreira, Lagos, & Hernández, 2012). However, there is still a relative lack of fieldwork-based research unpacking the ways particular factors in the surrounding environment impact journalism work. This chapter examines in detail the ways particular elements of the Rwandan journalism field have emerged from and respond to events specific to Rwandan culture. More broadly, it shows how lo-

cal beliefs and shared history generate myths that impact journalism work by reinforcing archetypes that constrain and encourage particular metadiscourse and practices.

### **3.1 *Understanding journalists' social roles***

How journalists feel they ought to act, and how they say they actually act, are critical components of role construction and influence the ways that journalists do act (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). These normative and narrative components of roles can be thought of as aligning with specific social functions, such as monitor, watchdog, collaborator, facilitator, or a variety of other possibilities (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). They can also be considered on a more archetypal level, with journalists telling stories of themselves as heroes or anti-heroes, or even as villains. The motifs of journalist as hero and as anti-hero both reinforce positive portraits of ideal journalists. The hero is the person who pushes beyond the call of duty to pursue something for the greater good; the journalist as hero might work long hours for little financial reward to bring powerful, evil figures to justice, for instance, a portrayal used in representing the *Boston Globe* reporters who investigated Catholic priests' abuse of children in Massachusetts. The journalist as anti-hero is presented as an ideal type with the traits that journalists perceive as favorable in themselves, and presents the journalist as uniquely suited to his or her work, while snubbing the common demands of professionalization (Eldridge II, 2017). The archetypal villain, by contrast, is also powerful but uses his or her power for ill somehow, by oppressing the weak, betraying the good, cheating, or selling out on a group value (Klapp, 1954). Journalists in Western democracies commonly see themselves as the heroes, individuals bravely exposing hidden facts, or increasingly today as anti-heroes, breaking rules for the greater good (Donsbach, 2010; Eldridge II, 2017). Regardless of the story told, journalists' metadiscourse is an important element in constructing and claiming authority (Carlson, 2017). I find that, in Rwanda, journalists are more likely to see themselves and be seen as villains, an archetypal role perception with ramifications in how journalists define their social positions and how others interact with them.

Journalists' role perceptions are broadly defined as "generalized expectations which journalists believe exist in society and among different stakeholders, which they see as normatively acceptable, and which influence their behavior on the job" (Donsbach, 2008, p. 2605). Role perceptions are informed by occupational ideology, which encompasses values guiding a particular "journalistic" way of interpreting and seeing the world. It includes some globally shared elements and some aspects that are idiosyncratic to particular newsrooms or communities (Deuze, 2004; Weaver & Wu, 1998). They are an element of journalism culture (Mellado & Lagos, 2014), which encompasses the set of ideas and practices that journalists use to legitimate their social roles and informs the way journalists interact with each other, their sources, and their audiences, the kinds of news products they create, and the methods they use to create those products (Carey, 1965; Hanitzsch, 2007; Weaver & Wu, 1998). They are widely studied, though scholarly attention focuses primarily on the different role conceptions journalists have in Western, democratic societies, and less on roles journalists may fill in other parts of the world (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016).

Role perception is a product of a variety of influences on journalists, including years of professional experience (Herscovitz, 2004), individual values (Plaisance & Skewes, 2003), and organizational factors (Mellado & Lagos, 2014), but studies suggest that one important element in constructing role perception is country-level variation, particularly in the political arena. Broadly speaking, it is commonly accepted that political systems influence media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and there is concrete evidence that country-level factors have a relatively strong influence over the role perceptions of individual journalists. A study of journalists in four European countries found that the journalists' countries mattered more than within-country factors in determining role conceptions for British, Spanish, German, and Danish journalists (Van Dalen, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2012). Zhu, Weaver, Lo, Chen, and Wu (1997) found a similar pattern in comparing journalists from China, Taiwan, and the US; societal factors, and in particular political factors differentiated from cultural fac-

tors, had more impact than organizational or individual factors in predicting journalists' role conceptions. In a study of journalists' role conceptions in Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, Mellado et al. (2012) found some evidence that political culture impacts the level of interventionism and power distances journalists perceive in their roles. In a study of Brazilian journalists' role conceptions and ethical considerations, Herscovitz (2004) found a connection between Brazil's restrictive information policy and journalists' emphasis on disseminating rather than interpreting information. And yet, though journalists' role perceptions are widely studied, Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) point out that most studies of journalists' roles focus mainly on inductive and descriptive examinations and are "remarkably thin on theory" (p. 3). This study presents a theoretical perspective on the creation of role perceptions and other elements of journalism culture.

It is important to note that news content is "seldom an individual output," meaning it does not directly proceed from individual journalists' conceptions of their roles (Tandoc Jr, Hellmueller, & Vos, 2013, p. 551). Rather, it is a product of those roles in combination with other factors, which may include the constraints of routines, organizational influences, the journalist's beat, and geographic location (Mellado & Lagos, 2014; Mellado & Van Dalen, 2014). As such, organizational and practical factors impact the extent to which journalists enact particular roles (Carpenter, Boehmer, & Fico, 2016). However, while the relationship might be complicated, studies show that role perception affects reporting styles and the way journalists do their work (Van Dalen et al., 2012). A survey of Danish journalists found that journalists' perceptions of their social roles along passive-to-active and information-giving vs. conversation-starting dimensions influenced the way they implemented the objectivity norm in their work (Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro, & de Vreese, 2012). Journalists' perceptions of valid roles also influence the boundaries of journalism in particular contexts, defining what journalists may do that falls within the boundaries of "journalism" (Ryfe, 2016). Understanding the influences that lead journalists to say they *should* perform particular roles in society helps us understand how journalism is perceived in different cultures and what goals

journalists might aspire to, even if they are diverted from meeting those goals.

Development and watchdog roles in particular occupy prominent places in the journalism studies literature and are relevant to this study. “Development journalism” has roots in 1960s discourse around communication for development and emphasizes goal-oriented reporting that may side with or support government policies to effect social change (Xiaoge, 2009). Journalists filling development roles can see themselves as social change agents, educators about perceived problems, or mediators between social factions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). These journalists tend to find it important to educate audiences, promote tolerance and diversity, and support national development, and say it is less important to be a government adversary or set the political agenda (Kalyango Jr et al., 2017). Notably, the development journalism role does not necessarily carry a burden of government support per se; journalists with a development orientation surveyed in eight countries felt that it was relatively important that they “report things as they are” and unimportant to “convey a positive image of political leadership” (Kalyango Jr et al., 2017, p. 585). Journalists can find it difficult to convert the principles of development journalism into practice, though, partly because the concept is ambiguous (Skjerdal, 2011), and critics have questioned whether development journalism merely represents government control and an attempt to justify and normalize censorship and self-censorship (Waisbord, 2013).

The watchdog role, by contrast, positions journalists in a critical or monitorial position relative to the government, with journalists seeing themselves as responsible to scrutinize financial and political leaders and critique social institutions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). Journalists who perceive themselves to be social and political monitors also prioritize verification and fact-based observation of political conduct, seeking to foster independent citizenship (Christians et al., 2009; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). Watchdog journalism is rooted in the Anglo-American journalism tradition, and was bolstered in the West by widely publicized investigations into high-level government corruption surrounding government documents (the

Pentagon Papers) and funding (Watergate) (Norris, 2014). Journalists filling this role seek to investigate the powerful and disseminate information that might have previously been hidden from or unavailable to the public (Norris, 2014). While watchdog journalism is often romanticized as something that can be accomplished by a lone, dedicated journalist, research suggests that it is most often enabled by a host of social and political factors (Waisbord, 2015). It also has an unpredictable effect, and may need public and legislative support to effect change (Waisbord, 2015). Nevertheless, watchdog journalism is strongly favored in Western journalism education and practice, particularly in the U.S., and Western educators can import it elsewhere. Watchdog journalism as a role is typically associated with some degree of autonomy in the journalism field, since it involves journalists watching for misdeeds or unethical behavior among powerful actors in different fields.

Of course, journalists can hold allegiance to several roles simultaneously, leading to a complex range of factors informing how they do their work. For instance, journalists in Fiji and other Global South countries prioritize both development and watchdog roles, evidence of a “development journalism that sees itself as supportive of development, but wants to make sure that governments adhere to the development process” (Hanusch & Uppal, 2015, p. 573). Several studies based on survey research report journalists’ relative rankings of different possible role perceptions across national and other geopolitical borders (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). Even within countries, journalists’ role perceptions and ranking of the relative importance of different roles can vary. Hanusch (2015) found that the amount of importance Australian journalists placed on filling a watchdog role was linked with the relative urbanness of their organizational context, with the role being more important for metropolitan journalists than for journalists in smaller population centers. I find that, within the Rwandan journalism field, journalists themselves are caught between two roles: that of the watchdog, and that of the social helper. Each of these roles is encouraged by different elements of journalism training, historical events, and social expectations.

### **3.2 *Myth, roles, and metadiscourse***

Still largely missing from discussions of journalism roles and metadiscourse, though, is in-depth consideration of how both are constructed. Where do journalism role and self-perceptions come from? Borrowing again from organizational theory, I argue that they are introduced via various myths into the occupational milieu of journalism, both on an organizational and a system level. In developing this suggestion I draw from the tradition of journalism studies that examines the motivations and actions of journalists from an ideological point of view. Deuze (2005), for instance, suggests that journalism can best be understood “in terms of how journalists give meaning to their newswork” (p. 444). Hanitzsch (2007) also embraces the ideological nature of journalism work while cautioning against thinking of journalism culture as a singular ideology. He points out that journalists often must negotiate competing ideological pressures in their daily work. Zelizer (1993) likewise proposes that journalists can be viewed as members of an interpretive community whose motivations and behaviors can be understood in light of the way they understand key, shared cultural narratives. Zelizer here calls for an extended examination of the journalistic discourse surrounding key events in the history of the practice, “as a means of understanding the shared past through which journalists make their professional lives meaningful and unite themselves” (Zelizer, 1993, p. 219). In essence, what Zelizer is suggesting is that researchers further explore the impact of particular myths on the practice of journalism.

Journalism studies has tended to invoke the concept of “myth” to mean “a captivating fiction, a promise unfulfilled and perhaps unfulfillable,” an untrue or popular tale, a rumor, or a fictitious or imaginary person or object (Lim, 2012, p. 72). This meaning is evident in Mudhai (2011)’s exploration of objectivity as a myth — something “impossible to achieve” (p. 679). Dickinson and Bigi (2009) use the term similarly in their discussion of the ways video journalists romanticize their social roles, taking on a “Robin Hood” ethos. Reich and Godler (2017) attribute a similar sense of popular fiction to the term “myth,” finding that

legwork is a “mythologized” concept in journalism but that the reality is different from the myth and the promised value of legwork is not “merely a myth” (p. 9). Used in this way, the concept of myth can shed light on the portrayal of particular characters in media coverage or the ways journalists adopt romanticized notions of their work as “Robin Hood” fighting for the poor against the rich, etc. Tuchman (1972)’s discussion of objectivity as a strategic ritual relies on a related concept of ritual as a “routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought” (p. 661). However, this conceptual definition of myth can only go so far in aiding scholars seeking to understand the ways stories and ideas shape practice.

Organizational studies suggest a somewhat different conceptual meaning of “myth.” This alternate meaning has been less often explored in journalism studies but provides a helpful framework for understanding the ways journalism culture is constructed and applied in particular contexts. Bowles (1989) explains these various concepts attached to the word “myth,” pointing out that, in management studies at the time, myth was largely used with a pejorative meaning to conjure up something “antithetical to fact,” opposed to reality, untrue, primitive or arbitrary. However, he points out that anthropologists and others have treated myth seriously as a way to, among other things, help the holders picture their role in the universe and socialize individuals into particular groups, teaching them values, attitudes, and forms of expression valuable in the group.

In the context of organizational studies, a myth is “a structure of beliefs in the organization that serves as the ‘taken-for-granted’ logic base for the relevant organizational unit” (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989, p. 85). As such, “myth” does not connote a falsehood or fairy tale but rather a set of beliefs that can be conjured up in a story-like narrative fashion to explain why something is done the way it is. A myth is the way organizational culture is verbalized and explained, or a story about “how things are around here” (Owen, 1986, p. 116). The “truth” or falsehood of a myth is subjective; to those social-

ized into organizational culture, a myth represents factual and objective reality that gives common-sense appeal to explanations of the way things are done (Boje, Fedor, & Rowland, 1982). At an organizational level, a myth can be a way of explaining problematic aspects of an organization by defining truth and rational purpose to justify why a particular practice is the most effective way for an organization to function (Boje et al., 1982). Myth as a manifestation of organizational culture plays an important role in ensuring the stability of an organization, because once it is accepted as a foundation for particular beliefs or practices, it is difficult to change. Myths can effectively define the boundaries of what behaviors are considered appropriate for those in an organization (Boje et al., 1982; Ferris et al., 1989).

While the concept of myth defined in this way shows up less often in journalism studies literature, it has the potential to add valuable insight. Two examples of scholars using the concept as I define it are Pauly and Eckert (2002), who explore the importance of the concept of “the local” as a widely held and dramatized myth that articulates dilemmas facing commercial news organizations in U.S. journalism, and Mitra (2016), who says myths are “unconscious common senses, affiliations, and affinities of journalists” (p. 12). Of particular interest to the present study, Mitra goes on to highlight the ways myths are active in journalists’ attempts to practice peace journalism in Kenya after the 2007 election violence. Various social constraints can be interpreted as particular myths impacting the ways journalists go about their work.

### ***3.3 The role of genesis narrative in organizations and fields***

One possible source of powerful organizational myths is in an origin story or genesis narrative. Fundamental to organizational and field identities is the story of how those organizations and fields came to be. The “genesis narrative” sheds light on “the history inscribed in institutional practices, social, economic and political structures” (Hanna, 2005, p. 168). The genesis narrative as recounted by those within a field is a step removed from the genesis

history itself, as it has already been reinterpreted by particular members of the field. However, the memory or story of an event is widely considered by sociologists to carry significant weight in individual decisions and behavior (Merton, 1995; Thomas & Thomas, 1928). In essence, the origin story functions as an identity narrative, and understanding it as such allows the researcher to better understand the identity constructs and power struggles within particular organizations (Brown, 2006). With this in mind, I examine the narrative about journalism's rebirth in Rwanda, as recounted by particular members of the field, and the ways myths rooted in that narrative impact journalism culture today.

Origin stories play key roles in organizations, serving as sacred narratives that are often invoked in times of crisis or change to justify organizational decisions (O'Connor, 2000). On a broader level, the origin story sheds light on how the field emerged, what tensions resulted in its cultural location, and to some extent how things might have emerged otherwise than they did (Bourdieu & Farage, 1994; Bourdieu & Thompson, 1991). In addition, the history inscribed in institutional practices and hidden in people's heads is fundamentally linked to the sociocultural practices that emerge in a given field (Hanna, 2005). Using data collected from fieldwork in Rwanda, I show how the rebirth story of the contemporary field of journalism in Rwanda contains myths that shape the ideology and practices of journalists on a daily basis. Sometimes these field myths even supersede internal conceptions of global occupational norms.

While the political system outlined in chapter 1 certainly constrains and shapes the Rwandan journalism field, it was often low on the list journalists mentioned in interviews when asked what factors constrain their work. Most commonly, across media organizations, journalists mentioned the genocide as the most powerful force shaping journalists' perceptions of themselves and their occupation as well as public and official perceptions of journalists. This chapter focuses on the narratives journalists tell about themselves and their occupation. There is a shared narrative, rooted in the role journalists played in the 1994 genocide, which

shapes journalists' current identity and place in society. It also defines a mission, shared among local organizations, to guard against future genocide and promote unity and reconciliation among Rwandans. Drawing from observations, documents, and interview data, I argue in this chapter that this shared genesis narrative is responsible for powerful myths in the Rwandan journalism field, and that these myths have a visible impact on many levels of Rwandan journalism culture, particularly in shaping elements of role perception relative to other fields of power.

Interviews with other editors in Kigali confirmed that the *New Times* is well-established and influential in the journalism field. A founding editor at *KT Press*, an online publication that is also well-known in Rwanda, said the new publication decided on a news strategy specifically so that they would produce different types of stories and not be competing with the *New Times* for readers, because the *New Times*' name brand recognition would win out. Thus, while the myths outlined here draw most heavily on interviews and observations from the *New Times*, it is likely that they diffuse through the field, at least in their practical impact, as other organizations look to the *New Times* for examples of how journalism should be done in Rwanda. Employees interviewed for this study include the senior editor, two deputy managing editors, the online editor, and three reporters at the *New Times*, along with editors and reporters at other outlets identified in the text. To preserve subject confidentiality, the sources are distinguished only as reporters or editors, not by their specific position within organizations.

### ***3.4 The origin story and its effects on Rwandan journalism culture***

Journalists in Rwanda construct their occupational identities and social roles in response to and consideration of the role journalists played in the 1994 genocide, and the relatively recent occurrence of the genocide makes the Rwandan case ideal for studying the impact of myths rooted in critical junctures on the journalism field. In short, a commonly shared belief among

journalists and in society more broadly is that *journalists used their occupation to exacerbate the genocide*. In light of this belief, the genocide represents a critical juncture that revealed major, critical flaws in the state of journalism and, as a result of this past behavior, the journalism field and its practitioners are primarily cast in a “villain” archetypal social role, by themselves and by those outside the field. This myth shapes the field by setting the boundaries of acceptable discussion about journalism: Because journalists have played the powerful and negative social role of the villain in the past, they should be treated with suspicion today.

The second myth particularly impacts journalists at specific organizations, but those organizations are centrally placed in the Rwandan journalism field so the implications of the myth are likely to trickle down to also shape the work of journalists at other organizations in Rwanda. This myth is that *journalists have a responsibility to promote unity among Rwandans and present a unified picture to the outside world*. Both of the organizations in question — *KT Press* and the *New Times* — were founded after the genocide and the myth is embedded in organizational genesis narratives, shaping journalists’ beliefs about what is “good” journalism, what their social roles should be, and how they can and should do their work. This genesis narrative serves not only as a normative force shaping journalists’ beliefs about what they should do; it also shapes their perceptions of the constraints at work on the field in each of these domains.

### **3.5 Myth I**

*Journalists used their occupation to exacerbate the genocide.*

Newsroom staff are, for the most part, quite young — the editor in chief of the *New Times* is 35 and the average age in the newsroom is around 30. *KT Press* employees are similarly young, as were journalists I interviewed at other news outlets. This suggests that few, if any, journalists currently working in Rwanda were old enough to have been working journalists during the genocide, as the oldest staff members would have been only young teenagers at

the time. While no one I interviewed expressed personal responsibility for the genocide, everyone said they feel professionally implicated in the events of the genocide because their predecessors played a critical role. They were “deeply involved,” one editor said. “The media played a big role in the genocide,” one reporter said. Journalists working at the time used their media outlets as platforms to spread propaganda and violent messages, as one editor described:

Someone went on the radio — a normal journalist — and called on the people to start killing. And the people said, “OK, I have to do it, because they said it on the radio.”

This quote illustrates the personal power and responsibility journalists attribute to their fellow field members for playing a role in the genocide. This role involved print and broadcast journalists publishing and broadcasting messages emphasizing ethnic division and encouraging racist attitudes before the genocide, as outlined in chapter 1. It continued through the genocide itself, when journalists, primarily radio personalities, used their access to broadcast studios and their widespread audiences to call for direct social action with powerful and harmful consequences. Another journalist explained,

In the genocide, we had journalists who sensitized people to kill. They were using the radio station to spread the message of hate and killing. And some people died because a journalist has told the militia where they were hiding.

Not only did these journalists use the power of name recognition that had been built up over years of doing their jobs, but they used their work platforms to broadcast and publish those messages. Thus, in this narrative, it is not just the rogue journalist who has diverged from his or her role to take a public stance, but all journalists, even those going about their daily routines as usual, who are implicated in the genocide. Journalists see their fellow practitioners as responsible for stirring up violence, and even for outing specific people on the radio who would later be killed. The narrative recounted by these journalists aligns with that

presented by news accounts and research about the genocide. Kellow and Steeves (1998) recount how, in the months leading up to the genocide, the radio station RTLM cultivated an audience through its broadcasts of “hot news” (*inkuruishushe*), which often included stories of attacks and alleged misconduct by opposition party members. The radio station relied on “excellent journalists,” many recruited from newspapers, to produce these shows (Kellow & Steeves, 1998, p. 118). Kellow and Steeves also note that journalists were often at the top of the lists of people to be killed during the genocide, occasionally for their ethnicity but more often because of their political involvement and occupations.

Journalists see themselves as professionally responsible for personal and direct violence committed against their fellow Rwandans during the genocide. No one said that they personally had played a role in killing. The only personal stories journalists shared about the genocide involved being out of the country because parents had moved because of ethnic conflict earlier in the 1980s and 1990s, or hiding and watching others commit violent acts. However, journalists as a social group report that their occupation enabled particular abuses of power that perpetuated the genocide on a systemic level with immediate and personal effect. Journalists, along with presumably most other Rwandans in their late 20s and older, remembered vividly events surrounding the genocide. Some told me the stories in personal conversation; others recounted them in editorial meetings, including one at *KT Press* leading up to Kwibuka (genocide commemoration week). One reporter described to me the scene he found when his parents came back to visit the country in late 1994; bodies were piled up on the sides of roads, vast evidence of the violence. Another editor told of how he hid inside his house and watched his 11- and 12-year-old classmates run through the streets of his village, some holding machetes and others being chased. There is a strong and inescapable personal relationship with the genocide shared by most Rwandans who are old enough to remember or have lived through the event. One editor vividly recounted this reality:

We are part of this society ourselves. We are born of this situation. In this

society, everybody is a victim. I lost my relatives, close relatives. So one way or another, that thing keeps playing on your mind. You cannot avoid it.

The genocide comprises a shared cultural memory that carries particular weight for journalists because of the role they perceive their forebears to have played in perpetrating the violence.

### *3.5.1 Power and relationships among Rwandan journalists*

The latent meaning of this myth is that journalists are powerful and have played the villain before, so they should be treated with suspicion today. This meaning has implications for how journalists perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Taking the definition of a journalistic role as a “discursive construction of journalism’s identity and place in society” (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 159), this myth contributes a foundational level to the journalist’s identity — the story and belief of journalist as villain. Any particular roles that a journalist may adopt as educator, critic, monitor, or other figure, are interpreted within the broader belief that journalists have been powerful villains in the past and, while they may have reformed, it is still appropriate to treat members of the field with suspicion. This leads to weak internal regulatory structures that tend to rely on cooperation and compromise with figures of authority in other fields rather than strong internal defenses and self-policing. This weak field-level stance in turn shapes individual journalists’ work because, as one journalist said, while the regulatory commission might eventually come to the aid of a journalist accused of wrongdoing, they typically would not step in before it hurt.

On a field level, this involvement shapes the way the regulatory bodies governing the field set rules for the field and protect journalists against outside critics. It also impacts the level of federal funding these organizations receive, and public reaction to journalists who get in trouble. On an individual level, it influences journalists’ level of comfort pursuing stories

that are independent, investigative, or critical of other fields of power, and it colors journalists' social interactions with sources. Journalists often encounter uncooperative interview subjects, many of whom say they don't want to talk to the media because of the destructive role media has played in the past.

Many journalists in Rwanda are uncertain in their ability to appropriately manage a high degree of social power, so they embrace or accept a field position of limited power. Many journalists expressed this interest in a guarded social power, and some attributed it directly to the media's role in the genocide. Two interactions illustrate this. The *New Times* newsroom is an open-concept office space with rows of desks assigned to individual reporters and editors. Two television screens hang in the center of the room, each facing half of the newsroom. When I was in the newsroom these were always on and were tuned to a news channel, often CNN's global news channel. When I began my observation period at the *New Times*, Donald Trump had just been inaugurated as U.S. president, and he was the frequent subject of stories on CNN. Since everyone in the newsroom knew I was American and had worked as a journalist, reporters and editors frequently discussed with me their critiques of the ways U.S. news media were covering the Trump presidency. These conversations were useful both in that they helped me build relationships within the newsroom, and also in the ways they shed light on the occupational ideology and role perceptions journalists hold at the *New Times*. An excerpt from my fieldnotes illuminates how one editor outlined the ideal role of the media. This editor began by telling me that "the media should print the truth, but not be the opposition." He was telling me that CNN had recently published a piece embracing the "opposition party" role that Trump had declared the media to hold<sup>1</sup>. This editor said objectivity was an important goal to meet but that actively opposing the president is taking a political position, which is not acceptable. He also said that the American media and other Western media are too strong and will get to determine Trump's legacy, which is not fair.

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<sup>1</sup>one such article is Bailey (2017)

The editor further explained,

Yes, we are journalists, we have to be free to exercise our right to communicate, to do our job, hold everybody accountable — but also exercise all this responsibly. If you like, there has to be that sense of accountability on our part.

In the judgment of these Rwandan journalists, it is equally or perhaps more important for journalists to exercise their power responsibly as it is for them to ensure that others are using their power responsibly.

Journalists guard against publishing news content that could stir up controversy or negative sentiment in part because of the powerful role they know they played during the genocide. An editor at *KT Press* explained:

Genocide affected journalism. People say, “Eh, what if I say this and then spark something else?” Some people end up censoring themselves because (something) is very sensitive. Genocide is a very big thing, and it creates that confusion of differentiating what is publishable and what is not.

There is a general sense that journalists are somewhat uncertain of what sources of conflict could spark violent conflict again, leading reporters to avoid overt seeking out or portraying overt or implied conflict in news reports today. There is a contemporary reluctance to publish any content that might trigger conflict in any form. News content like updates about the stock market were far removed from the kind of conflict reporters were worried about, but stories related to political conflict would often raise concern. News stories related to ethnic division would be very unlikely to make it to publication, often because reporters were themselves uncertain whether or how such an item should be covered in light of the genocide. Political figures in turn are reluctant to trust reporters with information, as one *New Times* reporter recounted.

Everyone is so conscious about what they present in the paper or radio. Policy-makers and leaders want to be sure, “What are you going to write?” And even journalists themselves haven’t trusted themselves to, you know, to hold whoever is there accountable. There is that mistrust because of the past.

This quote suggests that journalists are uncomfortable advocating for a powerful role in which they would hold a watchdog position. In addition, figures in power are mistrustful of journalists. Because journalists are unsure that they should fill a social role of and are conflict averse, they tend to not push back against mistrustful sources by demanding accountability. Instead, they are likely to take a softer approach to reporting and not push for information beyond what is offered.

This analysis suggests that journalists in Rwanda are reluctant to push for a role that exerts power to be independent of government. One of the factors informing this reluctance is that journalists have a strongly shared institutional memory of the role their predecessors played in sending messages that incited and encouraged violent ideology and behavior during the genocide. This reluctance creates some tension for reporters who wish the media would collectively advocate for a more powerful role, but most see it as unlikely to happen. “If you tried to read how other countries get independent journalism, the government didn’t come and give it to them,” a *New Times* reporter said. “Journalists themselves fight for it — not with guns, but using the facts” However, even while acknowledging that journalists would need to fight for a more powerful position in society, many reported their fellow journalists as being personally reluctant to do so.

Along with affecting the social power journalists themselves feel comfortable claiming, the myth that journalists were deeply involved in and responsible for violence during the genocide affects the level of social support they receive, both from sources and others involved in the newsgathering process and from the general public in cases when members of

the journalism field are criticized for the way they reported something.

Journalists feel that the public has little faith in their ability to do their job well, and this is evident in the reluctance of most sources to give journalists information. The media's role in the genocide provides "a convenient excuse for people to start viewing the media with suspicion," one editor said. A reporter explained:

If you are trying to interview someone in Canada, it takes two minutes. You are like I am [name], I write for the *Ottawa District*, just a quick question about this. They will tell you exactly what you want. In Rwanda, it's different. In Rwanda, the way our people think, by the time we call them about something, they are like, "What does a journalist want, why does a journalist need me?" because they don't have a good memory, or a good experience with journalists in the past.

This reporter, who had worked briefly in Canada while pursuing graduate studies there, had realized through this work that sources in Rwanda are relatively reluctant to talk, tending to be suspicious of journalists rather than open in sharing information. Because of this, journalists in Rwanda face a challenging level of work in writing news articles, often running into a general sense of public reluctance to engage with media outlets. Sources often justify this reluctance by recalling journalism's role in the genocide.

You talk to the minister and he says, "Ahh, I know you! Before you have published your story, get me the draft so I look at it." You see that type of thing. Or even a common person will say, "Ehhh, don't take it — don't take a picture of me. I can't talk." The society doesn't trust us. And it's difficult to get someone who can trust you with classified emails or a hidden agenda from people here and there. Not that they don't know, but they have that fear of the media. They know that we denounced them. so they don't trust us.

In this quote, an editor at *KT Press* recounts the range of sources who respond with suspicion, from a private citizen on the street refusing to let his or her photo be taken to the public official who requests to review content before it is published. Journalists find that they are rarely trusted to report on confidential or sensitive information. (They are occasionally privy to this information, but are expected to keep it out of print because of organizational loyalty — a topic I will discuss further in the following chapter.) This adds an extra hurdle to the Rwandan journalist looking to report information. Before he or she can produce an article or broadcast, the journalist must first gain the trust of each source involved, building from a position of relative lack of trust in the journalism field in general.

From the reports of journalists in Rwanda, the role the genocide plays in creating this public lack of trust in the journalism field has a crucial and insurmountable effect on the challenges and practices of many Rwandan journalists today. As a reporter for the *New Times* explained:

During the genocide, radio and newspapers were really vibrant. People could just tune in and listen for directions on where they were going to attack and which roadblock should be where, what you guys should be doing at the roadblock, and things like that which were really negative. So today, I think there's a feeling of, do I really trust a newspaper?

Sources and audiences alike share the lack of trust in media outlets, leading to a further challenge for journalists: They are unlikely to receive public support when they face criticism from public officials or others in power. According to an editor at *KT Press*:

Basically, you don't have someone to fall to. In America you know, when the government lambasts you, the public is going to say "good job." It's not the case here. Here, when the government lambasts you, the people will say, "Yes, they are not very good people." This is what happens. It has been said since the genocide that the media are bad people, the media are bad people, they

provoked the genocide — that has created a perception in people that the media is a dangerous thing and it's not something you should trust. Because [journalists] will say things that are bad. OK? They said bad things about Tutsis, so they will say bad things about anything. Now because of that, people call here every day, some public relations officer from some office, to say, "That story, it's not a very good thing, I think you should delete that story.' Some PR guy, you know. They feel they have power over you. So the government does that all the time, and ordinary people do that.

This quote highlights several elements of the relationship between journalists and the public in Rwanda. First, based on the role journalists played in the genocide, this editor says the public are unlikely to trust the media over the government if they are in conflict. Instead, the first response is likely to be one of mistrust of media, and an assumption that journalists must have made a mistake somehow. If the media could report bad things about the Tutsi — the ethnic group that was targeted in the genocide — then the media can report bad things about anything, and journalists are untrustworthy. In addition to this negatively impacting public support of journalism, it also empowers sources who disapprove of content that has been published. Those sources begin to feel that they have the right and power to demand that editors remove stories published online for small reasons.

A wire reporter who had worked in Uganda before moving to Rwanda as a journalist reiterated the general public distrust of the media in Rwanda, which he explained in comparison with the perception of journalism in Uganda. In Rwanda, he said:

Say you are writing a story about corruption. Maybe money has been stolen and the money was supposed maybe to bring water to village people. You would expect that it is a good cause that people would appreciate. But here, instead, people are suspicious. When you go down and you talk to people and say look here, I am doing this because this money is meant for you, not for government,

they will not seem to understand. For instance, in Kampala, you write a story, eh, even when they arrest you, people generally will maybe demonstrate and say no, no, no. But here, even those who tried to speak will say, “But why are you doing this? Why are you doing this? The society itself cannot come on the side of journalists and maybe see the good things [they do].

As this reporter explained, in other contexts where he had practiced journalism — in Uganda, a neighboring country where journalists are frequently targeted and sometimes arrested for producing content that political figures do not want — journalists would be likely to have public support in political trouble. At the least, journalists tend to be sympathetic figures in Uganda because the public is generally skeptical of government behavior and is likely to support journalists who say they are fighting for public rights against political corruption and oppression. By contrast, in Rwanda, journalists who face censure from the government are likely to also face judgment from the public, which tends to not grant the journalist the benefit of the doubt.

Throughout the early 1990s, the public were suspicious of sharing information with news media, one reporter told me.

Information was something sensitive to share, because you don’t know who you are giving information to and how it might affect you. That has made Rwandans very, very careful people when it comes to releasing information. As journalists, we always face challenges of even someone who has a shop selling goods and is not eager to tell you what they are doing because they don’t know for what purpose you need information.

Journalists feel that the media’s role in the genocide infuses the way the public interact with journalists now. To him and other reporters and editors, this serves as just a reminder that journalists must work extra hard to be “professional” and to hunt down necessary quotes and sources. But to others, this serves to excuse what they pointed out as weak points in

professional practice.

In response to this general public reluctance to engage with journalists, the reporters I encountered would sometimes behave in ways that they acknowledged to be ethically questionable. I watched reporters discuss a few such encounters in editorial meetings at *KT Press*, highlighting the roadblocks journalists run into and the ways those journalists respond. At this meeting, journalists were debriefing the difficulties they had encountered in reporting and writing feature stories around a genocide theme, set to run during Kwibuka (genocide commemoration week). The journalists hoped to interview two important sources who refused, saying variations of, “If you are a journalist, we cannot meet you.” Both sources told the reporters that they did not trust journalists to report facts accurately, and were concerned that the stories of their roles in the genocide would be misrepresented. In both cases, the reporters misrepresented themselves, saying they were not journalists. After the sources shared lengthy stories, the reporters then negotiated coverage, finding that the sources were more open to appearing in news stories once they knew what would be covered exactly. The editor sharing these anecdotes acknowledged that this is a dubious ethical practice but supported it as something that he thought was necessary to get the news coverage desired.

Everyone has their own opinion — to me, I think it was brilliant, because negotiating after is easier. You can tell the guy you know what, seriously, we need that story, I’m a journalist, it’s a very powerful story and I want to tell it.

This and other interactions throughout my fieldwork highlighted the fact that, while Rwandan journalists are in a relatively unprivileged position in that they are generally viewed with suspicion by those in other fields of power and their desired audiences, they respond with behaviors that are perhaps exacerbating the image they wish to shed. By adopting practices like hiding their true identities and massaging quotes in translation from Kinyarwanda to English (a practice I observed several times, as many reporters, especially at *KT Press*, did not use recorders or take notes in interviews), reporters could be further solidifying their

popular image as untrustworthy purveyors of information. This challenge is discussed further in chapter 5.

Yet another quote from a reporter at the *New Times* underscores the shared feeling that the genocide has set the stage for the contemporary journalism field to be the way it is. “The media played a big role in the genocide,” a reporter said. “That has undermined the profession and has caused people to feel that they should not trust the media.” This feeling plays a role particularly in relationships with sources, from politicians to private citizens on the street, who journalists say mistrust the media because of the role journalists played in the genocide. “If they actually want to hide something, for example, it was so easy an excuse to say ‘you see guys, you are known to be inflammatory, you are known to be sensational, you see what happened,’ ” said one editor. “A lot of excuses came up owing to what happened in ’94. And of course, to a certain degree, the onus was on the journalists to prove themselves, that they are different.” This presents a double challenge. Not only are journalists under heightened scrutiny from their official sources, but their readers and the citizen sources they could rely on to do more mundane reporting are also hesitant to confide in reporters. In turn, journalists respond by adopting sometimes unethical behavior by hiding their identities, which could contribute to a stronger feeling that journalists are not always trustworthy.

A *New Times* reporter called this “the issue of mindset.” He said:

Because most people know that a journalist is a bad man, even if you are looking for a positive comment, people will be suspicious. That is maybe changing — people have started understanding that everyone has the right to access information, and now the cooperation is improving. But you can look for a comment from someone today, and he tells you, “Can we talk after noon, give me like two hours or three hours then you’ll get it,” and then he won’t pick up the phone.

Because information was used as a tool to provoke dissent and conflict during the genocide,

people today are reluctant to share personal histories and details with others who they do not know well. This is broadly true across Rwandan society — Rwandans have a reputation in surrounding cultures and among the expatriate community of being private and not forthcoming. It becomes especially pertinent with journalists, who rely on information readily supplied to produce news updates. When there is a generally shared social distrust around information sharing, it has a strong effect on the ability of information workers to do their jobs. Another *New Times* journalist confirmed this when I asked him what problems Rwandan journalists face:

The main challenge is the trust, really. Should I trust you? As a journalist, should I trust you as my source of information? Or if I'm a source of information, why should I trust you?

Lack of trust and reluctance to share information permeate the Rwandan journalism field, affecting the ways sources and journalists interact and the way journalists think of themselves and their social role.

### **3.6 Myth II**

*Members of the Rwandan journalism field have a responsibility to promote unity among Rwandans and present a unified picture to the outside world.*

The Rwandan journalism field's role in the genocide features prominently in the ideology and role perceptions of reporters and editors today, as individuals, as news organizations, and as a field. Reporters and editors emphasized that they feel they have a social responsibility to promote unity and positivity among Rwandans, emphasize progress, and show a good face of Rwanda to the rest of the world. Several reporters emphasized that this development journalism role is different from the more watchdog-oriented role journalists play in other countries, including Canada, the U.S., and Kenya. Conversely, interview subjects

stressed their responsibility to not stir up dissent in any way similar to that underpinning the genocide. “We are doing development journalism, and it’s a constructive thing,” a *New Times* reporter told me. Many Rwandan journalists embrace a development journalism role because of concern over the negative power of divisive watchdog reporting combined with a desire to contribute to the social good and undo the negative effects their field had in the past. There are many reasons Rwandan journalists tend to produce positive news and avoid negative or watchdog reporting, and I will unpack additional motivations further in chapter 4. However, one strong motivation that inclines journalists to think of their work as primarily contributing to national development rather than stirring up dissent or uncovering conflict has to do with the powerful social effect of the genocide. One editor at *KT Press* explained it this way. He first acknowledged that most local media houses are not strictly independent and face pressure from other angles to produce positive news and avoid critical news. However, there is also personal motivation to report this way:

If these media houses were fully independent, they still would be doing the same kind of reporting, for one reason. You know, Rwandan society is still moving out of those genocide memories. Everyone, be it in the opposition or something else, is fully focused on rebuilding the nation. And rebuilding the nation means giving a helping hand in promoting and publishing what is mostly needed for the local communities.

Out of personal motivations linked both to the journalist’s role in the genocide and a shared cultural memory of the violence and upheaval around that event, journalists tend to share a mission of promoting local security and development. They are more interested in pursuing news coverage that builds reconciliation than in coverage that might have destructive or disruptive effects.

Not only is the journalism field weak, it is also deeply rooted in the events surrounding the genocide. This is particularly evident in narratives recounting the genesis of the *New*

*Times*, which is easily the most prominent and well-resourced ostensibly independent news outlet in Rwanda. One editor explained that the *New Times* was created immediately following the genocide with a mission to unite the Rwandan diaspora. Many had fled to English-speaking countries and had learned to speak English, so the newspaper was born as an English-language publication. This language still contributes to a core identity of the newspaper; many staff were quick to remind me that it is the only English-language daily newspaper in Rwanda, and that this language choice constitutes a challenge and a mission. Related to the language as well is the unifying mission of the *New Times*: “As part of the reconciliation process, the people who had gone abroad — we needed them to come back home and help build the country . . . so they needed to know what was going on, and the language they were comfortable with was English,” an editor said. Another editor also linked the newspaper’s genesis to its mission.

You have to look at where we have come from. I would say that the *New Times* is probably a symbol of post-1994 Rwanda. It was born after the 1994 genocide with the mission to partake in the process of the rebirth of this country and to build a country that is accountable, that is of the people, that promotes reconciliation and the unity of the people, that delivers development, that commits and delivers on its commitments. The whole idea behind the *New Times* is saying look, we can afford to do professional journalism, but also partake in propagating hope and promoting business and promoting civility and promoting a nation, a nation that wants to be there for its people, a nation that is inclusive and institutions that are inclusive but also that are accountable to the people. And I think that is our role as media in Rwanda, as the *New Times* — to be professional media, and to tell the Rwandan story, despite our challenges, using our means, and within our context. For a long, long, long time, our story, and the story of Africa, has been pretty much in the hands of someone else.

The genocide, in these journalists’ retellings, comprises a compelling origin story and a *rai-*

*son d'être* for their ongoing work. There are several factors wrapped up in this explanation of how and why the *New Times* exists the way it does in Rwanda. Some are unique to that publication, but others were echoed by editors at other news organizations, including *KT Press*. This mission combines elements of development journalism, in the commitment to promote reconciliation and unity, with elements of watchdog journalism in the idea that the government should “commit and deliver on its commitments.” In articulating the mission this way, this editor positions journalism in Rwanda as a field that exists to supplement and aid the government in performing a mission of bettering the country’s population. The other element of journalistic mission this editor outlines is that of “telling the story of Rwanda.” This mission is one that was echoed by journalists at *KT Press*, the *Great Lakes Voice*, and *Taarifa*. These journalists said they had a mission of presenting the story of Rwanda from a Rwandan perspective to an audience of Rwandans but also to an audience of outside observers who might only know the country from its portrayals in Western media, which primarily center around the genocide. This mission of promoting development and an Afro-centric portrayal of Rwanda, as recounted here, stems from a reaction to the powerful role journalists understand themselves to have played in escalating the genocide.

### 3.6.1 *Development journalism in service of Africa*

Reporters and editors, primarily at the *New Times* but also at *KT Press*, expressed a sense of obligation to promote stories that showcase unity and progress over stories of dissension and destruction. Journalists were not universally positive about this decision, but they did universally acknowledge that it is a prominent role and attributed that role to the divisive role media had played in the genocide. This affects journalists at the ideological level, in choosing to pursue development journalism at the *New Times*, and at a practical level, in emphasizing positive stories over negative stories in many cases.

Rwandan journalists feel they are responsible for encouraging unity in the post-conflict

environment of Rwanda. As one *New Times* editor said:

Things like unity and reconciliation are so important for us in Rwanda. If we don't keep educating people it becomes an issue. And you never know what might happen, so you just have to continue to educate people. For example, if you get someone whose family was killed by another and they are now living together as neighbors, or forgiven, or all those kinds of stories, when we see them we have to write about them so that other people can see that we can co-exist with each other.

According to this editor, Rwandan journalists have a responsibility to promote community and reconciliation, and they could best promote this goal by reporting and publishing stories that emphasize forgiveness and neighborliness, such as stories about former enemies living side-by-side and other events and relationships that emphasize unity as it is evident in Rwandan culture today. This editor occupied a senior role at the *New Times*, so it is reasonable to assume that his perspective on what kinds of news should be published would have a strong effect on the work produced by staff reporters and photographers. Unsurprisingly, I did find this mission repeated and shared by subeditors, reporters, and other staff at the *New Times*. A reporter said, "I find our stories a bit positive, like there is a way of trying to look for success stories . . . trying to say oh, Rwanda is great. And I think the reason for that is the guilt feeling by the genocide and the war." He felt this motivation at work in his own decisions to pursue certain stories over others, he said.

Instead of just keep talking about negativity — like instead of reporting how someone who lost her children hates the killer, it doesn't add up. You would rather find a story where they are trying to reconcile. So it's a natural instinct. There was so much suffering, so much violence, that people are trying to find better stories to tell, or better things to talk about, instead of just perpetuating the bad that happened.

This quote illustrates again the ways that reporters at local news outlets tend to look for the positive over the negative. Instead of reporting on negative feelings held by someone who survived but lost family members during the genocide, reporters would look for a story of survivors who had overcome hatred and division to tell a “better story.” Staff at *KT Press* and other outlets expressed a similar interest in looking for positive news and emphasizing the general development of the country.

Alongside the motivation to promote positive change in the community, journalists are motivated by a fear of creating division and an uncertainty of what topics could lead to that division. As one editor explained:

If there are politically charged statements, for instance, and you think, “This might fan or whip up those old ghosts, that divisive ideology,” you probably are not very comfortable. So that’s where you start to gauge and see. You always catch yourself with that.

He went on to give a specific example about a story he had dealt with recently regarding an advocacy group promoting social restitution for a particular ethnic group related to the Twa, who comprise a small percentage of Rwanda’s population. This advocacy group had been active in the DRC and Uganda and had received news coverage in those countries, he said, but Rwandan media had been hesitant to cover their activities. While the news story might not draw much attention in the other two countries, in Rwanda, journalists upon hearing about the story immediately follow a mental path connecting the Twa to the other ethnic groups in Rwanda — Hutu and Tutsi — and must think about whether it is worth reminding a Rwandan audience that there are ethnic divisions in the country. Rwandans have made significant effort on private and policy levels to remove reminders of ethnic division from public discourse, and a story like this one could serve as such a reminder.

Now in Uganda, and in Congo if you like, eh, maybe I will easily put out a story and the public will look at it and move on, no problem. It’s just another story.

But in our context, I may not treat it as just another story. It could be an innocent story, but then our readers here, they might look at it and they're like oh, but I thought everybody is Rwandan?

A story that might generate no social reaction in neighboring countries could have strong effects on the Rwandan audience, raising questions of ethnicity and division and signaling reminders that there are several ethnic groups in Rwanda. In a context where government policy and social spaces are designed to signal that ethnicity is of marginal importance next to the shared Rwandan national identity, a story that reminds readers of tribal division would serve as a step backward, not forward, in development progress. And to many Rwandans, the genocide is still a recent memory and it takes daily work to move past it in social interactions, the editor said. "Twenty years is just the other day," he said. "The healing is a work in progress, but you wouldn't say that the costs have completely been counted." This is the kind of mental calculus based on the origin-story myth that guides story selection from the editorial perspective on a daily basis.

The emphasis on stories that highlight the country's development and the ways average citizens and government policies have progressed in a positive direction since the genocide has a powerful and direct impact on the types of stories reported and the angles journalists take in approaching those stories. While journalists are encouraged to produce investigative work (a complicated process that I will explore in more detail in chapter 4), they are also encouraged to produce work that promotes socioeconomic development and shows how such development is taking place in Rwanda. Journalists are encouraged to ask critical questions, but to do so in the context of this positive movement.

Editors acknowledged that there could be a negative angle to stories but in such cases encouraged reporters to "have an open mind" to the positive as well as negative implications of policies and other issues. This occurred frequently. An interaction in one morning staff

meeting at the *New Times* highlighted this process. A reporter shared a story idea about market sellers, related to how small businesses were closing down because of new, expensive government requirements. “If someone has five dresses, they can’t sell them because they say the government is requiring them to have a computer to sell as a big business,” she said. The editor asked her to clarify — “What is the story?” Another reporter added clarifying information. The editor responded that the real story was “a mindset issue on the part of buyers and the public generally.” If everyone chooses to only purchase goods at the market, sellers will follow and set up shop in the market, in spite of the cost. To the reporter who suggested the idea, he suggested looking for people selling goods in the market. “Go ask them, are they regretting it — have they started to leave, are they seeing positive results? Then find some people selling on the streets and ask them why they are on the streets and if it is working for them. Try to look for something positive,” he said. The government is waiving taxes for a year and trying to encourage them to succeed, he pointed out. He suggested a few neighborhoods where she might find good sources, including Nyabugogo, the site of a large covered market in Kigali. This interaction highlights ways an editor essentially encouraged a reporter to look away from the government watchdog story she pitched initially and turn it into a development-focused story, looking at the pros and cons of different sales techniques. While he did not discourage investigation, and in fact suggested several questions that would be worth exploring, he emphasized that the story should proceed in a direction that acknowledged the socioeconomic benefits of this new policy and the ways the government was trying to make it easier for the shopkeepers to implement the changes.

The emphasis on narratives that reinforce government messaging was also apparent in editorial meetings at *KT Press*, particularly when reporters discussed story ideas for a feature package designated to run genocide commemoration week. During one especially long meeting, editorial staff discussed how they would portray the genocide in the stories they would run. An editor called on reporters one by one, asking them to recall where they had been and what they had seen on particular days during April, May, and June 1994. One

reporter brought up a story he recalled of a Tutsi man who had begun killing Hutu people around him. Editors quickly shot down this idea, saying it would disrupt the narrative around the genocide by turning it into a civil war-like narrative with both groups fighting equally against each other.

Editor 1: Was he doing it to survive or was he doing it because it was, of course there are —

Reporter: Maybe it was power.

Editor 2: A Tutsi killing will not be a story.

Editor 1: Yeah, it cannot be a story. . . . The bigger picture is, the genocide is against the Tutsis. It's not — when you try to discuss it the way you want to discuss it, then it becomes war. (laughter) It doesn't become genocide, then it becomes war.

This quote illustrates how reporters curated the narrative around the genocide itself, likely the most sensitive topic one could possibly cover as a journalist in Rwanda. Rather than highlight an unusual story of behavior against the status quo — a member of an oppressed group killing oppressors — editors held back on the story and turned the narrative in another direction. They were eager to avoid a murky narrative that would suggest blame on both sides or complicate the oppressor versus oppressed narrative of the genocide, even if such a story could shed further light on the genocide and help make events more clear. In this way, editors at *KT Press* and the *New Times* showed their interest in contributing to government narratives that would foster unity and positive change in society, rather than highlighting ways those narratives were incomplete or possibly inaccurate.

Reporters are motivated by the same myth that their role is to promote unity. Because of the legacy of the genocide in Rwanda, reporters said they are especially cautious of exercising their power in printing divisive or negative news. The *New Times* reporter who had attended graduate school in Canada observed that in his experience, Canadian journalists were less

cautious about the news they reported because they were less aware of the power of divisive news, and thus less concerned about the possible ill effects of their work.

A journalist in Rwanda thinks more about the impact of what they write than a journalist in Canada does. A journalist in Canada is probably going to tell you this and this happened: This person is bad, this person did this. But in Rwanda before they do it, they also have to think about social responsibility, so about the impact of what you say — the impact on people’s lives. Remember it’s been only 22 years after the genocide, so . . . people have been thinking, “How do we not contribute to violence, how do we bring back peace in this country?” Journalists are also thinking about that. In Canada, all they want is people’s attention on the screens, but that’s not necessarily the case in Rwanda. In Rwanda, people think about how can our stories contribute towards making Rwanda a peaceful place.

As this quote illustrates, Rwandan journalists are wary of reporting “just the facts,” telling audiences immediately what happened and who is guilty of what, because they know that, in the past, people died because of similar facts that were reported by journalists. Journalists are cautious in an attempt to avoid creating similar situations today, and they are wary of playing a role that stirs up controversy and strife. For the Rwandan journalist, this reporter suggested, social responsibility is a more important value than timeliness and information provision — both key, core news values for many journalists who practice in Western democracies like Canada and the U.S. While this journalist was quick to acknowledge that different contexts of journalism demand different approaches, he prioritized the importance for the Rwandan journalist of playing an active social role of contributing to peace, diminishing the value of “people’s attention on the screens,” a core news value he observed in Canada. To some extent this is a false dichotomy, as chapter 4 will illustrate; Rwandans journalists are just as concerned with business viability as are Canadian journalists. However, it does highlight an important distinction between the focus of many journalists in Rwanda with

what this reporter observed in Canada. Canadian journalists, he suggests, place critical importance on the audience and giving the audience what it wants. Rwandan journalism, on the other hand, tends to focus on providing what the audience “needs,” which is determined often by political considerations and development goals. And as the above analysis illustrates, this goal is strongly informed by the genocide narrative underlying the contemporary journalism field in Rwanda.

The flip side of this ideological bent away from opposition is that several newswriters embraced the role of development journalism, emphasizing the importance of partnering with those in power to lead the country in a “positive” direction. As one editor explained:

Journalism today should be able to partner — to serve as a vehicle to better livelihoods, to educate the people about the things that directly impact them, that change their lives, that change the course of their future. . . . And I think the media can play a role in that, especially in our context . . . The people’s welfare, their issues have to be seen to be improving. And then you can ensure that going forward there is reason to let everybody understand that they have a stake in consulting and making sure that they maintain and protect this peace, protect this peace that they have because they have a stake. If anything goes wrong, they lose, themselves.

A reporter explained that the *New Times* and other local outlets cover news differently from reporters from global news channels like BBC or CNN, who might come to Rwanda to expose an issue. By contrast, this reporter said, “we don’t focus on negative stories.” Instead, journalists in Rwanda are concerned with “constructive journalism or development journalism.” The concept of development journalism as editors explained it to me is not necessarily positive; in fact, it involves getting “governments to really properly serve the people and invest where they should to impact the lives of the people,” which can involve opposition and discord in the service of the goal of improved quality of life. However, as

currently practiced — and as many on staff acknowledged — this functionally looked like positivity and a reluctance to stir up controversy, tied to memories of genocide involvement.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Journalists in Rwanda are confronted on a daily basis with reminders of the role news organizations and fellow journalists played in the genocide. From visual reminders like the bullet-riddled walls of parliament looming over newspaper offices, to remarks from sources and shared cultural memories, these reminders signal deep-rooted myths about who journalists are, what journalism is, and what journalism should be. These myths that bound the scope of permissible behavior by and towards journalists. Not only that, but a social pattern of conflict avoidance — for which the genocide is blamed — permeates relationships between journalists and sources and among political figures whom journalists might otherwise find to be valuable sources of conflict for news stories. As a result, the field of journalism in Rwanda is perceived by those outside and those within the field to be powerful but full of people who wield their power irresponsibly and are not worthy of trust. Partly prompted by a desire to redeem themselves from this role of villain, many individuals are driven to practice journalism in a way that they see as socially responsible and that promotes unity, development, and positive self-image within the country and to those outside.

The question posed at the beginning of this chapter was, **How do journalists learn their roles, individually and as a field?** To summarize the previous pages, journalists learn the role they are socially expected to play through field-wide myths shared between journalists and communicated by sources and other members of the public. The myth that “journalists used their occupation to exacerbate the genocide” brings with it the understanding that journalists are likely to be social villains. This makes sources reluctant to trust journalists and journalists reluctant to trust themselves, and leads to a field-wide role position of relative social weakness. This myth also sets up the social expectation that

journalists are untrustworthy and thus likely in the wrong when they face accusations from government officials who may be unhappy with a story. The second myth stems from the first and holds that “Rwandan journalists have a responsibility to promote unity among Rwandans and present a unified picture to the outside world.” This myth is generated within the field as a response to the public and personal belief in the first myth, and it sets up a role for Rwandan journalists as one of support and assistance, rather than neutral observer. Both of these myths are based in narratives about the field’s rebirth after the genocide and, in several cases, are closely linked with organizational founding goals, lending them particular power in setting Rwandan journalists’ role expectations and beliefs.

The journalism field in Rwanda is heavily shaped by the shared narrative of the journalism field’s involvement in the 1994 genocide. This is true across news organizations, but the shaping power is particularly prevalent at the *New Times*. The *New Times* holds a unique and influential position in the field as the news outlet created to be the voice of a unified Rwanda after the genocide, and as an organization that is elite, relatively well-resourced, and is the first employer for most English-language journalists who go on to other publications in Rwanda. The rooted nature of these role perceptions and self-perceptions that Rwandan journalists share suggest that role perception is rooted as much in field-internal discussions, beliefs, and history as in external pressure or negotiation with other powerful forces.

Two sets of beliefs founded in this narrative have strong shaping power for the Rwandan journalism field today. The first is the message that Rwandan journalists were directly and personally responsible for increasing the atrocities and violence committed during the genocide, by using their media platforms to spread messages of violence and division and by broadcasting particular plans to congregate and kill particular people. The second is the related message that, because of the negative effect journalists had during the genocide, they today have a responsibility to contribute to rebuilding the country and presenting a positive image to observers. Both of these myths impact journalists’ work and relationships. The first

myth instills in journalists a reluctance to exert much power relative to other fields of power in Rwanda, and creates among sources a reluctance to trust journalists with their narratives. The second leads journalists at major local publications to adopt a development-oriented role that seeks to promote an Afrocentric image of Rwanda to local and international audiences. Each of these myths serves as a “‘taken-for-granted’ logic base” that informs the way work is done in the Rwandan journalism field (Ferris et al., 1989, p. 85). In providing the foundation for journalists’ work practices and ideology, these two myths serve to support the current work of journalists and providing meaning and justification for the routines, some of which run counter to training the journalists have received in other contexts.

Given the relatively recent occurrence of the genocide, its wide cultural impact, and the role journalists played in it, Rwanda is a particularly well-situated context in which to study the impact of myth on journalism culture. The organizational studies literature discussed above suggests that myth plays a role in a wide variety of organizations, and my fieldwork experience corroborates this finding and extends it by illustrating the important shaping role myth can play in a journalism field and at individual organizations. In addition, this chapter highlights the ways a myth contributes to the discourse shaping journalism’s role in a society. In Rwanda, a shared understanding of the past behavior and role of powerful individual journalists, who used their professional expertise to heighten racial tension and motivate genocide, contributes to a current understanding of contemporary journalists as powerful, untrustworthy, and possibly villains. This myth shapes the social context within which Rwandan journalists work, leading them to be socially constructed as powerful, negative social actors. This construction in turn means that Rwandan journalists are viewed with suspicion by those in positions to protect them with legislation, court decisions, or public opinion. The end result is that, in spite of a code of ethics mandating that every media professional is entitled to “an individual contract ensuring them material and moral security as well as a remuneration proportional to their social role” (Rwandan Media Fraternity, 2011, p. 16), journalists are, for the most part, poorly paid and lacking contracts because

the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes has little power to enforce that rule. When journalists are taken to court, the state wins every time. And when journalists are judged in the court of public opinion, as a rule, they are found guilty.

With this perspective as a backdrop, the second myth — that journalists are responsible now for contributing to national welfare — is as much a myth built around rehabilitating the image of journalists as it is a belief that Rwandan journalists have been pushed into by external forces. The most powerful figures in the field, the editors and publishers running the biggest print news outlets, have taken this mission seriously, such that it shapes the work produced at their outlets and their missions to produce development-oriented, unifying news coverage. Some journalists practice development journalism because they believe it is the best way to improve Rwanda and serve Rwandan citizens. Others practice it out of self-preservation, because they do not have social power to advocate for a role that is more independent and critical. Within the same journalism field, and even within the same news organization, journalists have different motivations for adopting the role they do. I hint at this division in the beginning of chapter 1, where my friend observed that the Rwandan journalism field is divided between those who want to promote the mission of the state and those who want to practice a more independent form of journalism. While the outside observer would find that much of the news produced in Rwanda is strikingly similar, the motivations of the journalists producing those news items are varied. This matters because it affects the social cohesion of the field and the extent to which field organization is likely to be possible. It also suggests that, in focusing on role perception and performance, researchers might do well to focus also on role motivations. In addition, the findings presented in this chapter show that journalist role perceptions can best be understood in their specific contexts. Many journalists in Rwanda practice journalism in a development-oriented fashion, but they do so within a context where they are as much redeeming themselves as working for social development.

Myths are generally considered to be powerful and persistent. They tend to continue

influencing an organizational culture even when many within that culture feel the myth hampers their ability to do work the way they would like. The analysis presented above supports this conceptualization and suggests that individual and shared social perceptions have an enduring power that shapes journalism work. Organizational theory suggests that organizations are capable of pushing back against external restrictions, whether those come from overtly imposed restrictions in the form of laws or other requirements, or in the form of unwritten social expectations, but that this is most easily and successfully accomplished when there is a strong internal sense that boundaries are inappropriate for some reason. When the boundaries are internalized as organizational myths, this is unlikely to happen (Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). Thus, this analysis of the routines and motivations of Rwandan journalists and media organizations has critical implications for scholarly understanding of media systems, particularly those operating in “partly-free” or “unfree” political contexts. The research presented here suggests that, even if the laws of Rwanda were to change overnight to resemble those of a “free” political environment, the journalists in Rwanda would be bound by internalized social and organizational constraints that guide them to conceptualize journalism in a certain way and to ignore certain stories and angles and prioritize others. This understanding sheds new light on the ways journalism is constructed in conversation with specific elements of local culture, and how those cultural factors can in some cases play a more powerful role than a shared global understanding of the occupational norms of journalism. As journalism studies moves to understand better the global practice of this important occupation, my study suggests that a stronger understanding of myths grounded in local narratives can further illuminate the ways these journalism cultures are constructed. Myths are, of course, not the only important factor that shapes journalism cultures, but the myths examined in this chapter form an important foundation for Rwandan journalism work that impact organizational and individual behaviors.

Within the space shaped for Rwandan journalists by shared history, there is still space for reporting that critiques and holds accountable authority figures — and in fact, editors at the

most devoutly pro-Rwandan organization, the *New Times*, encourage “investigative” reporting. Many editors at the *New Times* and *KT Press* emphasize that they would like to see their employees produce more investigative reporting that holds authority figures accountable. As outlined in this chapter, development journalism promotes an approach to reporting approach that emphasizes positive development goals of a country or community but does not preclude the possibility of strong investigative and critical reporting uncovering ways that development is not occurring or is being undermined. Thus, shared history and cultural interpretation of that history draws boundaries around what can and should be considered “good” journalism in Rwanda — but that definition of good still includes investigation and critique. However, such investigation and critique in reality rarely occur at local news outlets. In the next chapter, I examine the ways cultural expectations set by these myths interact with other pressures to shape a journalism field that primarily revolves around the production of positive, “play it safe” news. In chapter 5, I show how journalists working in a field defined by these constraints can nevertheless be empowered to practice watchdog journalism.

## Chapter 4

**“THEY ONLY THREATEN YOU OR CUT OFF YOUR JOB”:  
HOW JOURNALISTS TEACH EACH OTHER  
SELF-CENSORSHIP**

In early April, editors and reporters gathered at *KT Press* for the weekly meeting debriefing the past week’s content and planning the week ahead. The 100-day genocide memorial period had just begun, and staff were discussing the previous week’s coverage — which had primarily focused on genocide-related stories in honor of Kwibuka, genocide commemoration week — and upcoming coverage. Meeting attendance was typical, with four or five staff writers present and three or four editors in attendance. A senior editor led the meeting. The *Kigali Today* offices were in a residential complex in the Kigali neighborhood of Nyarutarama, and the *KT Press* editorial meetings were in a large room that might have originally been a bedroom. One wall was lined with built-in closet shelving, and a generous full bathroom opened off a side door. The room had been transformed into a conference room with long tables placed in a square, and the meeting leader (often the head editor, and occasionally a less senior editor) typically stood on one end of the tables with a marker and a paper easel while the attending staff sat around the table. On this particular occasion, the head editor was missing and a sub-editor led the meeting. The meeting commenced as usual when the editor asked for summaries of last week from reporters around the room.

The editor asked a young reporter how many stories she had written last week (two or three?) and then moved to the next person with a direct question: “You are not contributing — why not?” This reporter responded in a somewhat disgruntled and unusually forceful tone, “Last week I was on a team covering the president. I don’t like teamwork. It destroys

my own creativity and angles. I found an angle we liked and we didn't use it. It feels like a waste of time to be working together on something like that." Another reporter added, "We had a fight — not a fight, an argument — with editors about the angles for that story." The editor responded in a matter of fact tone: "This is a standing order. If the president speaks at any event, we write everything he says. We don't pick out one thing. That is how we cover the president at *KT Press*." The reporter originally called on tried to justify his approach: In this case, another important African official was saying the same things as Kagame, and it seemed like some editorial judgment would make the story smoother. The editor disagreed, saying, "We have had meetings, and the rule is we always cover everything. It's not like we go on Twitter and pick a few things. Go on SoundCloud, find the recording, and cover everything."

After issuing these instructions, the editor continued moving around the table, next calling on a sub-editor to share his summary of the previous week. The sub-editor shared some frustrations: Content came in very late on Saturday, for no good reason that he could tell. In addition, he was sent to the Marriott Hotel — a 15-minute or so motorcycle taxi ride from the newsroom — on Saturday to cover a speech that Kagame was supposed to give. "By the time I got there, the president's office had canceled the coverage, but no one had bothered to tell me before I wasted my time and resources going there," he said.

The editor leading the meeting next asked who was following parliament for the week. No one responded. The editor called on one reporter directly, asking him to take a particular story, and the reporter said he didn't know the source who would need to be interviewed. The leading editor turned to the sub-editor, asking him to take it on. He then turned back to the reporter who declined the story with a reminder: "We need stories," he said. "All of you have an agreement with the company to produce a certain number of stories. Are you guys sick? [Editor] is saying I'm not doing my part because we don't have enough stories." He included the sub-editors in this dressing-down as well, saying "You guys are not doing your

part to bring stories to me.” At this point, a reporter who had been quiet so far spoke up to say, “OK, I have a story, you can help me flesh out the idea. Last week there was a gathering of youth at Gisozi . . .” — at which point the editor leading the meeting interrupted to say that her story was old. A few reporters chimed in to support the idea, but when the idea had been fleshed out a little more the editor repeated: “See, that is old. It happened yesterday. It should have been a story yesterday.” The editor followed up with a general directive to the reporters: “The way you present your stories is not attractive. You should always find a way of convincing us.”

This meeting, like many I sat through, sent thoroughly mixed messages about expectations around creativity, deadlines, and entrepreneurial reporting. On one hand, editors encouraged creativity, demanding interesting stories and rejecting stories that had been told too often and encouraging investigation to find more interesting stories. On the other hand, reporters were told that creativity was undesirable, especially in covering speeches or events involving the president. Through it all, reporters were chided for missing deadlines and not meeting weekly story quotas, even as newsroom processes strained efficiency and at least one reporter spent half of a workday in pursuit of an event that had actually been canceled.

In chapter 3, I showed how narratives about shared history shape the practice of journalism in Rwanda, creating a field-wide reluctance to demonstrate power in the social sphere, particularly where politics is involved. The previous chapter also demonstrated how, even while taking a weak social stance relative to other fields, Rwandan editors and other field leaders are hopeful that newswriters will practice enterprising and investigation-based journalism. In this chapter, I address the question, **How do journalists decide what not to publish?** For many reasons, journalists tend to not deliver on their managers’ stated expectations, choosing to play it safe rather than pursue investigative work that requires creativity and enterprise.

This chapter examines the ways external forces and organizational routines together encourage and enforce institutional behavior that contradicts the Rwandan journalism field's professional norms. I focus on the communication and implementation of practices that enforce an institution of positive, non-confrontational, unskeptical news reporting. Journalists produce news content that reflects a carefully curated, primarily positive, government-aligned image of political practices and officials. This style of news production is, in itself, unremarkable; self-censorship is practiced in some fashion in every journalism field, and its political manifestation has a well-documented existence in many countries around the world. However, a close examination of the ways journalists say this norm is communicated and enforced in Rwanda offers new insights into how journalists are motivated to adopt practices that are contradictory to basic journalism training they have received. I find that the institution of self-censorship to produce non-critical news coverage of powerful figures involves two separate processes that reinforce one another. The institution originates with overt financial pressure at the editorial level and is communicated to reporters through several newsroom routines centered around time and payment considerations. The reporters then internalize the expectation and generally produce news that fits within the expected boundaries. In other words, news production is constrained and bounded through a two-stage process. The first step is an overt tit-for-tat bargaining process between reporters and advertisers, and the second step is a subtle and indirect but nevertheless clearly understood message to reporters, who quickly learn to self-censor and avoid producing certain kinds of news stories in order to avoid financial and occupational repercussions of falling out of step.

This finding complicates arguments that journalists are more strongly motivated by political alignment than by economic considerations (Ryfe, 2006a), suggesting that context matters in assessing how journalists are most motivated and, furthermore, that the political and economic are sometimes closely linked. In some cases, at least where the rule in question contradicts an accepted norm of the field and many organizations in the field are financially unstable, pragmatic incentives have significant power to change journalists' behavior. The

findings outlined in this chapter also highlight the ways routine news practices can reinforce practices that are at odds with commonly held beliefs about what journalists should do. This points the way to new research questions around the construction of journalism practices internationally. It also suggests that policy interventions and training designed to halt self-censorship and positive news coverage might more effectively aim at the financial challenges rather than at “critical thinking,” where most journalist training seemed to aim when I was doing fieldwork. Limited examples of this exist in Rwanda, for instance with Pax Press, an organization designed to encourage investigative reporting with financial rewards. However, the one-off nature of the funding and the sporadic funding of Pax Press (its budget was severely limited due to lack of funds when I spoke with the director in 2017) limit the efficacy of this sort of assistance. In addition, it requires constant attention from outside sources, including wealthy donors, which might not be sustainable. Another possible solution is to teach and advocate for financial independence and structural reform in organizations to construct a sustainable business model that is less directly dependent on a few powerful advertisers for solvency.

#### ***4.1 Enforcing positive news coverage of authority figures***

Rwandan journalists tend to publish news that is not critical of public officials. This news coverage is primarily the result not of direct censorship but of self-censorship, a practice that hedges or obliterates critique of power in published news content. The 2012 Media Sustainability Index report on Rwanda notes that many Rwandan journalists practice “‘play it safe journalism,’ only filing stories that praise the country’s leadership” (Gonza, 2012, p. 323). Journalists avoid certain issues and self-censor to avoid becoming targets of government harassment or creating ethnic tension (Cruikshank, 2016; Frère, 2007). Self-censorship is practiced around the world and is particularly well documented in sub-Saharan Africa and many Asian countries as a response to perceived external pressure — often political — whereby a journalist constructs media narratives in such a way that allow him or her to avoid

personal reprimands and accusations from powerful figures (Skjerdal, 2008). Self-censorship is sometimes justified as a practice of development journalism, an ideology framing journalism as a field dedicated to promoting state development. While development journalism can be critical of the state it is often practiced, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, in a way that affirms ruling groups and allows them to consolidate and perpetuate power (Xiaoge, 2009). It is a strategy practiced to avoid coercive pressure and curry favor with figures in power, including government, business, and other positions (C.-C. Lee, 1998; F. L. Lee & Chan, 2009).

When journalists do not produce or publish news that seems to meet standards of newsworthiness and other normative criteria determined by the professional community, the decision to not publish is often attributed to either censorship or self-censorship. Censorship is pressure exerted by the ruling class in a society to contain particular information or somehow keep it from public knowledge, and is often accomplished through regulation such as broadcasting bans enforced by police claiming “security matters” who require particular items to be cut, edited, or redacted altogether (Arsan, 2013). Self-censorship accomplishes the same goal of preventing undesirable news content from publication, but it is routinely applied and enforced within the journalism field without external bans or direct pressure from public officials (Arsan, 2013). While the two are not mutually exclusive, overt censorship, if powerful enough, can preclude the need for pressure leading to self-censorship. The difference between the two largely lies in the source and the mechanism of enforcement. Direct censorship has been documented historically but accounts suggest that it is less prevalent today. In Ireland in the late 1980s, government directives forbade publication of content promoting organizations seen to encourage violence to achieve particular goals (essentially banning coverage of the Irish Republican Army) (Horgan, 2002). The law stayed in effect until 2001. The “war on terrorism” in Russia in the early 2000s provided an opportunity for government officials to censor media content by outlawing material that reportedly endangered victims or security forces or spread terrorist “propaganda” (Simons & Strovsky, 2006, p. 189). As noted in chapter 1, censorship was practiced through the 1980s in Mexico and many countries in

South America, often perpetuated through elaborate routines where officials would bring to newsrooms pieces of paper listing forbidden content, with editors who refused to cooperate facing sanctions such as arrest (Hughes, 2006; Smith, 1997). Direct censorship thus includes behavior that is prompted or demanded by official policy with particular negative sanctions facing individual journalists or media organizations that decline to follow the approved practice.

Self-censorship, on the other hand, is a practice that occurs within the journalism community and without explicit government pressure. No official figure demands that a fact be removed from a story or a story be produced in a certain way, but the editor or reporter decides preemptively to remove the questionable content, either because of prior negative experience associated with publishing something similar or because of oblique or overt messages that some sort of content is inappropriate for publication. It is a self-imposed or editorially imposed decision to omit, dilute, distort, or otherwise change a news story in order to curry reward or avoid punishment (Ngok, 2007). Self-censorship is often linked to business interests of media owners with ties to the state in places like Pakistan (Nadadur, 2007), Turkey (Yesil, 2014), and Indonesia (Tapsell, 2012). In Kosovo, journalists self-censor out of fear that they will create conflict with powerful political or economic figures (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017). In Central Asia, journalists are motivated by post-Communist social values to report positive news (Kenny & Gross, 2008). It has also been tied to overt expectations by trainers or officials in state-aligned or state-owned media houses, where it may be encouraged because it aligns with organizational values (Skjerdal, 2011; Tapsell, 2012). In other cases, it is accomplished through editorial strategy, with reporters providing the appropriate coverage without knowing they are doing so (F. L. Lee & Chan, 2009). In all of these cases, actors within journalism fields make semi-autonomous decisions to produce certain kinds of news with the expectation that some sort of reward will be offered or negative consequence avoided.

While the above accounts primarily focus on either censorship or self-censorship, in re-

ality, the line between censorship and self-censorship is blurry and the two often coexist simultaneously. Even in the 1980s, Smith (1997) documents cases where journalists in the same newsrooms would receive both coercive, official demands censoring particular content and suggestive requests, issued by officials but in a private rather than a government capacity, to censor other content. Today, the lines seem to be even blurrier, even in the most strictly authoritarian states with controlled media. In China, for instance, journalists' news production is bounded by official parameters but journalists practice self-censorship also in order to "minimize political risks while maximizing public interest" (Tong & Sparks, 2009, p. 593). In addition, the research outlined above categorizes direct censorship as a product of government demands and penalties, while attributing self-censorship to a variety of factors and pressures, including government, business, and other forces. The Rwandan case that I explore in this chapter provides further evidence that the forces constraining news content cannot be neatly separated into externally imposed and internally adopted constraints, as forces inside and outside the field work in concert to create an environment where a certain form of news is produced. Nor can government interests be effectively separated from other pressures, as many of the businesses whose advertisements Rwandan news organizations most rely on are government organizations with political interests at stake. This chapter explores the messiness of real-world constraints on news production, showing how multiple forces can together exert pressure in a single direction to produce news content that is undesirable by professional standards of the field. In addition, the research outlined above suggests that journalists and editors tend to explain their expectation and practice of self-censorship by appealing to professional norms or otherwise claiming that it is not at odds with professional behavior. My findings suggest another route of self-censorship where journalists and editors are well aware that they edit the news to align with expected portrayals and that the practice conflicts with the professional norms they have been taught, but traditional (and common) newsroom routines and organizational structures constrain any attempts to break out of the self-censorship practice.

Self-censorship and censorship practices, however they are implemented, perpetuate and solidify a set of news values that are somehow at odds with the norms that journalists would adopt if constrained only by occupational values. Where these values are routinely implemented and practiced, as is often the case, they can solidify into institutions, defined in chapter 1 as structures that define, justify, and stabilize social behavior. The set of practices and behaviors leading to the production of alternate forms of news content take the form of an institution that is somehow powerful enough to override the expectations that journalists will align with the values encouraged and supported by professional development in the field. An important feature of institutions, also discussed in chapter 1, is that they are perpetuated by routine behavior rather than by collective mobilization or extraordinary action. Two newsroom routines that are particularly relevant to this chapter are the routines of measuring journalists' output production and the routine of enforcing deadlines. Output tracking as a way to measure journalists' value has been practiced in some fashion in many parts of the US journalism field, especially as a response to declining profits in the journalism industry in the 1990s and 2000s (Tcholakian, 2017; Underwood, 1998; University of Pennsylvania, 2014). They are also used in Zimbabwe and other countries around the world (Mabweazara, 2013). However, quantifying reporter output is notoriously difficult, partly because different types of journalists produce different amounts of content and partly because production quantity has no correlation with quality (Picard, 1998). Thus, quotas and other methods of measuring journalist productivity are common but problematic. Deadlines are powerful newsroom routines. They impact journalists' assessments of newsworthiness, among other things; closer deadlines lead to more strict assessments of newsworthiness, with questionably newsworthy stories losing out for surefire news (Shoemaker et al., 2001). My research suggests that the institution of self-censorship to produce non-critical news coverage of powerful figures originates with financial pressure at the editorial level and is reinforced and stabilized at the reporter level by several newsroom routines centered around time and payment considerations.

The norm of self-censorship can be seen as an institution created through negotiation between parties in various positions of power, media organizations, and journalists. The study of self-censorship as an institution formed through a discursive practice sheds further light on the ways journalism culture forms outside the U.S. Journalists are often taught in journalism school that they should be independent, but they soon realize that in practice they are required to publish content that fits within the specifications of particular, most often pro-government, editorial lines. This chapter takes a close look at the discursive practices undertaken by government and business officials, media organizations, and individual journalists in enforcing this institution. In so doing, this analysis highlights mechanisms of norm institutionalization with possible parallels in other countries where self-censorship is practiced. This chapter offers two sets of insights. First, my findings shed new light on the process by which self-censorship norms are communicated, understood, and implemented. Second, they complicate the assumption that journalists are primarily motivated by legitimacy (political or otherwise) rather than economic considerations (Ryfe, 2006a). My findings suggest that in some contexts, financial considerations, especially when shrouded in routine, may be one of the most powerful methods of communicating expectations to journalists. In addition, the analysis below highlights how, in some contexts, those motivations can be intertwined. In the Rwandan case, journalists face mutually reinforcing messages around local legitimacy and financial security encouraging them to produce news that is relatively positive and events-focused, rather than critical or investigative. These messages contradict and supersede the message from officials and educators privileging universal journalism norms such as the importance of independence and “speaking truth to power.” This may be a particularly effective way to communicate and enforce expectations that contradict or challenge commonly held beliefs about the nature of journalism and journalistic autonomy. Finally, I join scholars like Roudakova (2017) in highlighting the spaces where journalists exist in between the binaries of journalism as “either a vehicle of indoctrination or an outlet for resistance” (p. 3). Many Rwandan journalists inhabit a space in between, where they assess and incorporate local pressures strategically, assimilating to those expectations in or-

der to accomplish certain goals, but maintaining an internal critical distance between what they do and what is ideal behavior.

#### ***4.2 Rwandan journalists self-censor, even though the practice runs contrary to field norms.***

Among Rwandan journalists, self-censorship occurs in spite of the fact that it is generally seen as “bad journalism” and inappropriate by people associated with the field. Norms communicated and held by journalists, editors, educators, and the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes (ARJ) stipulate that journalists should be critical of those in power. Journalists are explicitly and formally encouraged by their superiors to pursue investigative stories that will hold the feet of powerful people to the flames of public opinion. The ARJ offered a \$400 bonus in 2016 to journalists who would report and produce investigative pieces. The code of ethics for Rwandan journalists, which was adopted in 2011 and is supported by the ARJ, grants journalists the right to “freely carry out investigation into the facts conditioning public life” and to refuse to write or read (on air) any content that contradicts their conscience (Rwandan Media Fraternity, 2011, p. 14). There are also legal protections for freedom of the press. “The law clearly is against censorship. It is there,” the chairman of the ARJ said. Normative pressure from attempts by field leaders to professionalize and define appropriate conditions and methods for the journalism field emphasize the importance of independence and investigation. These values are prioritized both in university education and in the materials produced by the ARJ, the primary professional organization for journalists in Rwanda. Both sources are commonly accepted sources of powerful normative pressure for individuals within the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In spite of the incentives and protections, though, journalists rarely produce pieces critical of those in power, and it is practically unheard of for a journalist to investigate the president or others holding the most powerful political positions in the country. In addition, critical

stories are often published briefly to the web, only to be taken down by an editor or reporter after he or she receives a threat, or a request, from a powerful figure who does not like the story. “You have instances where you see a story has been published, and after 30 minutes it’s gone,” the director of the ARJ said. “They (journalists) don’t scrutinize real power.” He elaborated:

My biggest challenge is that scrutiny of authority. There’s a lot of scrutiny that goes on in radio stations, but the radio scrutinizes mid-level and low-level officials. The people who are in power — the president, the army, the minister of finance, the ruling party secretariat and the big corporations — those are the actual people who exercise power in this country. They are not scrutinized. Journalists only report on whether the government has said this — “the minister of finance has said they will spend this much on the road.” No one says, “This money is from where? Why this amount? Last year you said it’s this; we don’t see this. Why has public debt reached 40 percent of GDP?” That scrutiny of people who actually hold power is absent. And it’s a major weakness for us as journalists.

This quote captures the analysis and frustration I heard from editors at the *New Times*, *KT Press*, and *East African*, and an assessment of affairs that is shared by journalism educators as well. The problem, by this estimation, is that journalists in Rwanda are encouraged to investigate powerful figures, field leaders are offering incentives to do so in the form of cash prizes, and the law ostensibly protects journalists who produce work that meets shared normative standards while criticizing the powerful, but journalists persist in not doing so.

The actual process by which self-censorship expectations are communicated and put into practice in the Rwandan journalism field are somewhat opaque to an outside observer. Editors often seem to encourage investigation and critique in meetings, and news organizations’ official mission statements likewise emphasize objectivity and critical distance. But as one reporter noted,

In editorial meetings, journalists will come and discuss and when you hear their discussion you can see what they want. But the next day when you read their articles, you don't see what they have been discussing. It's like when you go to Parliament, the MPs will talk and talk and talk, and you are like "they are going to reject this project." But when it's time to vote, they all vote "yes."

Journalists pitch critical and investigative ideas and get the initial greenlight to pursue them, but at some point the story is quietly rejected. One possible explanation, of course, is that journalists are just not producing good enough investigative content to merit publication. But this narrative that journalists investigate and produce critical stories which are somehow not passed on to publication was reiterated without prompting by nearly all of the elite journalists I interviewed, including those holding senior reporter positions at the *New Times* and many who had left the *New Times* to work at transnational wire services. The latter set of reporters were consistently producing for transnational organizations the sort of investigative content they said had been blocked from publication at more local outlets, signaling that the stories met international standards of quality. This suggests that, while some articles almost certainly did not merit publication because they lacked qualities important to good journalism, others most likely did meet publication standards, or would have, but were blocked for other reasons.

The puzzle remains: In newsrooms, it seems like editors and policies encourage investigation, but little content that is critically investigative shows up in published work, even though some of it is almost certainly high quality work. Published editorial policies, even at news outlets known to produce primarily government-aligned news such as the *New Times* and *KT Press*, condemn self-censorship and call for independent reporting. In fact, "No one will ever tell you" that self-censorship is expected, a former investigative reporter from the *New Times* explained. "There is an editorial policy that looks clean." Even a newspaper aiming to be truly independent of government control might borrow the editorial policy of

the *New Times*, because it looks “OK.”

They look like they are following journalistic standards. But that’s all on paper. When you get to the real practice, whether you are at RBA [the biggest radio station in the country] or Igihe [a well-known outlet that produces written news in Kinyarwanda], journalists there will tell you frankly, as long as a piece is critical and it is going to cause some chaos, it won’t run.

When stories with angles critical of the government are approved for publication, reporters often find that the government had approved the “criticism” because the critiques were aimed at a program or problem officials wished to change already. Other times, the person being investigated was on the outs with other government officials. “If you are going to write something about the challenges facing some center, you will get it out, as long as it is something that is just shallow, it is not so deep and involving government,” one reporter explained. “Investigation” is allowed and even encouraged, but only within carefully patrolled boundaries that do not question upper levels of political power.

My interviews and observation with journalists and editors in the field suggest that the self-censorship rule is communicated relationally, often in one-on-one meetings and other interactions. In addition, while it tends to be communicated directly to editors — advertisers will threaten to cut advertising and funding if a particular story runs or is not removed — it is primarily communicated in more oblique ways to reporters, who may find that the stories they carefully reported and prepared in expectation of a front-page byline will in fact not run for reasons vaguely linked to unsatisfactory performance. In other words, while both sets of journalists are motivated by financial considerations, editors primarily learn the rule through coercive isomorphism, while reporters primarily learn the rule through normative isomorphism.

### 4.3 *Communicating news expectations to editors and publishers*

Expectations around news publication are communicated to editors and publishers primarily through conversations with advertisers, who threaten to cut their advertising from particular news outlets as a consequence for negative news coverage. Functionally, the organization in question is often affiliated with the government, as government organizations tend to have the biggest advertising budgets in Rwanda. With the exception of a few telecommunications companies — MTN and Airtel — government agencies have, by far, the biggest advertising budgets in the country. Many organizations choose not to advertise at all. “It’s very difficult to get people to come and advertise,” one editor said.

You know that’s the first source of revenue for any media in the world. We have to find ways, you have to be innovative. But it is still very difficult . . . But the government, they want to sensitize, they have policies they want people to know, they have institutions and they have a budget for communication.

Another editor stated the problem even more clearly. “We are in a situation where the institutions that are causing trouble are paying you for ads,” he said. For instance, he said, the ministry of health — a major advertiser, with a budget of nearly \$100,000 to promote health messaging — was caught off guard by a resurgence of malaria in 2016, and *KT Press* reported on the number of people hospitalized with the disease.

The minister was furious. “We’re going to cancel your contract,” that kind of thing. So you see — balancing that is not very easy.

News editors are thus often approached directly by advertisers threatening to cancel ad buys in retribution or anticipation of negative coverage.

Editors said they occasionally interact directly with government officials who request that particular stories not be published or, in the case of *KT Press*, be removed from the

Internet. These direct requests are less likely to be successful, because editors can and do revert to statements about press independence and freedom of information — both protected by Rwandan law — and demand explanations around why particular news items should not be published. The most common reason a story is removed or not published because of a direct request is that it interferes with or endangers national security. But in many cases, reporters or editors will change factual errors or append information to articles rather than remove them as the result of a direct request. These requests were much less commonly acknowledged and editors said they occurred less commonly than advertising negotiations, so it seems like Rwandan officials more often rely on the bargaining mechanism of advertising rather than directly asking for content to be removed or not covered.

To address this challenge of bargaining with sources for needed funding while also covering appropriate news, senior editors at *KT Press* will sometimes call strategy meetings with the advertising department and sub-editors to determine what content to publish and what should not move forward.

The advertisers are our biggest problem. They are our biggest problem and our biggest solution, because they give us money. We always have to think very hard about how we will balance letting the journalists do their work and maintaining an income so they can be paid.

A frustrated journalist explained editors' views even more cynically:

Media owners, when they are starting media houses, their vision is not about giving the news to the people. It's making money. And one of the ways to make money is being a friend with the government. Because the government is like the only person who has money in the country. They do everything — business, politics, leadership — everything, they are there.

One reporter went so far as to say that the “only problem” with journalism in Rwanda is that “government is trying to win all media organizations on their side by giving them adverts

and offices, such that they write good stories on the government.” This process by which advertisers impose on editors and publishers an expectation of positive coverage against the penalty of losing advertising dollars is essentially a process of coercive isomorphism, with advertisers (often government officials) imposing their expectations on editors in exchange for something the editors and their organizations need (money).

Editors faced with demands from advertisers would often cut or change programming to accommodate the advertiser’s demands, according to a director of the Rwandan Association of Journalists. Editors acknowledge that it is a difficult line to find and that they often learn through trial and error what content is safe: “We have tried to be very careful,” one editor at *KT Press* said — meaning he requires thorough reporting from his staff and considers whether stories are likely to bring criticism. Even then, he said, “we find ourselves not running certain stories and we have to throw them away.” The result is a cycle where editors learn there are certain types of content they had better avoid in the first place. “Next time something like that happens, you’ll tell yourself not to publish it. You know this is a no-go area,” he said. Editors who change content in response to these demands are usually motivated by economic incentives; they fear, justifiably, that losing major chunks of advertising revenue will damage their ability to stay afloat as a business:

Most of it has to do with the economic structure of the country. It will not be somebody threatening to jail you or beat you or do whatever, but to cut the ads. And we understand. If you are running a business, you have to work; at the end of the month, you have to pay taxes, you have to pay dues. And you also have to pay yourself as an owner. Business matters.

Every senior editor I interviewed or encountered in passing brought up the challenge of relying on advertising and the ways advertisers would attempt — successfully or unsuccessfully — to control the media narratives. In Rwanda, where most big business interests are owned by the government, this means that government interests are directly intervening in media

business, but they do so by applying financial pressure, rather than threatening physical or political action.

Editors and officials at the Rwandan Journalists' Association told me how editors and publishers at newspapers and broadcast media outlets would receive phone calls or visits from officials threatening to cut advertising from the outlet if some critical story were to run. In addition to this preemptive threat, news outlets that run critical content would often find themselves the subject of smear campaigns where officials would send messages over social media calling the organization unprofessional and would prod other news outlets to produce contradictory and more flattering stories. An editor at *KT Press* gave the example of a story involving the Rwandan Stock Exchange, a major advertiser. In early 2017 the Rwandan Stock Index dropped dramatically — by 60 percent — and a reporter wrote a story on it for *KT Press*. As soon as the story posted, the CEO called a marketing executive and then posted to Twitter calling out *KT Press* for being “unprofessional.”

When we released the story about the stock market, there was a story in the *New Times* saying that's not true, the stock market failed because of blah blah blah — they don't refute the fact that it failed but they are giving other dynamics. Then they are all over other radio stations explaining. Basically they try to make you look like you didn't know what you were reporting and kill or damage your credibility.

By appealing to public mistrust of journalists and journalism and to commonly shared beliefs about good journalism, instilled because of the association of journalists with the genocide outlined in chapter 3, officials who are unhappy with particular stories can undermine journalists' credibility with public criticism of reporting that they feel does not portray a news item appropriately. In the case of the *KT Press* story, officials appealed to a journalistic standard that news should consist of a full picture of the facts as much as possible, outlined in the Rwandan media code of ethics (see p. 5 of the code of ethics in Appendix C).

Investigative articles about powerful non-governmental figures were also held to high standards by journalists and the public. In the late spring of 2017, *Taarifa*, a relatively new online-only publication founded by a former *New Times* reporter with a mission to produce investigative news coverage, reported a story on a local scandal involving MTN, one of the largest telecommunication companies in Rwanda and one of the most prolific advertisers in local media outlets outside of government organizations. MTN was being fined by the Rwandan government and rumor had it that the company was surreptitiously skimming customer accounts to pay the fine. Officials and journalists took *Taarifa* to task for producing an article that, they said, did not contain enough knowledgeable sources. An *East African* reporter said:

Even in the media industry they are being criticized, you know, “Why are you doing these things, you don’t even verify, you are attacking MTN,” Everyone, including journalists who were against them, were like, ‘You guys, you can’t do this to MTN, you are lying, you only interviewed yourselves.’”

This backlash against *Taarifa* and that against *KT Press* for publishing the stock exchange article demonstrate the way that Rwandan journalists and officials pressure journalists who publish unpopular stories by calling out perceived instances where the journalists in question did not meet standards of good journalism.

As these illustrations show, editors and publishers often spend much of their energy negotiating between the economic demands of keeping a news business financially solvent and their ideological mission to produce independent journalism. And editors could list offhand dozens of news outlets that had indeed shut down in recent years, for reasons directly or indirectly linked to loss or lack of funding. According to an editor at the *New Times*,

A very big number of newspapers are off the street already. They have closed shop here because of the business aspect. If you cannot fund your operations,

what will happen is that you cannot even pay your reporters, you cannot give them transport, you cannot do the basics.

Most news leaders in Rwanda have watched these organizations start, fail to find sustainable funding, and close up, so they have firsthand observed experience of the reality facing news organizations that fail to sustain advertising funding and do not have funding from reliable donors with deep pockets. The threat of failure is not just a legend but a present reality, as many of these outlets started and closed down in the past 10 years.

In response to this threat, news editors exhibit coercive isomorphism. Expectations of a particular type of news coverage (non-negative) are communicated to editors and publishers through external pressure when advertisers threaten to withhold payment or withdraw advertisements. The expectation is also communicated through messages of disappointment and failure to meet standards of good journalism. These messages damage media outlets' credibility and exert normative pressure by signaling that journalists are failing to meet agreed-upon standards of quality. Faced with these pressures from advertisers and, occasionally, other journalists, news organizations tend to adapt to the expectation that they will not produce news that is critical of advertisers. The result is that news organizations may have different audiences and areas of coverage, but they tend to produce news with similar content and similar, non-critical editorial styles. This process is observable across forms of media, one reporter said:

When I go to one website — like Igihe — or when I have listened to the news on the radio or TV, I can know what is happening around the country. Because we report the same way. It's like many radios, many newspapers, from one place — from one mother. Some media houses started and we thought, we will get *news* from these guys. But at the end of the day, they also became like the others.

News organizations formed with ambitious goals to be different from the others in the Rwandan journalism field either go out of business quickly or shift behavior and publication style

to align with the more established players in the field, ensuring financial success by adopting an accepted style of positive journalism that does not scrape below the surface on subjects that are touchy to major sources of advertising funds.

Another reporter explained, “If you go maybe to the *New Times* and you see today’s news, there is no difference between what is there and what is on Igihe and what is on *Kigali Today*, because the sources are the same.” This finding that editors and publishers are motivated by coercive isomorphism offers a new explanation for how journalists are motivated to produce certain types of news, suggesting that editors and publishers may be motivated to adopt journalism practices that contradict their beliefs about “good” journalism, justifying the practice not by aligning it with journalism standards but by aligning it with business interests and explaining the behavior as a “necessary evil.” In addition, it suggests that a practical and effective method of government oversight of media content can be attained without violence or direct intervention in authoritarian states where government and business interests and operations are intertwined.

#### **4.4 How reporters learn self-censorship**

Reporters are, for the most part, not approached directly with major financial dilemmas such as those facing editors and publishers. They occasionally receive phone calls from public officials requesting to have particular stories redacted or withheld, but without the financial pressure their bosses feel, reporters are less likely to acquiesce to those direct requests (and they also have the de jure protection of legislated press freedom). Instead, I found that organizational expectations around appropriate news content were communicated through editing interactions and enforced through routines around time constraints and pay. Reporters learn appropriate behavior through a process of mimetic isomorphism. They face financial uncertainty because most lack contracts and those contracts that do exist stipulate story quotas, or minimums, that must be met for a paycheck to be issued. In addition,

reporters face deadline pressure to produce news content on daily or hourly publishing schedules maintained by the organization. Both of these routines set up pressure for a reporter to behave in a certain way by meeting deadlines and producing the required number of stories (usually around 30, more than one story per day for a 20-day working month). Reporters who do not meet the story quota or who fail to produce content regularly for the publication are seen as non-productive and are either reprimanded, suspended, or demoted. To avoid these repercussions, reporters observe their peers and learn from their own “mistakes” to develop routines of rapid story production, often covering same-day events to meet deadlines for the next production cycle and neglecting investigation or “creative” angles because those types of stories tend to take more time to produce and have more uncertain outcomes, often never making it to publication at all. Thus, through mimetic isomorphism reporters respond to the financial uncertainty of not having guaranteed paychecks by adopting behaviors that they can see lead to financially stable and predictable results, rather than taking chances on behavior that they are ideologically inclined to practice but that would lead to financial uncertainty. However, even journalists who have adopted the behaviors expected of them around producing positive and routine news hold those efficient practices in tension with the values of independence and skepticism that they associate with the “good” or “real” journalism they learned in journalism school.

The expectation that a reporter will self-censor to produce stories that are not negative or critical of the government tends to be communicated with respect to particular stories, rather than directly as editorial policy. “Of course they cannot use those words, ‘These are the stories we DON’T publish’ — we publish everything,” a reporter at the *New Times* said. “But I know some stories — reporters have written a story, and then the story goes on the website, and then within the next hour, it’s not there.” In the most extreme cases, an editor might tell a reporter directly to drop a story right when he or she pitched it, a reporter at the *East African* said. In other cases, and in most cases reporters recounted to me, the message is communicated more obliquely. This reporter explained:

First of all, if a journalist pitched a story, a very strong story about some weird corruption going on in government, they will tell him, “Drop it.” Or they will somehow find a way to disincentivize it and discourage him against doing it. And then they will pressure him, don’t do this, something like that. Journalists find themselves having to stick to the normal stories, you know?

This reporter recounted the way he learned at the *New Times* that critical news stories would not run. The typical process, he said, would be something like this: A reporter would find a lead and begin investigating a story, conduct several interviews with sources who corroborated the wrongdoing, and then he or she would write the story.

Somehow the story doesn’t run and then they give you a reason — “This might cause a few problems,” maybe, “It’s not factual,” maybe, “You didn’t do this,” maybe, “Do this — get more voices” — and you’re frustrated. You don’t follow it up again. Because you know eventually they won’t run the story. It happens once, twice, thrice — you know that means they won’t run the story. So you stick to stories that are hopeful and optimistic.

This reporter found that the expectation of self-censorship was not communicated directly and was only invoked obliquely after he had produced a story and submitted it to his editor for review. Another reporter at the *New Times* explained a similarly oblique process by which story norms were communicated: “The stories we do are not the same as someone from the outside is doing,” he said. “We do constructive journalism, or development journalism . . . it’s like we don’t focus on negative stories. And most of the time I want to cover a story, I pitch it here [in the editorial meeting room], and they agree. But sometimes they say the story is not worth writing, and I let it go.” Stories that were “not worth writing” tended to involve national security issues or be stories that would give trouble to high-powered government officials, he said.

A photographer recounted how he learned the expectations of his news organization. When he was a new reporter, he wrote a finance story where he investigated a building project that was supposedly underway with massive amounts of funding, but had never broken ground. He interviewed several officials and wrote a story that his editor said would run on the front page. But the story never ran. “I spent my time on that. And I was thinking this is a very, very good story. Everyone would be calling me asking, ‘Hey, how did you get these guys, how did you get the contacts?’ ” He was proud of the story and knew it was good journalism, but then his editor cut the story from the front page and substituted a different story that this reporter had not written, but using his byline. When he asked the editor why his story was cut, the editor had a vague response about “some issues,” this reporter said. He didn’t push the matter further but surmised that “some issues” meant an official had requested that the story not run. Another reporter at the *New Times* noted that the pressure to run particular kinds of news content was applied more to certain topics, like the president and first lady, than others, like the environment. “In the presidential stories, I think we could find better angles,” he said. “Because of the editorial line, sometimes you skip something and write something in line, and then you see a better story in another paper or another website and you’re like, I should have done this.” The *New Times* in particular, he said, conveyed an expectation that reporters would report on facts and events — “just say he went here, full stop. Write what he did, what he said, and that’s it.” Creativity around this particular topic was not encouraged. By contrast to this expectation, he wished he could write more stories analyzing the impact of meetings. “It’s the impact of what that meeting or that event had that actually makes a story, not what actually happened at the meeting — being able to interpret the message that was shared at a certain event is what makes a story good,” he said.

Another reporter, who had worked as an investigative reporter at the *New Times* before he shifted to working as a stringer for a wire agency, explained how the self-censorship rule was communicated to the investigative team. “Of course you go through many sources, you call people to react. But before you publish a story, then you get a call,” he said.

They would call like my boss, the primary boss. Because they know as a reporter you don't have power. They call somebody, then somebody comes and they say, 'I have heard you are following A, B, C, D, we think that story might cause us problems.' So, kind of negotiating with you, but indirectly.

These anecdotes illustrate the process by which reporters learn the expectations around self-censorship. It is communicated through norms around what makes something a quality story, thus subjecting the reporters to cultural pressure and aligning the expectation of self-censorship with expectations of appropriate organizational behavior. After a few experiences like those outlined above, reporters pointed out, they learn to not fight for things that will not happen anyway. As one reporter explained, "We want to dare, but we don't know if daring is good. We want to try something different, but we are not encouraged to try something different. Even when you try, they will encourage you and then all the sudden they will trash your story." Several newsroom norms encouraged the continued practice of "safe" journalism. One major factor influencing this decision to go with the flow is that reporters are paid on a quota system, where they must produce a certain number of published stories every month to get a paycheck. No matter how much a journalist might want to serve the public, he or she can only do so if employed and financially stable — which means that many journalists, even though they have been trained in journalism school to ask "tough questions" and investigate official narratives, in the end resort to covering events and other non-confrontational stories. He explained,

A media house will tell you we want 45 stories per month, or 37. And that is how you will get paid. So you want to like the public the way you like yourself, but you have to like yourself first and then you like the others. Every month you have to pay your bills, your rent, your food, your everything — so you will do what the editors want. You go to the events, you cover the events, you come back.

Even at the most well-known and wealthy news outlets, very few journalists below the level

of senior editors have contracts guaranteeing employment, and reporters are often paid on story quota systems that penalize them for failing to produce some quantity of stories in a given month. In at least some cases, story quotas were taken very seriously. One editor at the *New Times* recounted how he was demoted and his pay cut for an entire year when he failed to meet a quota soon after he was hired. At the time, general assignment reporters at the *New Times* made around 120,000 Rwandan francs per month (around \$150 USD). His story count had “really, really nosedived,” he said, but no one had discussed the reasons with him before docking his pay. After a year with lower pay he was reinstated at his previous level of pay — “Someone felt, I think, that I had been unfairly treated,” he said.

Norms around productivity are also communicated in editorial meetings, like this one I observed at the *New Times*. As was typical in morning meetings, an editor was calling on reporters around the room to share story ideas and generate a list of the content that would go in tomorrow’s newspaper. A reporter was curious why a particular policy is not being implemented well, and in the morning meeting, she brought this up as a story she wanted to pursue for publication in tomorrow’s newspaper or a few days from now. As she explained it, the issue was that a county official had followed the wrong procedures to perform an audit and had escalated the audit, perhaps unnecessarily, to take a case to court. She wanted to explore the proper procedures and see if the auditor had done anything wrong. The editor did not reject this idea but did suggest a caution, saying that perhaps the government was taking measures to improve matters, and that the reporter should “approach it with an open mind.” He goes on to say that there are “so many” parties involved with this story, and lists several names of people to be interviewed, including the Rwandan attorney general. Before he moves on from this to call on the next reporter for story ideas, he adds a caution: This reporter can cover the investigative story she has pitched, but not at the expense of her regular coverage — she must still go to parliament and cover the day’s session, but she can work on this on the side.

This scene captures several elements of the process by which editors and other senior staff at the *New Times* discourage investigative, “creative,” and non-routine news coverage by relying on standard routines, rather than explicitly forbidding it. This reporter — one of the most senior at the *New Times* — pitches an idea that could yield interesting results but does not have a clearly bounded angle and is not cut-and-dried: There may be some corruption or some mismanagement involved in how a particular type of audit is performed. She explains how she will pursue this story to find out if anything indeed went wrong. The editor cautions that the story is a big one, hinting that many sources, including some high-up government officials, will be required to make it publishable. He further suggests that the critical angle be toned down, at least at first, by acknowledging the probable complexity of the problem. He concludes by allowing pursuit of this story, but not at the expense of regular productivity. This message explicitly allows the story while implicitly discouraging it by including several constraints on the story itself and no concessions to the demands of investigative reporting.

The deadline-based nature of journalism featured prominently in newsroom routines and often served to prevent or discourage reporters from pursuing a longer story, more nuance, or additional quotes. Instead, reporters at the *KT Press* and the *New Times* often turned in shorter stories with overt angles and quotes from few sources in order to meet short deadlines. Editors consistently included in their meetings messages about the importance of meeting deadlines and producing a certain number of stories per week, and also reminded individual reporters of deadlines throughout the day. For the most part, reporters seemed to be on a routine of producing one or more stories per day, with the majority beginning a story in the morning to finish it by afternoon for publication on the web or in the next day’s newspaper. The occasional story or set of stories took longer than a day to produce, but none took longer than a week. Deadlines at the *East African* were equally important, but often incorporated a longer cycle from idea generation to story completion, given the publication’s weekly print production schedule.

Editors also routinely emphasized the importance of deadlines in editorial meetings. Once the managing director wrapped up the meeting with just a one-word reminder — “deadlines.” The other editors concurred, adding “yes, deadlines.” The context implied a reminder — “please remember your deadlines, and keep them.” The editors fleshed out their concern over deadlines in an editors’ meeting after that newsroom meeting, with news editors expressing frustration that reporters turned in news late in the day, in turn keeping them at their desks until late at night to produce the newspaper. The concerns expressed seem reasonable, but the proposed solution (more pre-packaged features and fewer news events) moves even further from news that is current, relevant, and seeking to interpret current events:

There is no reason why news should keep us here until midnight, says the managing editor. Let’s finish it by 6 p.m. Do more features if you have to and cover fewer news events. It is not sustainable or healthy to stay past 9 p.m. every day. You can’t think of new story ideas and it is dangerous because you miss things that you wouldn’t miss if you were well rested. What happens now is that reporters come in and check social media, then eat lunch, and file their first stories at 3 p.m. We need to be tougher and make them get stories in earlier, he says.

At *KT Press*, editors similarly emphasized frequent deadlines and fast-paced reporting, though with no print deadlines they imposed deadlines for Web content instead. On one occasion an editor called around the room for status updates on stories, noting that he needed to publish 10 stories today and was waiting on a story from one woman in particular. When another reporter entered the room, presumably from an assignment, the editor informed him, “you are late, you have 30 minutes.” Demanding daily stories by deadline was a common part of the routine at both *KT Press* and the *New Times*, and led to reliance on news routines that reporters knew would result in publishable stories.

In my first week of fieldwork, I accompanied a reporter at the *New Times* to a ribbon-cutting event for 35 new cross-country buses that would replace decades-old buses in driving routes connecting Kigali with communities in the periphery of Rwanda. The event was scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m. and wrap up after a few hours, but the transportation minister — the guest of honor — spoke 20 minutes longer than he was supposed to, pushing back any opportunity for unstructured interview questions to later in the afternoon. By the time journalists lined up to ask questions, it was after 4:30 p.m.; the reporter had missed a 3 p.m. deadline for the next day's paper and said he would aim for the 7 p.m. late deadline instead. We — the reporter, the *New Times* photographer, and I — waited for 10 minutes or so for an opportunity to interview the press secretary directly. The reporter exchanged a few words with someone else in line, then told me he did not think it would be worthwhile to wait because he probably wouldn't learn anything he had not already heard in the speeches. At around 5 p.m. we left. The reporter said he had already missed the 3 p.m. deadline for tomorrow's paper but would write up the story quickly when he returned to the newsroom and file it by 7 p.m. for the late deadline. As far as I know, the reporter didn't do any other interviews for this story, but got all of the quotes from the press conference speeches.

Deadlines are a deeply embedded routine of news production and timely reporting of “news” is, to many, one of the core factors that makes news “news.” However, they can also serve to curtail the production of news that accomplishes other core goals that professionalization in Rwanda demands. In the situation outlined above and in many others I observed, the pressure of meeting a deadline to produce timely news demanded that the reporter table any inclination to pursue a more in-depth narrative around the new buses. Talking with me on the way to the event, the reporter shared how the new buses would be important to poorer women in rural Rwanda because they might now be able to port more goods to Kigali and other big cities to sell on a regular basis, thus increasing their family incomes. The reporter could have expanded the story to touch on this angle, talking with women about how helpful the bus might be (or not), asking the officials how much more cargo could be stored, asking

if fares on the new buses would be more expensive, and so on. None of this made it into the final article, which was a short narrative focused on the ribbon-cutting event, featuring official voices. In this case, a long, afternoon event coupled with a short deadline curtailed the time for creativity and seeking alternate angles. The reporter had a deadline to meet and, because the event took longer than scheduled, he ran out of time to pursue any deeper angles, instead returning to the newsroom with two hours' worth of official, public narrative to write about for the next day's paper.

Self-censorship occurs even at news outlets that are known for being independent, like the *East African*. It is less common there, partly because those organizations have larger advertising bases with some advertisers outside Rwanda, which gives the organizations more power to resist the norm. But one reporter told me how he had been called into his editor's office to hear that, instead of looking for a critical angle on an upcoming conference, he needed to write a piece that was more positive. His editor explained that the immigration office owed the *East African* 20 million Rwandan francs (about \$23,000 US dollars) and was refusing to pay because of a critical story that the *East African* had recently published. "I felt terrible, of course," the reporter said. "I felt like why the hell was I even hired? But as long as the editor explains — he was like, (name), I know this is against your beliefs, I know it's against your ethics, but just do it. You don't even have to put your name, just put it out there and write it for us." Another reporter had a more extreme experience at the *East African*:

There is a story I wrote and the government was not happy, so they told my boss not to run my stories again. And my boss did not tell me, but I would see the assignments declining me. I didn't know what was causing it. And I was one of the best journalists, writing good stories, so I did not understand why they were not taking my stories. I only discovered it like two years later, that there was a directive not to run my stories.

These interviews and observations show that journalists in Rwanda generally learn organizational expectations around self-censorship obliquely, through comments tied to story quality. Those expectations are then reinforced with newsroom routines around timeliness and deadlines alongside the quota-based paycheck system, which combine to send the message that journalists should not rock the boat, encouraging routine behavior and events coverage rather than creative and edgy reporting. As one reporter at the *East African* explained, being a journalist in Rwanda is “a bit tricky — there are so many landmines you don’t want to step on, you know? You have to know what you’re doing.” These findings highlight the ways behavior journalists consider to contradict “good journalism” can be institutionalized and enforced through commonplace newsroom routines. “We used to get arrested, right?” one journalist said. “There was a period in which at least every month you would hear of a journalist in Rwanda being arrested. But now, they only threaten you or find a way to cut you off your job or taint your name.”

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The question posed at the beginning of this chapter was: **How do journalists decide what not to publish?** The previous pages show that journalists decide what not to publish through a complex process that involves different pressures and incentives at different organizational levels. Editors and publishers are pressured to withhold certain items from publication or to edit or remove them after publication by advertisers, who rely on the pressure of coercive isomorphism — threatening to withhold advertising or not pay accounts if unflattering or negative portrayals of the companies or officials in question are published. News organizations have small circulations with relatively little subscription income, so they rely primarily on income from advertising, and editors and publishers are incentivized to comply to keep their organizations financially solvent.

Editors pass messages about what to publish to reporters through less overt messaging.

Reporters tend to decide which news stories to pursue through a combination of observations and prior experience combined with the knowledge that monthly paychecks are dependent on meeting story quotas and meeting newsroom standards of productivity around story frequency and deadlines. Faced with uncertainty over whether long, creative, or investigative stories will be published, journalists tend to choose the short, simple, and event-based options.

Rwandan journalists and news organizations operate within a set of paradoxical constraints. On the one hand, normative pressure from field leaders and educators emphasizes the importance of independence, investigation, and skepticism as fundamental values of journalism. On the other hand, overt pressure from organizations that news outlets depend on financially sends the message to editors and publishers that particular types of news coverage, especially those characterized by independence, investigation, and skepticism, are unacceptable, and organizations interested in maintaining financial stability should instead prioritize news coverage that trusts official voices and does not probe beyond the official narrative. As a result, editors transfer to their employees an expectation that news should be produced in a way that meets advertising organizations' standards. In transferring this message, editors typically refrain from outright discussions of the ways advertising constraints affect the newspaper's editorial outlook; instead, they use the behavioral incentives of story quotas and deadline reinforcement to reward news production that is fast, routine, and non-controversial. Reporters thus operate under competing messages: normative pressures from the field, both within Rwanda and on a global scale, emphasize one set of values, while practical incentives and constraints emphasize a different set of values. Adhering to normative pressures could lead to ideological affirmation, if the story produced is actually published, and if it meets all standards for good journalism. But it is almost certain to lead to practical, financial penalties. Since, as many journalists noted, even a journalist has to eat and a starving journalist does no social good, journalists make pragmatic decisions to mimic acceptable behavior, exhibiting mimetic isomorphism.

One reporter summed up this tension. He worked for a local news outlet and often covered the president and first lady, easily the most powerful and therefore dangerous to cover figures in Rwanda. A good journalist writing a good story would attend an event with the president or first lady and use that event as an introduction to explore the impact of a policy discussed or speech given at the event. But this reporter's news outlet discouraged that sort of reporting. "The editors, they want you to say, uh, if the president went here, just say he went here, full stop. Write what he did, what he said, and that's it, instead of focusing on his message and what he is trying to explain." This reporter said, "We have to be sober and sometimes if you are a journalist you want to get drunk, if I may use that word — push something, not be sober. If it's green, you say it is green, don't say maroon or whatever — but if it's green, they want just green — "don't say light green." This reporter felt that being a good journalist involved searching for creative and interesting angles or featuring the most interesting part of an event instead of the things organizers push as most important, but his editors insisted on "sober reporting" rather than looking for nuance. In other words, he said, everyone agreed that it was important to describe things as they are — as "green," not "maroon," if something really was green. But his journalism training had taught him that a good reporter would look for the nuance between "light green" and "dark green," while editors tended to insist on a practice of reporting only the basic facts without that additional nuance.

This chapter shows how common journalism routines can create an environment where journalists have substantial incentive to produce news that does not align with normative values instilled by leaders of professionalism within the field. Reporters themselves — the people in a news organization who do most of the work to produce content on a daily basis — are, for the most part, not directly coerced or pressured by unethical demands from advertisers or editors. This happens occasionally, but relatively rarely. Instead, they are encouraged by innocuous organizational routines to pursue news stories that perpetuate a trusting, noncritical narrative of public events by powerful figures, rather than news stories

that are investigative and skeptical, as demanded by professional norms. In fact, more than being innocuous, the routines explored in this chapter are, to some extent, an embedded part of the journalism field. Timeliness is a key factor journalists around the world use to define “news” (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2006). Productivity, measured as rapid story production, likewise is a valued trait among journalists (Picard, 1998). And in all journalism fields, creativity is somewhat at odds with rapid, prolific content production. But the Rwandan case illustrates the extent to which these standard norms can discourage an important type of news production, especially in a journalism field where journalists mistrust themselves and are distrusted by others, making it easy to accept the status quo and not critique official narratives. Faced with the backdrop explained in chapter 3 and the routines outlined in this chapter, most journalists naturally choose the easiest path forward by producing news that is timely and on-deadline but that does not challenge official narratives or expand beyond events.

This chapter illustrates how routines can enforce institutional behavior that does not serve field interests or contribute to organizational control (Oliver, 1991). Because editors and reporters must navigate between professionally enforced norms on one hand and organizationally necessary norms on the other hand, both groups spend a great deal of time translating messages from one language to another. Editors must translate messages of coercion from advertisers to messages of preference and suggestion for their subordinates. Reporters must in turn translate those messages of preference to correspond with organizational routines and financial incentives, resulting in the production of news content that does not meet field standards of professionalism but does satisfy those organizational obligations. These routines persist not because of stated laws or mandates, but through individual choices of convenience and obligation that perpetuate the production of content that most journalists in Rwanda agree does not meet field standards.

The idea that routine enforcement can lead to a breakdown between desired behavior and

actual behavior is not a revelation; by their very nature, institutions can encourage behavior that persists in spite of being incompatible with stated organizational goals (Oliver, 1991). But my examination of this effect in news organizations in Rwanda shows how extreme the dichotomy can be between what journalists say they should do and what they actually do. It further suggests that news organizations and journalism fields may be hampered in their pursuit of professional goals as much by internal factors built into organizational routines and standard business practices like advertising dependence as by external factors like direct censorship or market orientation. This finding has implications for journalism fields around the world, but has particularly useful application in contemporary authoritarian regimes, where evidence of overt government censorship is fading but internal routines and expectations may still perpetuate news production in a form expected by and acceptable to those in political power. In Rwanda, news is constrained through a complex web of interaction involving pressure exerted from powerful figures outside the field that spreads within the field to guide individual decisions about news values through messages about appropriate behavior and expectations of productivity. Nothing in the process directly contradicts the idea of a liberal democratic journalism field, which is the style of practice that journalists learn in journalism school and that is encouraged by field professional organizations. External pressure comes from powerful figures acting in business capacities to wield pressure in a way that can be justified as just part of doing business as a journalist (relying on advertiser funding). They just happen to also be powerful political figures with political motivations as well. The cumulative result of these pressures is that news is produced in a way that does not resemble the investigative and skeptical position that reporters are encouraged to take, but instead declines to question powerful figures and instead often simply reports updates on daily events.

This chapter addresses one aspect of this dissertation's research question by showing how political forces exert pressure on the news field at an organizational level and how that pressure is converted within organizations to trickle down to the individual level. Even though the norm of self-censorship is frustrating to individual journalists and editors, who at the

extreme believe it contradicts their ethical obligations and the practices they learned in journalism school and at a minimum think it is not the best journalism, everyone interviewed for this project had practiced it at some point and many censored their stories on a regular basis. Editors and publishers adopt the norm of self-censorship through coercive isomorphism, a process by which they are influenced by advertising from organizations outside the field with power to withhold important funding. Journalists learn the norm of self-censorship through mimetic isomorphism, a process by which news content that does not align with official messaging is edited or cut from the daily news budget with no explanation or with explanations tied to accepted norms — an editor might say a story is not well-reported and is missing sources or quotes, for instance. But typically the explanation is vague enough that a reporter will not question it. Along with learning expectations around the norm in this way, newsroom routines around timeliness and paychecks give journalists incentive to not practice creative or entrepreneurial journalism but instead to follow established routines of event-based reporting. Only published stories count toward monthly quotas, so journalists are unlikely to pursue stories that they have learned will not be published, for whatever reason. Editors may have expectations communicated more directly, in the form of threats of advertising loss. Most advertisers are in some way connected to the government, so this means that government officials have tools to negotiate with editors and publishers for positive coverage. As several editors and reporters explained, it is unlikely that a journalist would be arrested or killed in Rwanda today (though this has happened in the past). It is more likely that someone will “just” try to ruin your career.

The methods by which self-censorship is adopted as a norm can be understood as coercive and mimetic isomorphism, different pressures applied in different ways at different levels of the field. Editors are pressured by organizations with major advertising interests, most of which are government-owned and aligned, to cover news in certain ways, typically to put those organizations in a positive light. In this process of coercive isomorphism, editors are enticed to behave a certain way because of the financial incentives held by the advertisers who

are imposing the coercion. The editors translate that pressure to mimetic isomorphism when they pass expectations on to their employees. Rather than conveying the direct message that journalists' paychecks are dependent on positive storytelling — which would be a message inconsistent with stated organizational goals — editors typically convey their expectations obliquely through messages about acceptable and unacceptable work. Since reporters typically receive monthly paychecks that depend on their meeting given story quotas, they are discouraged from spending many days reporting one story that is investigative and resource-intensive, and instead encouraged to report on “easy” stories like events. In addition, editors and reporters are subject to a negative form of mimetic isomorphism, a “don't be like me” lesson where editors and news organizations are publicly shamed by officials and other news organizations for particular stories that do not fit with approved messaging, and reporters are told their stories are “not good enough” when they are cut from the newspaper at the last minute. This combination of mimetic and coercive isomorphism overcomes the field norms that many Rwandan journalists learned in school.

In contrast to the tactics practiced in the region and that might be expected of a strong field controlling a weak field, I find that these tactics are primarily not direct or violent, but are more routinized. In addition, though they are communicated initially from outside the field, they are reinforced by intraorganizational practices that discourage creativity and encourage practices that propagate the status quo. Control is exerted through financial incentives, including advertising (and some direct funding) at an organizational level and paycheck control at an individual level. These findings stand in conversation with Ryfe (2006a), who posits that journalists are more likely to be influenced in their daily routines by what is field-appropriate rather than by self-interest or status. I find that contextual factors matter, and that in certain situations journalists can be driven by self-interest and economic needs to adopt practices that they readily admit are not particularly field-appropriate. In addition, I shed light on a way journalists adapt to the dissonance between idealized journalism and journalism in the field, a dilemma outlined by Hanitzsch and Vos (2017). These findings

show how practices standard within the field of journalism can reinforce behavior that is at odds with normative beliefs about the field, suggesting that the “problem” of self-censorship is more complex than previously understood and that news routines that journalists consider standard to the field may not be ideal in all circumstances.

In spite of social and organizational factors that pressure journalists to produce positive news coverage, some have formed careers where they consistently break from these established norms to produce news that instead investigates and uncovers wrongdoing and unacceptable behavior by powerful figures. In chapter 5, I explore motivations and strategies that enable journalists to pursue these watchdog careers.

## Chapter 5

### BEYOND PUPPET JOURNALISM: TAKING A WATCHDOG ROLE IN RWANDA

Near the end of June, I attended an editorial meeting with a different tone. The *East African's* Rwanda office was located across the street and 100 yards or so down the road from the *New Times*, on the sixth floor of an office complex whose first level was occupied by Simba, a Kenyan grocery chain with outlets across Kigali. Compared to the *New Times* and *KT Press*, the *East African's* office was small. About eight reporters — some freelance and some staff — and a freelance photographer sat at desks lined up in rows across a single room. To one side of the room, a glass wall separated a conference room and the editor's office. Reporters typically met in the conference room on Mondays at 9:30 a.m. for the weekly editorial meeting.

This meeting began like others I had attended. The editor introduced me and let me explain my research project, then he began to call on reporters around the room to share their story ideas. Someone explained to me that each reporter was expected to come to the meeting with three ideas to pursue for the week (though not everyone did). After a few people had discussed some fairly standard story ideas — one involved a grant given to Africans that a Rwandan had received — discussion turned to the upcoming election, scheduled for August 4. The three-week campaign period was about to begin, and the editor wanted story ideas.

One reporter mentioned Diane Rwigara, a woman attempting to garner the 600 signatures required by the Rwandan Election Commission to enter the campaign for the presidency. She

had a press conference planned for that day because the REC had invalidated some of the signatures on the forms she submitted, making her ineligible to campaign for president. Someone else chimed in to say that the manifests containing the signatures might exist, and the reporter should try to find copies. The editor responded, “OK, capture contrasting views. We need to start aggressive campaign coverage next week.” He then brought up another candidate, Frank Habineza. Habineza, he said, was an adversary in exile and was then “rehabilitated” by the government. Two reporters interject here, and one mentions an online poll that favored Kagame over Habineza. The editor seemed unsurprised. He said the majority of people on Twitter are pro-RPF — for example, in November, a woman who tweeted something critical of Kagame was mobbed. The implication of this statement was that the Twitter poll was not representative of true public opinion. He went on to give some guidance for the story, saying, “We need to bring out the details of how the landscape has changed. Did we have a woman before? Get information ready to go for candidate profiles.”

Moving on from election coverage, another reporter offers another story idea. The government wants to control building material for fire resistance, but there is no way to check fire ratings in Rwanda. There is no lab equipped to run the tests. The editor asks how he knows, and lists some questions to ask in the story. He references an older story that another reporter wrote on fires and says to look at that for background and to find the gaps in that story to answer with this one. This reporter has one final idea to share, saying, “There are problems with tourism in Rwanda.” The tourism board had recently begun targeting luxury tourists, doubling prices to visit the mountain gorillas from \$700 USD to \$1500 USD and eliminating the local discount, which had steeply reduced the price to less than \$100 USD for Rwandan citizens. A source had come to this reporter listing the problems with this approach. The editor said, “Good, something about this is a story the *New Times* won’t publish.” In response to this, the reporter suggested that he get a response from the Rwandan Development Board and another person “to soften it.” The editor responded, “No, we don’t need to soften it. A story is a story. He went to the *New Times* and the *New Times*

as usual skirted the issue, that's why he came here. We should run it."

Several elements of this news meeting stand in contrast to the typical news meeting and routines at the *New Times* and *KT Press*. It was quickly apparent that reporters at this *East African* meeting were better prepared with story ideas than at the majority of meetings for the other two news organizations. Not everyone had three ideas to share, but everyone had at least one. The frank discussion of election campaigning and the candidates in the field was new; for the most part, when I asked editors and reporters at *KT Press* and the *New Times* about the candidates for president, they dismissed them with a comment about how Kagame would, of course, win. This was apparent to all observers of the election, as noted in chapter 1, but the *East African* appeared to take the opposition candidates more seriously. This openness to exploring unpopular candidates rather than focusing on the incumbent and shoo-in candidate Paul Kagame revealed a comfort level with investigating authority that was not apparent at the other news outlets. The instruction to the reporter writing about fire codes to read past coverage of the topic was also unusual. I heard very few references to past coverage at the other two news outlets; editors frequently chided reporters at *New Times* editorial meetings for not even reading yesterday's newspaper before coming to the meeting. The final admonition to the reporter with the tourism story drove home the *East African's* interest in critiquing powerful people, with the editor's explicit command to not "soften" the story or skirt the issue, but publish it.

The *East African* is one place where a small group of well-known journalists in Rwanda are doing work that diverges from the typical editorial line to take a more independent and critical watchdog approach in reporting on government and other powerful organizations and figures. In this chapter, I seek to explain how this handful of watchdog journalists is able to exist. In other words: **When journalists resist field pressures to produce a certain kind of news, what factors enable them to do so?** These journalists to produce news that is consistently out of step with the editorial line expected of the field and is instead

unpredictable and sometimes critical of the establishment. My data shows that at least two factors are necessary. First, the journalist must be capable of producing news content that is consistently *legitimate* by field standards. Second, the journalist must be affiliated with an organization that is *financially independent* of the local economic and political fields. The journalist's ability to produce consistently legitimate news content meeting agreed-upon standards of quality ensures that he or she will have occupational authority to justify any particular story that is more critical than the status quo. And the journalist's affiliation with a financially independent news organization means that the organization is not likely to be influenced by business interests and need for financial support from advertisers in Rwanda. Absent a need to placate businesses for the sake of financial stability, the organization is likely to support the journalist in the face of pressure from authorities if, or when, a critical story is questioned. Both of these qualities map onto particular forms of field capital. These findings are important because they suggest that individual and organizational factors matter in determining how particular journalists will be socially and structurally permitted to behave within their field. It takes more than one journalist "going rogue" to sustain a practice of journalism that bucks the status quo in a particular context.

The previous chapters outline the general terrain of the journalism field in Rwanda. In chapter 1 and chapter 2 I give background on the Rwandan journalism field and describe how it looked during my fieldwork. In chapter 3 I show how shared cultural myths inform journalists' self-perceptions and their relationships with members of the public and the government. In chapter 4 I explore how financial pressure and news routines institutionalize a set of news values that contradict normative standards set by field professionalization. In this chapter, I examine the factors that allow journalists to resist those pressures and practice a different kind of journalism.

One Rwandan wire reporter, who often reports news that aims a critical lens at powerful government figures including the president, members of Paul Kagame's cabinet, military

leaders, and others, explained the reasons he could consistently report this type of coverage.

I don't think the government would want to arrest somebody who is working for [wire service]. Because this country, much as they try to harass people, they want their image to be very, very positive, every time. Arresting somebody working for AFP or Reuters, they think maybe it will cause problems. And of course, by the time a story passes and it goes on the wire, it has been edited properly and describes exactly what is on the ground. There is no way you can file a story for [wire service] when it is half-baked, when you don't have enough information.

This explanation incorporates the range of factors that enable journalists in Rwanda to consistently report news that deviates from the status quo of positive journalism. The first factor the journalist mentions relates to the relative power that wire service and other multinational news organizations hold in Rwanda. Wire organizations, in particular, are funded primarily by subscriptions rather than by advertising, and they likely place higher value on appearing independent on a global stage than on appeasing capricious advertisers in Rwanda. In addition, the lack of dependence on advertising means they actually are financially *independent* from Rwandan power sources. The *East African* is primarily advertising-funded, but advertisements come from across the East African region, and editorial decisions made in Rwanda must be justified as “good” journalistic decisions to head editors based in Nairobi, Kenya, where the strength of Rwandan advertising income is diluted by advertising funds from Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. Thus, for a variety of reasons, this group of organizations is willing to publicize retaliation against their employees, threatening to or actually writing stories when a reporter is harassed or arrested for a particular story he or she has written. The second factor has to do with the *legitimacy* of the story itself — norms of the news organization ensure that articles undergo a rigorous editing process so that when a story is published, it contains a narrative built on verifiable facts and quotes, rather than personal opinion and rumor. But legitimacy in printed content is only one element of the legitimacy needed to ensure that a reporter can safely produce critical journalism. He or she

must also use legitimate practices to obtain the information. As this reporter went on to point out, the only thing that would really place him in danger would be unethical behavior, because it would lead the news organization to cut ties with him. If he were to take money from a source — or even appear to do so — it would be simple for a government official to accuse him of being “unprofessional,” and the wire service would be unlikely to support the reporter in that case.

This narrative provides important insights into the nature of the production of counternarratives in Rwanda and other journalism fields. My findings suggest that, while individual and organizational attributes are both necessary, a combination of the two is key to the continued production of news content that departs from social and political expectations. This narrative, and others like it, suggest that there are particular institutional and field factors that enable the pursuit and production of oppositional news in a journalism field like that in Rwanda, where organizations encourage the practice of self-censorship and social pressure encourages the practice of positive and non-confrontational journalism. To further explain how this happens, I proceed by explaining the concept of legitimacy and its application to journalism; the factors that allow organizations to oppose institutional regulations; and the process by which these are both implemented in Rwanda.

### ***5.1 Capital and the journalism field***

As detailed in chapter 1, the resources available to social agents can be considered forms of capital, and are helpful in explaining the different forms of power journalists and media organizations can hold in the journalism field (Benson, 2016; Bourdieu, 2011). Three major forms of capital — economic, cultural, and social — are typically considered with respect to the field of journalism. Economic capital refers to monetary income as well as other financial resources and assets; essentially, it is the ability to translate one’s abilities into income. For example, writers differ in the extent to which they can earn income from publishing, public

readings, or other literary activities. Cultural capital includes the capacity to define and legitimize cultural, moral, and artistic values, standards, and styles in a particular field, or to produce things meeting these standards. This can include the ability to define socialized habits, valued cultural objects such as paintings, and formal educational qualifications and training. It also includes an element of symbolic power — the ability to determine whether something is “real” journalism or in fact is something else entirely (Bourdieu, 1989). Social capital is the sum of the actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through memberships in social networks of actors and organizations, and social fields, such as journalism, education, and politics, are shaped by pressures imposed by the dominant forms of capital within that field (Anheier et al., 1995). Translated into the field of journalism, economic capital is often expressed in terms of circulation, advertising revenues, or audience ratings, while cultural capital takes the form of intelligent commentary and in-depth reporting, whose quality is measured by awards given within the field (Benson & Neveu, 2005; Najjar, 2007). The level and kinds of capital an organization or person possesses relative to others in the field determine that agent’s placement in the field and thus the kinds of forces that act upon that agent and the behaviors the agent can undertake (Martin, 2003).

The field of journalism is most often represented as one defined by tension between economic capital and cultural capital. On one hand, news organizations are compelled by the desire to make money and attract large audiences or appeal to a wide variety of advertisers. On the other hand, they are motivated to produce work that meets field-determined standards of high quality. When journalism fields are “mapped,” organizations or types of journalism produced within the field are placed on a grid that conveys their levels of economic and cultural capital relative to others in the field (see for example English (2016)). Scholars also examine the ways journalists gain or lose capital. Capital can be conferred on individual journalists by organizations, as in the case of journalists who were constrained and empowered by their organizations’ budgets and editorial identities to cover Syrian political conflict in particular ways (Vandevoordt, 2017). Journalists can also build capital through

their interactions with each other, for instance using Twitter discussions to increase social followings, drive web traffic, and build awareness of social media best practices (Barnard, 2016). Journalists also analyze the capital of others, particularly sources, calling on various levels of cultural and social capital in choosing sources to interview and in written portrayals of those sources (Munnik, 2017). Davidson and Meyers (2016) analyze reasons Israeli journalists leave the profession in terms of capital, finding that journalists exit journalism when they have maximized cultural capital. They then use the cultural capital acquired from their work to find positions in other occupations (often public relations) that provide higher levels of economic capital (higher salaries) than the maximum supplied in journalism, essentially trading one form of capital for another.

In general, capital tends to be discussed in terms of tension or tradeoffs between the various types. Forms of journalism, beats, mediums, organizations, and even individual journalists can be mapped as having high or low total capital and then portrayed along a continuum from journalistic to economic capital, depending which takes priority for the object in question. However, this tension has more recently been called into question. For instance, Vos and Singer (2016) examine discussions of the concept of “entrepreneurial journalism” in light of the tension between economic and cultural capital to find that the ways this new form of journalism is discussed conflate previously separate economic and cultural journalistic roles, potentially restructuring the poles along which journalism has been mapped. Powers and Vera Zambrano (2016) similarly sidestep the tension between forms of capital to examine how journalists rely on multiple forms, obtained by virtue of their position in the field and the field’s position relative to others, to successfully start and maintain online news sites. My research continues in this vein, and I suggest that it is useful to consider the value of various types of capital added together as a force to enable particular behaviors in a journalism field.

## 5.2 *Practicing opposition*

There is some research on the factors that enable journalists to produce watchdog work in an environment of censorship and self-censorship. I use the term “watchdog journalism” to refer to the type of journalism practice that highlights wrongdoing by reporting information that some powerful and dangerous implicated parties want to keep hidden. Following Waisbord (2000, 2015), whose definition I have borrowed with slight modifications, I found that journalists in Rwanda tended to use the term “investigative journalism” in a different way than it is commonly used in the U.S. In Rwanda, the term was often enclosed in virtual quotation marks and used to refer to either reporting that did uncover wrongdoing, but only wrongdoing that was already under censure by the highest political authorities, or to reporting that was more informative than critical per se. The term “oppositional,” which I also proposed to interview sources, was often rejected because of its association with the British press system, where media organizations align with particular political parties and the oppositional press would align with the opposition group. Reporters sometimes referred to watchdog journalism as “independent” reporting, implying that this group of journalists had the freedom to make decisions about newsgathering without facing financial pressure from employers. Because I use the term “independent” to refer to a particular factor that enables this type of reporting, I refer to the reporting style as “watchdog” for clarity.

Research on journalists who produce watchdog content in unfavorable environments tends to focus on how the practice becomes embedded in the field and widely accepted in contexts of censorship and self-censorship. Scholars suggest that practices of investigative journalism persist or even develop, even in contexts of strong censorship, when there is persuasive evidence that it will bring more revenue as a popular form of news or when it becomes institutionalized as an element of journalists’ occupational identities (Tong & Sparks, 2009). Journalists who pursue investigative stories also tend to bound their “investigations” within culturally accepted parameters (De Burgh, 2003). In South America, watchdog journal-

ism spread from a marginal existence in alternative publications to a mainstream journalism practice by the 1980s and 1990s, protected by subsequent constitutional changes and spurred on by marketing success (Smith, 1997; Waisbord, 2000). Often, the journalism practiced still falls within boundaries approved by political leaders, who rely on watchdog-style journalism to police low-level corruption and provide a semblance of responsiveness to citizen needs (Roudakova, 2017; Yuezhi, 2000). These experiences ring true with what I observed and heard in Rwanda from journalists pursuing investigative journalism at local media organizations. However, the bulk of this literature explores ways journalists pursue work that is boundary-pushing from within the status quo, not how journalists can sustain careers while they routinely produce news content that falls outside the status quo. In other words, these studies do not address what factors enable a journalist to consistently maintain a field position that is at odds with the prevailing political, social, and organizational pressures. Here, institutional approaches to organizations shed more light.

There is a range of stances organizations and individuals can adopt in response to prevailing norms and standards imposed by forces outside the agent's control. Organizational responses to institutional pressure could range from acquiescence — accepting and somehow absorbing the pressure — to more active or resistant behaviors like compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation (Oliver, 1991). An organization's ability to adopt any of these behaviors depends somewhat on the surrounding institutional environment and the organization's own level of dependence on institutional forces. Most organizations tend to acquiesce to pressure somehow, especially when the norms have absorbed into the status quo to become an accepted social fact. Forms of strategic resistance become more likely when the imposed institutional requirements conflict with organizational objectives minimally or dramatically, or when there are competing institutional pressures from different powerful stakeholders influencing the organization. This lens highlights the ways organizations placed differently in a field might respond differently to institutional pressure.

In the context of Rwandan journalism, an organization entirely dependent on funding from those same institutional forces that are demanding positive news coverage has little incentive or standing to openly oppose those norms. An organization that depends on funding from sources with contradictory demands, on the other hand, must still practice negotiation in order to survive within the environment, but has power and more incentive to pursue overt strategies of resistance.

### ***5.3 The history and scope of transnational media organizations***

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the full history of wire services and other transnational media organizations, the power dynamics at play in their work, or the effect of the news produced by these organizations, a few characteristics are noteworthy for this discussion. Research suggests that transnational journalism work is somehow different from journalism work produced within and for a particular geographically bounded national audience. However, what exactly the differences are and how they manifest in journalism culture is still relatively unknown (Hellmueller, 2017). Historically, transnational journalism work has often consisted of Western employees of Western organizations stationed in other parts of the world to provide news briefs and updates to their Western readers back home (Silberstein-Loeb, 2014). There is some acknowledgement in the literature that this dynamic is shifting today, with scholars studying the effects of pan-Arab media such as Al Jazeera and organizations such as IRIN, a humanitarian news organization (M. Scott, Bunce, & Wright, 2017).

News produced for multinational audiences is different from news produced within and for one national culture (Atad, 2017). It relies on different criteria of newsworthiness and different frames to make the content accessible and meaningful for audiences with different histories, cultures, and societies from each other (Atad, 2017). In addition, transnational news is often produced by a foreign correspondent who is not native to the country where he

or she is reporting, and this could mean that the producer of transnational news has a different role perception or prioritizes different values from other journalists in the field. Foreign correspondents in some cases tend to align with home governments and take watchdog roles toward their host government, as a result earning a label as “hostile foreign forces” (Zeng, 2017, p. 1). Wire services, such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse, and the Associated Press, are prime examples of this kind of transnational journalism, as they came into existence primarily to create news content that could be publishable by local news organizations across broad geographic distances. In general, wire services have relied on standards of news reporting and writing to produce content that will be acceptable across this range of audiences, making a point to avoid partiality, rely on demonstrably correct factual information, and in general produce a report that would be satisfactory across recipients with different politics, editorial values, and publication schedules (Fenby, 1986). In so doing, wire services tended to rely on news produced in bureaus staffed with international correspondents (Fenby, 1986; Silberstein-Loeb, 2014). In the best case, those correspondents were trained journalists, but that was not always true; for much of its early history, Reuters relied on trading companies and the occasional local journalist for coverage of most of the countries it covered (Silberstein-Loeb, 2014). Through at least the first half of the 20th century, the organization typically relied on European, primarily British, foreign correspondents who were stationed in countries around the world to report and produce news to publish on the wire (Silberstein-Loeb, 2014).

These outlets tended to produce news to satisfy strictly Western standards of objectivity and neutrality, making them impervious to suggestions that they serve as development tools for local governments or work to change representation patterns of the countries they covered (Fenby, 1986). This Western-dominated production of news from around the world was increasingly called into question throughout the second half of the 20th century, notably with the creation of Inter Press Service in 1964. IPS was created to be an information bridge between the Global South and the Global North, and by the mid-1980s it had distribution agreements with 30 agencies and bureaus in 64 countries in the Third World. IPS had the

overt aim of overturning the Western-dominated power dynamics of news production partly reinforced by wire services (Giffard, 1984). As this summary shows, transnational media have generally taken one of two approaches, with the oldest newswire services including AFP, Reuters, AP, and other European agencies relying on strict adherence to Western news values in order to produce content that will be palatable to the largest possible audience. By contrast, some newer organizations have taken an approach to newsgathering that prioritizes normative ideas about how the news media should represent the world over concerns about mass appeal.

Transnational media organizations thus possess a different kind of economic capital than do local media organizations in Rwanda. In terms of actual financial assets available to employees, journalists employed by wire services in Rwanda make about the same amount of money per month as journalists for the most solvent local outlets (the *New Times* and *KT Press*). However, the source of that income is distinct in ways that impart different responsibilities and freedoms on the affiliated journalists. Local outlets owe allegiance, in some sense, to the local advertisers who fund large portions of their budgets and demand certain kinds of news coverage. On the other hand, transnational news outlets are much less indebted to local sources of income and instead owe allegiance to international sources of income that is tied to their organizational newsgathering reputations. In order to maintain those reputations, these transnational organizations rely on news reporting produced in a way that signals impartiality and is based on factual evidence.

#### **5.4 Legitimacy**

For Rwandan journalists to routinely practice watchdog journalism, they must be able to consistently produce news content that meets field-level standards of good journalism. In terms of capital, the journalist must possess a high degree of cultural capital that is consistently evident across his or her body of work. Rwandan journalists typically used the

term “professionalism” to capture this concept. However, the concept of professionalism in scholarly conversation is multifaceted and complex. Debate around the term is most commonly associated with boundaries around the occupation of journalism and concern with defining who is or is not a “journalist” (Singer, 2003). An outdated approach to the study of professions holds that professionals are those who hold particular traits, varying but often including esoteric knowledge specific to the occupation, moral and legal authority to do work, and training (Abbott, 2014; Mari, 2016). Contemporary studies of professionalism in journalism tend to focus on ways journalists themselves demarcate the boundaries between what is and is not journalism and, by extension, who is and is not a journalist (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Waisbord, 2013). The meaning imputed to the term in my fieldwork conversations is captured equally well by *legitimacy*, a concept that has been applied to journalism in a few cases and has been applied frequently in organizational studies. Legitimacy is an “assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy thus captures a concept that is related to but distinct from the concept of professionalism, and useful for the present discussion.

Where professionalism tends to draw boundaries separating what is from what is not, legitimacy is more concerned with determining normative rank and status within those boundaries. One can be a *bad* journalist or a *good* journalist without leaving the ranks of the occupation per se, and legitimacy captures this distinction. This legitimacy approach thus fits well within a field theory framework in that it allows one to differentiate between different roles and practices within the field of journalism, studying within-field variation rather than focusing exclusively on defining the boundaries. In the context of journalism studies, legitimacy has been invoked typically as a way to imagine the nature of journalistic practice as a whole. The concept has been used to explain the boundary-setting practices of journalists dealing with new forms of media content, with journalistic practices such as reliance on user-generated content becoming more and common as UGC itself becomes more

common and thus legitimized (Yeo, 2016). That is, edgy practices can be justified if they are seen as “legitimate,” even if they are not often seen or dealt with by journalists. Legitimacy has also been invoked to explain the ways journalists sustain their occupational standing as information experts with a set social role (Tong, 2018). News organizations work for legitimacy by defending their work and adopting new tools to do that work.

Legitimacy can thus be seen as a type of cultural capital. A journalist who consistently produces legitimate work has a high level of expertise in the field, which acts as a power resource facilitating access to the organizational positions at transnational organizations that will further protect and privilege the legitimate journalist in producing such work (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Journalists with high levels of cultural capital are those who possess the skills important to do the job well. In the context of news production in Rwanda, this includes the ability to consistently produce news that meets agreed-upon standards (Vandevooort, 2017). For journalists affiliated with transnational media organizations, it also includes the ability to speak and write English fluently. Legitimacy as a form of cultural capital for journalists is the ability to consistently meet the social expectations imposed on a member of the journalism field.

### **5.5 Context: Rwanda**

As shown in previous chapters, the journalism field in Rwanda is relatively small, relatively young, and relatively decentralized. The field took on its current shape after the 1994 genocide, which displaced or killed many practicing journalists; as a result, most journalists practicing in the country today are young. Many identify as Rwandan but migrated to Rwanda in early adulthood from surrounding countries, where their parents or other relatives had fled during the genocide or ethnic conflicts in the 1980s that predated the genocide. All media laws in the country postdate the 1994 genocide, and many have been revised extensively throughout the 2000s, meaning the political landscape in which the field resides

has evolved considerably over the past two decades. In short, the contemporary field of journalism in Rwanda has taken shape recently. The country's first school of journalism was inaugurated at the National University of Rwanda in Butare in 1996; prior to this, journalists were trained on the job or internationally (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007). External to the field, the government's new constitution imposed regulations on journalism practice and instituted licensing practices for media houses starting in 2002 with modifications in 2009 and 2013; the 2002 law also instituted an external regulatory body, today called the Media High Council, to oversee media freedom, responsibility, and professionalism (according to the website). The 2009 law also required all media houses operating in Rwanda to register with the government (Kagire, 2010).

Media analyses routinely find that these latter developments in Rwanda's political system restrict media freedom and prevent journalists from reporting or publishing the news freely (Freedom House, 2017a; Gonza, 2012). The political system certainly constrains journalism work; however, this analysis sheds light on some of the ways journalists work within social and political constraints and navigate the field of journalism to find careers that satisfy their primary interests. This study thus reveals some of the complexity and career paths available to journalists operating in even a small and constrained media system, offering insights into both this particular case and the field of global journalism studies more broadly.

### ***5.6 The power of legitimacy***

Among Rwandan journalists, there is a shared feeling that many journalists fail to consistently research and produce news reports that meet their field's standards of acceptable journalism narratives. The general editorial consensus is that journalists in Rwanda are poorly trained and, when they are properly trained, they tend to leave the field for other, better-respected and better-paying careers. As a result, many of those who practice journalism in the field produce material that inconsistently meets standards that editors and

other field authorities deem minimally acceptable. Failure to meet those standards provides editors and officials with acceptable grounds to critique or question a journalist, and the officials and editors are likely to take that opportunity if a reporter pursues uncomfortable watchdog journalism. On the other hand, since laws in Rwanda provide some protection for journalists, a journalist who does produce content aligned with the desired standards has some protection against overt harassment.

The behaviors appropriate to the Rwandan journalist are outlined in a printed code of ethics available at the Rwandan Journalist's Association. The full text is included in Appendix C. In summary, the code of ethics provides some protections and imposes some responsibilities on Rwandan journalists. It is not legally binding, but a journalist who does not adhere to the behavior outlined in the code is likely to find him- or herself censured by the Rwandan Journalist's Association, which has the power to revoke press cards and thus bar journalists from entry to some events. According to the code, journalists are obligated to respect facts and search for truth by not suppressing essential information or distorting remarks, texts, or documents, and "they shall consider slander, abuse, libel and groundless accusation as the most dangerous professional faults" (Rwandan Media Fraternity, 2011, p. 5). They are to "avoid broadcasting or publishing biased information inciting to racial, tribal, ethnic, religious hatred or hatred based on sex, age, social status, disability, or any disease or health status of the people mentioned" (Rwandan Media Fraternity, 2011, p. 6). They must avoid publishing or broadcasting scenes of violence or obscenity, and avoid sensationalism. As these examples highlight, while the code imposes some restrictions against relatively easily discernible violations such as plagiarism and acting simultaneously as a public relations officer and a journalist, many of the guidelines laid out are subject to interpretation by the authorities within and outside the field who might hold journalists accountable for them. In spite of the nebulous nature of many of these guidelines, though, when journalists discuss ideal or desirable behavior within the field, they are generally referring to these. In particular, many journalists mentioned the importance of publishing information for which

they have established the origin, veracity, and accuracy (p. 6), not taking bribes from people seeking to influence coverage (p. 8), avoiding sensationalism (p. 9), and separating opinion from fact (p. 10). The comments and analysis below reflect this.

Reporters and editors across media organizations, including some more independent organizations and some that are more state-aligned, agree that overt harassment from political figures is much less common today than it was 5 or 10 years ago. In other words, journalists today are much less likely to be arrested, disappear, or face other retaliation for covering powerful figures critically, and there is growing acceptance of a powerful, independent, and critical role for news media. However, editors still get phone calls from officials asking to have stories pulled from the issue or the web, and reporters are still (on rare occasions) arrested. Reporters also face opposition and reluctance from the public, both as readers and sources. These things happen, reporters and editors told me, because individual journalists lack the training, skills, and behaviors that would protect them against such backlash. Conversely, reporters and editors believe that when one reports stories in a “professional” way, even if the story is contentious, it is unlikely to result in serious censure against a journalist. Thus, professional behavior acts as an individual safeguard against retaliation for critical reporting. Reporters and editors agreed that professionalism is, in general, in short supply in the Rwandan media scene. Media professionalism is growing but “not where we want to be,” one reporter told me. Journalists are “not at their best level in terms of education and professionalism,” an editor said. “I can improve my career if I can improve my professionalism,” another reporter said.

This lack of training is rooted in the reality that the field in Rwanda essentially restarted after the genocide. In observations and interviews across six media organizations in Kigali, I did not encounter any Rwandan journalists older than their mid-30s; journalists older than this were Ugandan or Kenyan and had been hired to fill specific roles at university or in the newsroom. The young average age across the field further reinforces the idea that journalism

in Rwanda has “started over” since the genocide. Stories of journalism practice from 1994 or earlier are inherited secondhand rather than being recounted by the practitioners. This also means that there are few older, established reporters and editors from whom journalists can learn from, and fewer still who have retired to teach in journalism programs. As a result, the journalism education is heavily weighted toward academic experiences, and students tend to deprioritize real-life learning experiences like internships in favor of getting good grades on classroom projects, editors said. Even attentive students with good grades have a great deal to learn once they show up to the newsroom hoping for a job, and are often disappointed to hear that they need to intern or freelance before they will be offered a full-time, salaried position. As a reporter characterized the media scene in Rwanda, it is “something which is growing up . . . and we are trying to do our best with professionalism and ethics.”

However, training in the field is rare. Journalists have few opportunities to formally learn new practices or polish their current habits. At best, they may learn on the job from editor feedback, which is often indirect or communicates mixed messages, as outlined in chapter 4. One editor at *KT Press* explained:

We have not worked in big media houses where there are experienced people, so there is that lack of knowing a professional story. I don't have the right words to assess it, but everyone lacks something. There is room for improvement, and people here don't get trainings. Like since I came here, I never got any training.

Journalists tend to learn their skills on the job, often picking up here and there best practices for the occupation. Few travel outside the country for training, unless they are sponsored by the *New Times*, and during the eight months I was in Rwanda I only observed one training, for photographers at *KT Press*. This lack of formalized skills training meant journalists often felt unskilled and felt that they were learning by trial and error the fundamental practices of good journalists.

The same editor noted that it also feels like there is a lack of experienced people in the field who could teach journalism practices to others, whether at university or on the job.

We don't have experienced people in the media. And when you have such experience — like, have you worked in the media house? You had guys with experience and you could learn from them, right? Here in Rwanda, who do you learn from? It is like, you are like an orphan trying to learn things by your own. I am telling you. Because even when you go to universities, you don't get what you need. When I left Mount Kenya University I felt like I was cheated.

Because most news outlets and journalists in the country postdate the 1994 genocide, the field as a whole lacks a depth of experience that could be provided by those who had been working as journalists for more than 20 years. Journalists I encountered in surrounding countries, especially in Uganda and Zimbabwe, referenced this sort of newsroom learning and socialization provided by colleagues who had been in the field for decades and had a long experience of how things should be done, such as where to push the boundaries and where to follow the status quo. By contrast, in Rwanda, the media organizations themselves were relatively young and even the longest-working journalist had only been practicing their occupation in Rwanda since after the genocide. This reality combined with the legal changes over the years contributed to a feeling that there was a lack of experienced experts who could be expected to guide and mentor young journalists in the field.

Because most journalists in Rwanda are relatively young, stories of journalism practice from 1994 or earlier had been inherited secondhand rather than being recounted by the practitioners. The newness of the field means that there are few older, established reporters and editors from whom journalists can learn, and fewer still who have retired to teach in journalism programs. As a result, the journalism education is heavily weighted toward academic experiences, and students tend to deprioritize real-life learning experiences like internships in favor of getting good grades on classroom projects, editors said. Even attentive students

with good grades have a great deal to learn once they show up to the newsroom hoping for a job, and are often disappointed to hear that they need to intern or freelance before they will be offered a full-time, salaried position. As a reporter characterized the media scene in Rwanda, it is “something which is growing up . . . you are learning from experience, you are learning from the past, and we are trying to do our best with professionalism and ethics and the context.” As several reporters and editors reminded me, the *New Times* itself began in 1995, just a year after the genocide.

The myth that journalists are harassed and disrespected because they are poorly trained serves to explain why many in the Rwandan journalism field come under government censure for their reporting. It is also an editorial explanation for the behavior noted in chapter 4, that reporters tend to not pursue creative or investigative stories at local media outlets. The shared belief and narrative is that, because the genocide destroyed the journalism field as it was, members of the field today have started from a blank slate and built to the current state over the past 22 years. Editors and staff at the *New Times*, *KT Press*, and other outlets said that media staff are constantly learning and need intensive training because they lack skills. As one editor said, “There are . . . challenges that everybody in the media industry in this country faces. Skills is a general need, because this is a very young field,” he said. “You get the feeling that you always are building for the future. It’s always a work in progress. It’s always training, day in and day out.” This future-oriented approach to journalism practice both acknowledges that the journalism field in Rwanda has not reached the level of expertise that its members would like, and provides justification for the current state of affairs. There are justifiable and understandable reasons for why journalists are not occupational experts, and there is a goal editors and reporters are trying to reach that has not yet been achieved. The subtext is that, once that goal has been achieved, reporters will be able to take a stronger social role that includes investigation of power.

### 5.7 *Consequences of lack of legitimacy*

One particular skill editors felt their staff lacked was the ability to do investigation. This generally included the ability to think beyond the routine story that is presented in media events like press conferences, and to look for another, more interesting story, through interviews or independent research. For one editor, this lack was directly linked with a lack of skill among reporters in the newsroom:

I think the main issue [with lack of investigation] is having the people with the skills and with the zeal — that drive to want to do deep investigative stories. Because we've done it. There was a time when we had a very vibrant investigative desk that was actually led, it was headed by [editor's name] when he was still a reporter. He was a reporter. And I was on it. It was very active. And we never got any problem. So I find it's an issue of skills.

While this assessment is complicated by the pattern outlined in chapter 4, editors across media organizations shared it and it informed the general belief placing the responsibility on individual reporters to produce good content. Good investigative reporting can be done, and reporters and editors could point to one or two specific instances where they or someone else had produced investigative content with no problems, so it followed that the problem must be with the individual. This belief also highlights the somewhat deceptive nature of “investigative desks,” and the problem with conflating investigation with independent journalism: As other reporters pointed out and is spelled out in more detail later in the chapter, much of the work done at the *New Times*' investigative desk was not necessarily independent; it might be guided by the desires of powerful figures as much as any other coverage in the newspaper.

In editorial meetings at the *New Times*, editors routinely gave very specific information to reporters about which sources should be contacted, what questions to ask them, and what

angles to take. Reporters routinely checked in with their desk editor every morning when they arrived in the office, confirming which stories they should work on for the day. In one editorial meeting, I observed this interaction:

Someone mentions that one can only ask certain questions at a press conference because the people running the conference will say that other questions are “not allowed.” The EIC says, “You know that even though a question is ‘not allowed’ doesn’t mean you can’t ask it. Think of other ways to ask it, or ask it anyway.”

This interaction highlights the minute level of oversight editorial staff took with reporters, and how most of the detail-oriented instruction revolved around guiding reporters on routine tasks or responsibilities that one might expect to constitute basic, understood job responsibilities. In a private discussion, one reporter said it felt like editors at the *New Times* in particular were sending the message that reporters couldn’t be trusted to think on their own.

Reporters pointed out that the lack of training could be seen as an advantage in that it fostered the production of general assignment reporters who had not been trained in journalism ethics or appropriate behavior and thus might be more open to potentially unethical behavior such as unquestioningly positive coverage of government actors. Many people in this situation could be found working at local radio stations, said one reporter, who had himself worked in local radio before moving to a wire service job.

You find someone finishing high school, even without having any skills, and he will just go to a radio station and start working as an intern. Later you find him going to a press conference. Maybe they don’t have money to pay you, but also they know they will get some free staff who will do what the government wants — who will not do investigative stories or bother to focus on truthfulness, or the basic principles of journalism.

There is a mutually reinforcing cycle of news outlets lacking funding to pay for qualified

staff and relying on free and consequently less well-trained employees instead. This encourages observers who may in turn lack training in interviewing, writing, and ethics, but may nevertheless assume (correctly) that they can also get jobs as journalists. Thus, there is a self-perpetuating cycle that reinforces the introduction of young journalists into the field who lack the skills that would make them legitimate and credible among their peers.

The lack of training among journalists in Rwanda plays a key role in the way journalists discuss political censure of reporters. In general, the journalists I interviewed insisted that the government generally does not hamper their practice of journalism. Where journalists have been disciplined, it is because they were not trained well enough to practice “good” journalism, or blatantly broke laws, for instance by attempting to bribe sources (a story one editor recounted to me in detail). One reporter noted that he has had friends arrested because of something they wrote or said, but that the arrests were clearly because “those people had no skills. They thought that journalism is something you can wake up and do . . . It is something that should have basic skills before you can start.” A reporter who now works for a wire service told me that, in past years, stories which got reporters in trouble with political authorities often were reported with no quotes, or were one-sided, or the reporter hadn’t tried to find balance for the story, which he described as things an untrained journalist would do. This could lead to trouble: “So somehow there was a confrontation between journalists and the state. OK — maybe they don’t want you to write the stories, but also the stories were not well-researched,” he said. Another reporter for the *New Times* said that he thought it would be possible for reporters in Rwanda to criticize the government if they did so with well-researched and well-written stories. “We can have journalists who can . . . write or publish something which I can call against the government, or against what they want,” he said. “If you publish it with facts with everything, they [the government] will not do anything.” This belief offers both hope and constraint to the Rwandan journalist: on the one hand, if one reports a story professionally, even a critical one, it will not get the reporter in trouble. On the other hand, if one gets in trouble for reporting on a particular

subject, it is probably one's own fault, because the story was unprofessional.

For journalists to produce oppositional or critical work in Rwanda, they must be able to consistently produce work that is legitimate — that is, it meets agreed-upon standards of good journalism as outlined in the code of ethics produced by the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes, both in the content produced and the manner it was reported. If a journalist produces a critical story, it is likely to be scrutinized intensely, and any missteps in reporting or writing that particular story or even past work become fodder for an investigation and, in some cases, a call to remove him or her from staff. As a result, there is a commonly shared belief among journalists (articulated in chapter 3) that journalists who do follow professional standards in reporting and writing will not be penalized or censured for writing stories that critique officials and stray from the accepted editorial line. I found this to be true in one sense: Journalists who do not adhere to standard expectations of ethical behavior and professional writing are likely to face censure ranging from critique to job loss to arrest if they pursue watchdog news items. On the other hand, though, legitimacy alone does not appear sufficient to ensure that journalists can safely pursue independent angles.

Rwandan journalists contend that if one follows ethical reporting tactics and produces an article that meets accepted standards by being factual, relying on multiple sources, and including no author opinion, then one will not face political or organizational censure. Journalists tended to use one of three arguments to back up this claim. One argument was to provide examples of journalists who had been producing watchdog content and were still at work in the country. A second argument was to claim that the lack of skill in the journalism field meant there were few (or no) reporters capable of producing well-written, critical content: Some had left the country in 2010, and others had left the field but remained in the country. A third argument was to point to the laws supporting freedom of the press (there are several). Each of these arguments sheds further light on the ways that “good journalism” is a necessary, but not sufficient, tool enabling a journalist to fill a watchdog role.

The prevailing belief within the Rwandan journalism field, as indicated by the evidence shared in previous pages, is that journalists tend to be untrained and not particularly good at their jobs. This leads journalists to reason that there is a relative dearth of critical, investigative, and watchdog journalism because many journalists themselves are not highly skilled enough to produce that journalism. When reporters are highly skilled, they tend to be tempted out of the journalism occupation by higher-paying jobs in other sectors. Journalists who are good reporters with a good grasp of English, for instance, are prime candidates for PR positions with NGOs and other international organizations looking for local staff with good communication skills. “These international organizations here, if you have a masters, they take you,” one editor said. “They pay well. So the media has been like a transit to public relations. That is a challenge — someone has experience and then just look for greener pastures and they leave the field. So they leave it in the hands of people, amateurs.” The departure of skilled journalists for adjacent communication fields like public relations leaves the field populated with journalists who are often less well-trained in necessary reporting skills like interviewing, researching, and writing. Another reporter explained this from a different angle: “We don’t have a lot of critics,” he said, referring to the journalism field. “The people who should be, who would criticize whatever is going on, are busy doing something else. Like a friend of mine the other day was saying: The good journalists are not actually doing journalism. Good journalist are somewhere else — working for hospitals or doing something else.” This feeds into a belief, also elucidated in chapter 3, that many journalists left in the field are not particularly good at their jobs, which in turn provides a ready explanation — bad reporting — to take the blame and explain the result when journalists face government and public censure for attempting to do investigative reporting.

The converse of this belief is a belief that, if journalists do practice journalism well, they will be free to produce work that follows a watchdog counternarrative. As one reporter said,

We have journalists who can write or publish something against the government,

or against what they want — if you publish it with facts with everything, the government will not do anything. They will not. Look at the local journalists who work for the international media — they report the way they want, as long as they have facts in everything, and nobody attacks them.

Journalists have observed that some in their community routinely report news that portrays officials in unflattering ways, and they persist in doing so. So the assumption is that, if one follows agreed-upon standards of good journalism in reporting even a critical story, there will be no negative repercussions.

Critical stories come under intense scrutiny. Sometimes this is immediate, as in some instances outlined in chapter 4. But when the story cannot be immediately censored by organizational forces, journalists themselves and their work history are often called into question. One wire reporter, who had previously worked at the *East African* and the *New Times*, explained how his reporting history had been scrutinized in light of one critical story he wrote for the *East African*. He had written an article about a press conference, and a minister said she had been misquoted in the article. The reporter did not consider that particular story to be very critical or investigative. He said he might have slightly misquoted the minister, but pointed out that it would be a poor journalistic decision to misquote a minister at a public event with many witnesses to testify to the correct quote. However, the reporter later found out that the minister took the opportunity to call his entire work history into question, taking the confrontation straight past the editor of the newspaper to the owner of the publication. “They were so annoyed that instead of calling the editor they jumped and called Aga Khan family, complaining about the story,” he said. “Later I found out that they had lined up all my stories I worked even before, so they were saying, ‘You see, it is not only this story, but there is this history which means this person is doing it intentionally.’” Later, the reporter again found himself on the wrong side of the government after writing a story for the *East African*. Instead of overtly questioning the legitimacy of

his work as a journalist, the editor quietly sidelined him for several years. “The government was not happy, so they told my boss not to run my stories again. My boss did not tell me, but I would see the assignments declining me. I didn’t know what was causing it,” he said. “I was one of the best journalists, writing good stories. I only discovered two years later that there was a directive not to run my stories.” These examples illustrate ways that the articles produced by reporters practicing watchdog journalism comes under heavy scrutiny.

Journalists also face scrutiny in how they go about their work. The cases editors and reporters recounted when journalists had been overtly censured by the government — for instance, being arrested — involved failure to follow journalistic best practices. An editor at the *New Times* recounted one such encounter where a reporter had tried to blackmail a powerful source, alleging that the source, a hotel owner, had sexually harassed his staff but not producing any evidence.

The hotel owner called the managing editor at the time and said, there’s a man here who came and said you guys have a story on me about me harassing my female waitresses, but it is absolutely like really, really not true, it is outrageous, and I have not even been given a chance to hear those facts that the journalist has. The ME told the other person you know what, you play along, show him that you bought into his blackmail, and then we’re going to come — the police of course — and arrest him. And that’s what happened. He called in, “I have your money,” so then when he went to go there the police were there and they immediately arrested him.

In other words, a reporter attempted to bribe an important figure — a hotel owner — to pay him to keep quiet about a story of this hotel-owner’s alleged sexual misconduct. The hotel owner took the story to the reporter’s superiors, who then worked with the hotel owner to have the reporter arrested for attempting the bribe. Of course, this is a one-sided account of an event remembered from several years prior, and without an account from at least

the reporter who was arrested for allegedly offering a bribe, it is impossible to know what actually transpired. However, this account sheds light on the manner in which it is socially acceptable to discuss the harassment of journalists in Rwanda. It suggests that public, government censure is acceptable and can be incorporated into public narrative if it occurs as a result of inappropriate or unethical behavior on the part of a journalist. Harassment for “good” investigative reporting, on the other hand, was denounced by everyone I encountered as something that should not (and for the most part, does not) happen in Rwanda. Accounts from wire reporters further suggest that they are most concerned that they will be harassed for a slip-up in reporting or, in extreme cases, that they will be followed and harassed in their personal lives:

If you are really a good journalist — not just a puppet journalist, because some journalists have decided to be like that, just to make a living or to please — but if you are a journalist who can do any story, you will always be scared that you are being watched. You will face criticism any time.

This reporter had not been arrested and most of his stories did not meet public critique, but he went about his days extra cautiously to avoid giving officials any excuse to arrest or harass him.

Reporters for wire services and the *East African*, who produce critical journalism regularly, corroborated the importance of using great care in following ethical reporting standards and producing news content that lived up to journalistic standards. Even errors that might be considered “small” — things like misspelling and misquotes, which would generally not warrant even a printed correction at the *New Times* — would provide openings for government officials and others to critique an entire body of watchdog work, one reporter said.

When you are writing for a news agency, the risk is high, since they cannot control you (directly). A boss cannot tell [wire service] to stop your stories, and they know that writing for [wire service] you are employed, and they have money. If

they want to harass you, there is a way they can maybe bring up maybe charges. When you get a small problem, they can use that small problem — they will not be punishing you for that small problem, but they will be punishing you because of what you do. You have to be very smart — smart in the sense that you try to do your work properly, not to give them the chance to get you.

In some sense, then, watchdog journalism in this context is inextricable from careful sourcing, reporting, and writing, because watchdog reporters who do not exercise care in following accepted standards of news production will find their careers quite short. Only those whose stories pass a high bar of scrutiny are allowed to continue working. Careful reporting is also proactively encouraged by the organizations that tend to produce watchdog journalism. Organizational priorities and practices set higher standards of sourcing and verification for stories to be published. One wire reporter noted that there is some truth to the claim that journalists in Rwanda sometimes would publish poorly researched and poorly vetted “investigative” journalism that would not stand up to the scrutiny placed on news articles published for wire services or in neighboring Uganda.

If you are writing a story maybe for the AP, or maybe for the *Uganda Monitor*, you would expect somebody to raise an issue but try to talk to all people, to balance the story. But in the past in Rwanda, you might find somebody running a story without a quote — any quote — and sometimes stories turn out not to be true. So there would be a confrontation between journalists and the state. Maybe the state doesn't want the journalist to write the stories, but also the stories were not well-researched.

Reporters in general had little sympathy for their colleagues in these situations; the attitude tended to convey the idea that, if you had tried to investigate something without concrete facts or named sources to back it up, you would be asking for trouble, and you probably would know it.

Highly trained journalists able to produce watchdog stories with named source, quotes, and facts are rare in Rwanda, but powerful. One editor suggested that the government tries to limit opportunities for journalists to gain more specialized skills, afraid of what a cadre of highly trained journalists could accomplish. He used the example of a well-known professor and media critic who regularly contributes to the *East African*. “The government is scared of media professionals now, I think. If you are too professional, I am scared of you. Like [name], when he writes a story — everyone is reading to know what he is going to talk about this time. So if you have like, 10 [names], you can put the government to the test.” However, as chapter 4 shows, even skilled journalists inclined to practice watchdog journalism and write critical, investigative pieces are often prevented from doing so and trained to avoid particular topics and investigations by the pressure of newsroom routines laced with financial incentives combined with the uncertainty of knowing that an editor will likely not back up a reporter if a story backfires and draws criticism. Through the 2000s, one reporter said, reporters would routinely be fired from the *New Times* for stories that violated the editorial line. “There was that kind of harassment where a story was published, the government was not happy, so they decided to fire that journalist,” he said. “It has happened so much at the *New Times* — so much.” In other words, even journalists doing work that their peers agreed was legitimate have faced repercussions from their environment, often getting fired because they wrote something that upset a government official.

This suggests that a reporter’s ability to produce critical news consistently without harm is not entirely a function of his or her level of skill. For one thing, reporters acknowledged that there had been, as recently as the mid-2000s, many print news outlets in Rwanda that published well-reported and critical news. By the time I arrived in Rwanda, though, these had mostly shut down. One such outlet, the *Great Lakes Voice*, persisted, but published news only online without a print counterpart. Another such outlet, the *Chronicles*, had employed several editors and reporters I interviewed before it, too, was shut down after three or four years in print. The chairman of the Association of Rwandan Journalists described this trend

as a lack of “vibrancy,” which he attributed to the rise in online media outlets leading to a decline in print readership and substituting the “real investigation” of print outlets with softer investigations for online organizations. “At the moment the culture is not as vibrant as it was when I joined,” he said.

When the print press was working better, before the Internet dominated, there were several newspapers which were very critical. They investigated stories which we don’t see these days; they could attack the government directly. It was more dramatic. But just before the presidential elections in 2010 most were banned and the journalists had to go to exile. Of course, radios of course continued to be dominant, online media continued to expand, but critical content decreased. It’s one of the challenges we have at the moment. While the infrastructure has increased, and we have many radio stations, many talk shows, and like a hundred publications online, they don’t scrutinize real power.

The failure to “scrutinize real power” was a recent phenomenon, following on the heels of a glut of publications in the early 2000s whose employees had produced work critical of top government officials — and then been forced to leave the country. This source attributed the lack of current investigative work to a rise in online publications, implying that these newer outlets had pushed print publications out of business. However, a wire reporter who had also observed this shift discounted the business angle:

By 2009 and 2010, there were two big papers that were really good — critical of the government, investigative. Of course they lacked some journalistic skills. But still, they were giving really what Rwandans wanted. You would see, you know, when it prints, you would see copies in the morning getting finished just after one hour of distribution. And some other people would go and photocopy the paper and sell copies. That showed how print media could also do better. But the two papers were banned for six months, and later on the journalists had

to flee the country. That was not good times. And the remaining journalists for print started working in fear and decided to be pro-government to survive.

It is no surprise that journalists mentioned this as a reason they self-censor today, choosing to avoid touchy subjects rather than invite the same treatment their predecessors received. But even more relevant to the current argument is the fact that this happened to journalists who, by this account of a journalism field expert, were doing good work that contributed to a “vibrant” journalism field. Thus, it seems to be the case — or at least to have been the case up until quite recently — that even a number of journalists doing good work investigating powerful people have faced severe repercussions and have found that career path unsustainable.

### **5.8 *Watchdog journalism: Rethinking loyalty and impact***

A final factor differentiating watchdog journalists from the rest of the Rwandan journalism field lies in their distinct interpretation of national loyalty or patriotism the way journalism should support that loyalty. For most Rwandan journalists, as outlined in chapter 3, the practice of journalism should be positive and promote a unified image of Rwanda inside the country and on the international stage. Most watchdog reporters still told me that a goal of their work was to make Rwanda a better country, but they thought the best way to do so was by practicing social distance between themselves and powerful leaders and providing information to audiences to make better informed decisions. In other words, the choice to practice watchdog journalism accompanied a shift from viewing journalism as a somewhat paternalistic tool of development to viewing journalism as a more neutral tool for providing information. This makes sense, as these different views of journalism align with the actual goals and orientations of the respective styles of journalism practice. I found, though, that most watchdog journalists along with the rest of the Rwandan journalism field prioritized a patriotic, loyal goal of making Rwanda a better country, though they disagreed on the best

form of journalism to accomplish this. In choosing a watchdog role, journalists choose to exercise a power that is somewhat removed from the Rwandan journalism field, with one foot in the local field and one foot in the international journalism world.

Watchdog journalism in Rwanda is not widespread, but does have an influence on the field. As noted above, the journalism produced by international outlets like wire services and the *East African* is held up across the field as proof of the fact that journalists can produce critical work without facing exile or prison. What many observers fail to note is the importance of the organization itself in enabling and encouraging that work. As a result, many journalists attempt to produce watchdog journalism in local organizations, as noted in chapter 4, before realizing that it is practically impossible to routinely function as a watchdog within the organizational structure of local media outlets. It is an open question whether the watchdog function of international media organizations will influence the rest of the Rwandan field to normalize the practice, as the practice has spread in some other regions (Smith, 1997; Waisbord, 2000). After all, wire services are predominately aimed at telling stories to an international, largely Western, audience. However, reporters for wire services and the *East African* were partly motivated to continue in their jobs because of the impact they felt their work had on the local community. This was most apparent in the reaction journalists would see published by colleagues at local news organizations. One reporter gave an example:

There was a time the European Community issued a statement on the human rights situation in Rwanda, and I did a story and asked the minister, “What’s your comment on that?” He said it. But he was not happy with the interview, so afterward, he was like, “Please, put that there is freedom in Rwanda. Because even you, you are free — you do whatever you want, I always read your stories.” And I was like, “No, I cannot just write a story about me. This is not autobiography.” He gave me a very strong statement. I put it in the story. Then in the

morning I saw a story in the *New Times* commenting on the [wire service] story about the EU statement.

This reporter was assigned to write a story on an international community's negative assessment of human rights in Rwanda. The local minister he interviewed suggested that the reporter write that the country is free, based on the reporter's personal experience — “even you . . . you do whatever you want.” The reporter refused, insisting that he must stick to accepted standards of newswriting rather than writing a first-person narrative account of his own experience. The story that he produced about that human rights rating stirred up enough interest that local outlets, including the *New Times*, reported on the way he had reported on the story — a meta-story, but nevertheless a story about human rights that otherwise likely would not have been published in a local news outlet. Through this and similar occurrences, wire reporters were convinced that, even though they were writing to an international audience, their work had an effect on local discussions by introducing dynamics of independence that local media had to contend with and interact with. At least occasionally, the news produced by local journalists for wire services would thus introduce new discussion topics to the local press, who could report on the news by reporting what their colleagues had published for transnational outlets.

Of course, wire services and other international news outlets also seek particular coverage angles and reject stories that do not meet standards of newsworthiness or timeliness. The reporters I interviewed had practice pitching stories and discussing angles before they began reporting, as they knew that some things just would not make international news. Some wire reporters would only write two or three stories per month, and sometimes no content at all, but would wait on a retainer for news that merited international attention. But at its best, reporters felt they had a local influence as well as an international influence. One reporter explained this as a “social role.” It was more limited with a wire service, though he had pitched feature stories like one about street beggars being put in prison (something a Human

Rights Watch report claimed was happening, but local officials denied). Some feature stories would still make the cut, but they would have to be “very big,” he said. However, for him, the tradeoff was worth it. “I know I can do a political story and be able to interview all sides, not only the pro-government but also the opposition, and get away with it,” he said. “Local media, they will not publish that story. They will say remove that part. So, it’s still good to be a journalist.” Wire reporters pointed out that the wire services, with their largely international audiences, could actually have a great impact on policy changes in Rwanda, which is heavily dependent on donor money and has a good reputation to maintain in the donor community. “Rwanda is a country that wants to be seen well internationally, so they will change if you write a story that is true,” he said. “It may be fake change, like provisional change, maybe to show the international community, which is huge in this country, that something has changed — but it will be there.” The implication in this quote is that, while lasting change is slow to come, the Rwandan government is swayed by international opinion. News coverage that is factually accurate and portrays Rwanda in an unflattering light for something that can be corrected by policy change is likely to impact discussions and lead to some sort of policy change so that government officials can look proactive and positive to the international community living in Rwanda and onlookers outside the country.

Journalists face some social pressure for doing watchdog journalism, and it tends to be aimed at their affiliation with particular organizations, rather than the work itself (though individual reporters also find their reporting the subject of investigations). One reporter noted that reporters working for wire services were occasionally told by government officials that, by working for international employers, they were “betraying the country.” Many reporters in Rwanda attend a several-week government education training where they learn about the history and culture of Rwanda. One wire service reporter, who had not attended, called it “brainwashing” and said officials spread messages at those events that working for international outlets was unpatriotic.

They will be telling them no, don't work for those international media. Those are people who want negative things from us, nothing positive. That is total bullshit, because when I am working for [wire service] I cover some positive stories — economic growth, investment, investors coming around. Is that negative? But some people when they are training them say look at BBC, look at CNN, look at Al Jazeera — have they, have you ever seen them criticizing their own governments? Why can't you just work like them in Rwanda?

For this reporter and others practicing watchdog journalism, these questions set up a false dichotomy — for him and others, they practiced critical journalism as a form of loyalty to the country and their fellow citizens. Another reporter explained that he was a genocide survivor — a Tutsi — and was grateful to the government for feeding and clothing him and others, but still wanted to raise questions about how to improve governance:

There are always some issues which are not clear cut, and I don't think it's wrong to raise them. I don't think it's wrong to tell the people involved, "Look, this is not good. Can we do it better? Is there a way it can be done better?" There is nothing wrong in holding whoever is doing nothing accountable. Accountability is a must. I am very grateful to what this current government did to my family, to me, but I don't think I should be restrained from telling them look, this is not good.

This reporter thus calls into question the conflation of loyalty with unquestioningly positive coverage that reporters feel is demanded by local organizations and taught in training sessions like the one led by government officials. But even in critiquing this conflation, the reporter is acknowledging its existence. On some level, watchdog journalists in Rwanda face an ongoing critique that they are disloyal because they question best practices and probe into dysfunctional government practices.

While watchdog journalists tend to face social pressure in the form of critical assessment of their loyalty to Rwanda, they also enjoy the benefit of higher social capital, afforded to them by virtue of their work. Producing the watchdog content allowed and required from an independent news outlet places reporters under scrutiny, but it also lends them some respect from audiences looking to find news that differs from that routinely produced by Rwandan journalists. As a reporter at the *East African* explained,

With the *East African*, you get trainings, you know, and you get people trusting you as a journalist. At the *New Times*, even people with the *New Times* think it's a joke. You get? But then when you start getting out these critical stories, you go on Twitter and check the reach — It's in the thousands and tens of thousands if it's a critical story. The *New Times*, they don't get that. So, I feel like this is satisfactory, in a way.

Other journalists echoed this feeling of satisfaction from knowing they were producing news that would be read by a wide audience including Rwandans and international readers or listeners. They felt they gained social capital in the form of name recognition and respect in their roles as journalists from audiences interested in reading an alternate perspective shaped less by local economic pressure. The same *East African* reporter noted that he had heard from many readers who appreciated the perspective the *East African* offered. “I've listened to quite a number of people and they appreciate our role in Rwanda,” he said.

They believe that we offer an alternative in most situations. If for example the head of RwandAir is fired, we are going to find reasons why they fired him — point blank, he was fired, and this is what they say about it. So I believe that most people find us an alternative for information, like to find their way through the right information.

In general, watchdog journalists enjoyed the feeling that they were able to provide a different perspective on current events than their counterparts at local news outlets, and they felt that

readers appreciated this perspective as well.

Of course, one characteristic of most wire services, at least the ones featuring most prominently in the Rwandan journalism field, is that they have Western roots. Agence France-Presse is based in France, Reuters in Great Britain, and Associated Press in the U.S., and all have associated normatively Western values and expectations of news reporting. Some journalists find that this suits them and provides an outlet for the kinds of watchdog reporting they want to do; others do not. A few journalists in Rwanda are fed up with both the local approach to journalism and the wire service alternative, and are attempting to build purely local and independent news outlets. One in particular, an editor for a web startup called *Taarifa*, said he felt there was a need for a different kind of reporting than that produced by journalists at local outlets or by wire reporters. However, both *Taarifa* and *Great Lakes Voice* were, when I visited, relatively small newsrooms funded by the owner, and it remained to be seen if they would have long term, sustainable business models.

### **5.9 The power of organizational protection**

The other essential requirement for journalists to practice a watchdog role, my interviews and observations suggest, is protection provided by an organization that is independent from local financial persuasion and thus positioned to be protective, rather than sacrificing employees at the threat of financial loss or state censure. In addition, internationally based news organizations tend to impose stricter expectations on the content that they run, as noted in the prior section. They also pay their staff well, so employees are less concerned about maintaining good relationships with local organizations to pursue side jobs. International organizations both protect their employees against criticism for watchdog reporting, and impose standards demanding more critical reporting.

International news organizations provide a cushion of stability for their staff. One wire

service reporter said his regional editors were aware of the sensitive and sometimes risky nature of newsgathering in Rwanda, and would check in with him before publishing stories to ask whether a particular story was too sensitive and would bring trouble. “Because of the kind of stories they write, they make sure that the stories are well-researched, especially in countries like this,” one wire reporter said. “They understand the context here, the fragility — they understand. Sometimes they even ask, this story, don’t you think it will maybe cause you problems?” International organizations also occasionally insert their authority into local situations, when staff reporters seem to be in danger. One reporter told me a story of how he had been harassed online after researching a story for a local radio station, where he worked briefly while also freelancing for a wire service. He had been researching the members of a commission created to investigate allegedly genocide-denying broadcasts by the BBC Rwanda (which had been banned because of those broadcasts). He wanted to find out what connections each commissioner had to verify government claims that the board was neutral and independent of the government. He produced and aired a broadcast story about the independence of the commission, and within days became the subject of a smear campaign by unnamed social media accounts that he attributes to the government. In detailed and lengthy statements, phantom Facebook and Twitter accounts called him a “genocide denier,” an accusation that, if proven, carries a strong penalty in Rwanda.

I know the situation was not good. So I kept quiet. And I told [wire service], because they were giving all my background. They were saying he now feels more powerful since he works for [wire service]. It was terrible. After two days, [wire service] was like, “OK, if you find it is going further, tell us and we will call the government.” The bureau chief in Nairobi told me, “We can call the government and ask them to look it up, because they can use their cybersecurity whatever and know who exactly is doing that.” [Wire service] said they would do it if it went on for more days. Then it stopped.

In this case, the intervention of the organization was unnecessary in the end, but the orga-

nization was ready to question authorities to protect its employee — and it was willing to do so even for a story the reporter had written for a different news outlet. This behavior is a marked contrast with the organizational behavior reported of Rwandan media houses, where managers under critical pressure tend to sacrifice employees lower on the totem pole. Another employee of an international media house had been arrested the previous year for a critical story, but the arrest lasted only hours, because the organization immediately threatened to run a story about the arrest — something that no local media house would have done, reporters said.

By contrast, as noted in the previous chapter, local media organizations have a reputation for not supporting employees whose stories catch criticism.

It is dangerous for the organization, or for the journalist who has done the story. It will not be like the manager will say we are answerable for that content; no, they will say, “The journalist is accountable for that. Ask the journalist.” Which is very dangerous. The editor would say, “Ask the journalist who did the story,” yet we discussed the story in the newsroom

Journalists who attempt to produce critical content in a local newsroom tend to do so on their own initiative and often risk organizational censure in doing so, whereas journalists doing the same for an international outlet are rewarded for that work and protected by the organization from some forms of penalty.

While international organizations clearly are willing to support their employees for critical stories they have run, reporters also noted that they face less criticism, in general, when producing news for international organizations than when they worked for local organizations. One reporter, who joined a wire service after first working for the *New Times*' investigative bureau for several years, explained that, while he had been regularly hassled about critical stories at the *New Times*, no one questioned his wire service work. He attributed the lack

of overt critique to two things: Knowledge that wire services are less susceptible to local pressure, and knowledge that employees are less likely to be won over by financial offers.

From the day I started working for [wire service], I haven't gotten any calls from anyone telling me 'we don't want those stories. I think maybe they know they cannot control AP. They cannot control Reuters. And the international media pay well. When you are working for international media, you feel like you are empowered. Your bosses, you feel they are protecting you. So you try to write in pure journalism.

In addition to the protection they can offer, international organizations tend to demand more watchdog-style reporting from their employees. "There is a big difference" between news produced for local outlets and that produced for international organizations, one reporter said.

*New Times* is going to write only the PR stories. So that is the difference. Reuters, AP, will try to probe. If people are being evicted, the *New Times* is going to say people are being evicted for the good of all. Maybe they are settled in wetlands, but they are not going to tell you that 20 people were evicted, but not given alternative housing. The government has taken the land but it does not compensate them. For us, we are going to say that government is not compensating those guys. *New Times* is going to say they are evicting them because they are in wetlands, and government is evicting them for the good of these families. So that is the difference.

But the editors who demand that investigation into the alternate explanations for events will also demand that those explanations be provided by credible, named sources, with factual information — key elements that protect a journalist's *legitimacy*, as noted in the previous section. One reporter said:

The people at AP, they are going to write like OK, Kagame has done A, B, C, and D; there is also this other side according to Human Rights Watch or the UN.

When you read the story, there is no way you can burn the journalist, the writer.

By imposing these standards of reporting and research on employees, wire services like the AP, Reuters, and AFP and international outlets like the *East African* buttress their own reputations as factual news sources, but they also protect the employees working for them by guarding against content that could merit criticism.

Another reporter told a similar story from his days reporting at a local news outlet, before he shifted to wire work.

When I was working at [local radio station], we just did a very simple commentary one day and I went home. I worked Saturday with the youth program. I was really controversial. A few weeks later, I was on leave when someone told me, “Man, things are hot here — apparently one of your programs has created problems with the government, with the president’s office.” When I went back, the boss told me, come in my office with your colleague. They told us, “Your program is anti-government and we have to suspend it, I’ve been told.” But you see, at [wire service], that cannot happen. It’s only when I commit an ethical mistake or do something wrong that they can say, “Eh, you are no longer part of us because you are not meeting our rules and regulations.” But here when you are working for local media, anything can happen, anytime, which is bad.

In other words, local news organizations would often not hesitate to sacrifice reporters, while international organizations would be more likely to protect their reporters and stand behind their work unless the reporter had done something overtly unethical.

Many of the international news organizations represented in Rwanda did not have editors or bureau chiefs stationed in the country. As a result, I have few firsthand interviews with

these sources. However, it seems clear that at least one element affording these organizations the power to both demand a particular quality of news reporting and then protect the employees who deliver it resides in the organization's *financial independence* from the Rwandan business environment. Without the pressure from advertisers reported in chapter 4, editors do not adopt the expectation of self-censorship that is internalized and then passed on down the hierarchy at organizations that depend on local advertising to fund ongoing business. Source interviews suggest this to be the case. Thus it seems that, by virtue of being financially independent and possessing a high degree of economic capital, international news organizations are able to resist the prevailing institutional pressure in a manner more overt and direct than that practiced by most news organizations in Rwanda. They pass this freedom along to reporters, providing necessary protection for those inclined to practice watchdog journalism.

Wire services in particular, including the AP, Reuters, AFP, and others, are built on a business model that provides global news coverage to subscribers, primarily other journalists and news outlets, on the assumption that those subscribers are often unable to report directly from countries and regions that are nonetheless of interest to readers in the U.S., U.K., and other parts of the world (Fenby, 1986; Putnis, 2004). As such, these services prioritize “demonstrably correct information” over judgment calls and ambiguous writing or reporting (Fenby, 1986, p. 25). Their business model in essence demands it, as subscribers as diverse as partisan presses in Great Britain, relatively young democratic or development-oriented news outlets in Kenya, and small-town daily newspapers in the U.S. all must be able to use the material alongside their own reporting for local readers. A wire service that consistently strayed outside reporting the straightforward and factual would likely not have a long tenure. In Rwanda, the *East African* occupies a somewhat similar position. While it is dependent on advertising, the magazine's readership stretches across East Africa, so writers are compelled to provide content that will be easily understood by readers in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda. So for these outlets, the goals of producing watchdog journalism coincide with

the business model rather than contradicting it as with local outlets. A reporter pointed this out:

Most newspapers tend to be nice to the state because they want to get funding through adverts. If you were at the *East African* there is a way they can maybe talk to your boss — we are supposed to cooperate, we are supposed to do this and this. But international media is a bit freer. Now there is a bit of space, and I think the state is understanding that maybe the media is not their enemy and we have to work together.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

The *East African* editorial meeting outlined in the introduction to this chapter highlights some of the contrasts between journalists who produce critical, watchdog news coverage on a regular basis and those who do not, instead producing content that is encouraged by the field myths and organizational routines outlined in chapter 3 and chapter 4. This chapter set out to answer the question, **When journalists resist local pressure to produce a certain kind of news, what factors enable them to do so?** The previous pages show that both individual and organizational factors are necessary. The individual must be able to produce news that is legitimate and does not break with field standards in the reporting process or the technique present in the final content produced. He or she must also prioritize loyalty to the profession of journalism or its mission as stated in the code of ethics and training materials, either holding these to be more valuable than loyalty to Rwanda or seeing these as a more desirable form of patriotism than the loyalty to Rwandan unity prioritized in chapter 3. Finally, he or she must be employed by an organization that has financial capital outside Rwanda and is rooted in a global or transnational journalism field. My observations show that each of these conditions is necessary but not sufficient on its own; as long as all three coexist, they ensure that a journalist can practice critical, creative, and independent journalism in Rwanda.

The journalists who are able to persist in producing this content work at transnational news outlets with bureaus or stringers stationed in Rwanda; these include the *East African* and many wire services. These journalists tend to feel less responsible for the genocide than their locally employed counterparts and are more inclined to think optimistically about the power of journalism, rather than highlighting the negative social role journalists have played. They have strong grasp of reporting skills valued in English-language, transnational wire reporting, including the ability to write fact-based narratives that are “objective” and rely on quotes from named sources, and strong English writing skills. In addition, an equally important factor enabling these journalists to produce work that breaks from field expectations is that they are employed by organizations that exist with some buffer from the economic realities constraining news organizations based in Rwanda.

In this chapter I argue that three factors — financial independence, i.e., a high level of economic capital at the organizational level that is independent of field resources, a perception of patriotism that prioritizes independent thinking and free information in service to country stability, and legitimacy, i.e., the ability to consistently produce news content that meets field-generated expectations of quality — enable journalists to practice watchdog journalism in Rwanda. Watchdog journalism is not necessarily critical or oppositional, and it is not necessarily produced by any particular method, but is independent from political influence so that journalists feel obligated and empowered to investigate government statements and actions regardless of whether particular state actors approve. In Rwanda specifically, I find that the field actors consistently practicing watchdog journalism are highly skilled and are employed by transnational organizations, including wire services and regional publications such as the Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, Bloomberg, Deutsche Welle, the *East African*, Reuters, and Voice of America. The journalists working for these outlets produce news for an audience that includes some elite Rwandans but also includes a large number of international readers or listeners. While they face some criticism from local officials for

working for “international media,” they feel that they are part of the local journalism field, partly because many of them are Rwandan citizens with families in the country and a strong desire to remain in the country. Thus, they are somewhat different from the transnational journalist profiled in recent research who has a cultural and political alignment with a country other than that where he or she is reporting. Instead, the Rwandan journalist working for a transnational organization finds in that organization an outlet to pursue the reporting that he feels is in the best interests of Rwandan politics and society. Transnational organizations like newswires thus provide an opportunity for local journalists to produce journalism that falls outside the prevailing local culture of self-censorship and positivity while not abdicating their desire to remain in the country.

These findings highlight the ways different forms of capital can enable particular behaviors in a journalism field, and build on Vos and Singer (2016) and Powers and Vera Zambrano (2016) in showing that economic and cultural capital may not always be in tension, but could work in parallel to enable journalists to accomplish particular goals. In particular, my findings complicate the expression of economic capital by suggesting that the source of capital relative to the field in question can be an important element of consideration. Some organizations within the Rwandan journalism field, notably the *New Times* and *KT Press*, possess a high degree of economic capital, in that they are financially stable, retain staff of several dozen employees, possess functioning equipment, and pay employees on time at expected intervals. Within the context of Rwandan employment, these are symbols of stability. However, this financial capital is inextricably linked with the interests of the organizations providing capital in the form of advertisements. Thus, the high degree of economic capital these organizations possess essentially bars their employees from pursuing independent journalism. On the other hand, transnational organizations also possess high degrees of economic capital but the capital is linked with a motivation for journalists to produce news that meets standards of independence and factuality that ensure a watchdog approach to newsgathering. The possession or pursuit of economic capital as such does not preclude the

practice of particular types of journalism or the pursuit or prioritization of cultural capital. What matters is the source of and motivations attached to that financial capital. Where it is tied to interests contrary to the pursuit of strong watchdog journalism, it prevents this type of journalism from occurring. But where it is tied to interests that encourage watchdog journalism, this type of journalism flourishes. The motivations behind economic capital are important in determining how it will interact with other forms of capital.

This chapter also provides a compelling starting point for future research on both local and transnational journalism cultures. While transnational outlets have a problematic history of perpetuating Western hegemony, my fieldwork experience highlighted the importance of their existence to enable local journalists to remain in the local field while practicing journalism that does not align with status quo expectations. Individual factors are also important in that journalists must be able to consistently produce highly legitimate content, but the organizational protection afforded by transnational organizations without strong financial dependence on the Rwandan advertising sector is critical in enabling journalists to sustain careers of watchdog journalism in a society that rather encourages “puppet journalism,” as one source called local journalism in Rwanda. A next step in this research could be to examine the ways that this watchdog journalism does or does not spread through journalism culture to become adopted by local organizations. Past research suggests that, under certain circumstances, a norm of watchdog journalism can start with a small group of practitioners and spread to be adopted by a substantial portion of the field (Smith, 1997; Waisbord, 2000). However, it is unclear whether this could happen in a context where the only practitioners of watchdog journalism are employed by transnational organizations and the financial situation of local organizations prevents their encouragement of the practice.

The findings in this chapter further reinforce the findings from chapter 3 and chapter 4 that members of the Rwandan journalism field make strategic decisions to pursue particular kinds of journalism based on the resources available and protection afforded them. It further

suggests that empowering local journalists to be watchdogs is not a matter of enabling one or two brave individuals but effecting structural change on many levels. While my analysis is confined to the Rwandan context, I predict that a similar combination of circumstances are needed in any situation where journalists are interested in practicing their occupation in a way that is neither encouraged by routines within the field nor well-tolerated by powerful forces outside the field.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

As my friend and I predicted in the conversation outlined in chapter 1, and as many other journalists predicted in conversations with me throughout fieldwork, incumbent president Paul Kagame won Rwanda's August 2017 presidential election with nearly 100 percent of the vote. There were, likewise, few surprises in the ways Rwandan news outlets covered the campaign and the re-election. The *New Times* reported that the presidential elections were "free, fair, and transparent," while the *New York Times* reported that the "lopsided re-election" was seen as a sign of oppression (Baddorf, 2017; Muvunyi, 2017). Two days before the election, the *East African* ran an Agence France Press story with the headline "Kagame set for sweeping victory in Rwanda election" and a succinct story summary noting factually that the incumbent faced "two little-known candidates who were given only three weeks to campaign against the incumbent, who has kept a tight hold on power since his rebel army ended the 1994 genocide" (Agence France Presse, 2017). Reliable sources informed me that three journalists who had tried to publicly question the RPF's official narrative of the campaign season, including turnout at campaign rallies and other events, had been fired or suspended from their jobs without pay. In short, it turned out to have been business as usual. Journalists who played the game by official rules had reported on a relatively peaceful campaign season leading to an election confirming the incumbent's power. The few journalists who broke the unwritten rules in trying to live up to normative expectations faced financial consequences. Almost certainly, the majority of journalists covering the campaign did not attempt to pursue such "creative" stories.

One *New Times* journalist, speaking with me shortly before the campaigns started, sum-

marized the set of challenges facing Rwandan journalists succinctly:

Some challenges are in ourselves, the people doing the journalism. Other challenges are where we are working from and our bosses, but if you read how other countries get independent journalism, the government didn't come and give it to them. Journalists themselves fight for it. You don't have guns, you don't have whatever; just use the facts. Let's say you are going to cover the election. Everyone knows Kagame will win. But now the question could be how many points he will have. Will he have 98 percent? 99? 90-something? 80-something? And um, if we can now start working on *how*, you follow them and you see how they will get that number.

In other words, there are numerous factors influencing journalists who choose to pursue the routine story over the creative or investigative. For one thing, journalists are constrained by social context, as outlined in chapter 3; they are also constrained by the unwritten but organizationally conveyed routines and norms encouraging status quo reporting that is efficient and productive, as outlined in chapter 4; but finally, journalists themselves are reluctant and unlikely to “fight for” their right to produce independent journalism (another point outlined in chapter 3). There are creative, insightful stories to be reported even within a fairly routine election campaign with a foregone conclusion, as this reporter pointed out — following campaign officials to find out how they drummed up a 99 percent vote for Kagame would certainly be an untold story, and likely an engaging one. However, no reporter told it.

Rwandan journalists operate within a paradoxical set of pressures that on one hand encourage skepticism, independence, and power while on the other hand sending the message that journalists are untrustworthy, unskilled, and better off choosing routine over creativity and enterprise. These competing constraints shape the journalism field by signaling how journalists can and should think of their own social roles, how others should perceive them, what journalists should do, and how they actually choose to act. And while this disser-

tation presents a detailed exploration of the journalism field in one case, it offers lessons applicable to journalism in many other contexts and sets the stage for future research on journalism fields around the world. In chapter 1, I posed this dissertation's guiding research question: **In a field suspended between global demands communicated by funding and education and local pressures of governance and social context, what does it mean to be a journalist?** The analyses presented in the previous three chapters show that being a journalist in this context means essentially practicing journalism in suspension: Most journalists in Rwanda hold in tension different ideals of how journalism should be done, with a more globally focused liberal democratic model of journalism as a powerful advocate for the people against abuses from authority figures being cognitively encouraged while a locally constructed model of journalism as a relatively weak force for government-directed aid and national unity is promoted and supported through daily routines and shared historically grounded beliefs about what journalism can and should be. To be a journalist in Rwanda means to accept the mantle of historic villainy perpetrated by journalistic forebears, and in many cases to seek to redeem that history by promoting unity and development in the present day. Being a journalist in Rwanda means hearing editorial encouragement to be investigative and creative while learning the unwritten rules that discourage creativity and encourage rapid production of content based on events and official narratives. Finally, being a journalist in Rwanda means that if one wishes to pursue independent reporting, one must sacrifice some degree of perceived national loyalty and exit the field to the financial and editorial protection of a transnational organization. I outline these findings in more detail below.

### **6.1 *Research in review***

The social role of journalists and journalists' self-perceptions are shaped by myths stemming from the genocide and the role journalists played in it. One myth holds that journalists used their occupation to exacerbate the genocide. This myth is widely held by journalists and non-journalists, and is to some extent corroborated by historical accounts such as that

of Kellow and Steeves (1998). Journalists were actively involved in exacerbating violence during the genocide and in spreading messages of ethnic discord leading up to the genocide, using their powerful platforms with access to mass audiences to disrupt communities and lead to death. This myth has the direct effect of leading sources and the public to distrust journalists today, making them reluctant to disclose sensitive or even innocuous information to many journalists because of uncertainty over what might be done with it. On a more foundational level, the myth sets a cultural understanding that journalists are powerful and have acted as villains before, so they cannot necessarily be trusted to act as heroes today — instead, they are likely to act in ways that put social values and communities at risk. Journalists themselves have internalized this myth, with the result that they are unsure of their own social prerogative to “speak truth to power” or push back, at least publicly, against powerful figures or official narratives. As a result of this myth, many journalists at local news outlets see their current practice of journalism as a way to redeem the past — both by proving themselves capable of acting differently than their past counterparts, but also by practicing a style of journalism whose primary goal is fostering national unity and social cohesion.

This myth helps set the stage for a peculiar feature of Rwandan journalism. Editors, educators, and other field leaders, such as officials at professional organizations including Pax Press and the Association Rwandaise des Journalistes, promote and reward investigative journalism that prods those in power and digs into the background and ramifications of official policies and decisions. However, despite field-level encouragement of this behavior, Rwandan journalists rarely pursue investigative stories that criticize the powerful, and these stories even more rarely make it to publication. Officially, there is space to practice this type of critical journalism even within the development focus many journalists adopt based on their genocide role. But in reality, it very rarely happens. I find that this lack of investigative or critical journalism is encouraged through a sequence of interlinked actions whereby routine pressures and behaviors associated with journalism and news organizations

serve to reinforce an institution of positive, non-critical news coverage that overrides field-wide professionally enforced institutions of news values. Editors are pressured to redact or soften particular news stories by advertisers, many of whom are large government agencies. They pass along these pressures to staff reporters and photographers in oblique ways largely dependent on newsroom routines.

On a few high-profile topics, such as the presidency, the editors send outright messages to staff reporters that the topic can only be covered in a certain way. But for the vast majority of topics, they encourage creativity and investigation in staff meetings and discussions, only to tank the story at a later date by repeatedly requesting additional sources or other information, or in some cases saying the story was just not good enough. Reporters, who are generally paid on a quota basis where they are required to produce more than one story per day to get paid for a month's work and are also assessed by their ability to meet deadlines, learn from experience that stories attempting creative angles that have critical components are unlikely to face a smooth road to publication and are more likely to hurt productivity. So they drop the pursuit of the investigative style of journalism encouraged in journalism school and by professional organizations and instead practice an events-focused style of news production that emphasizes facts and occurrences over their implications.

A relatively small number of journalists in Rwanda practice journalism differently, producing news coverage that is occasionally critical or investigative and in general does not meet with total approval from official sources or powerful figures. These journalists use legitimacy, a form of cultural capital, to buttress their work against critique and they are also protected by organizational forms that are built around news values motivated from subscriber needs grounded in normative legitimacy rather than news values motivated from advertising needs grounded in economic constraint. The journalists who practice critical journalism are also motivated by a different sort of affinity than the journalists who do not. Critical journalists tend to prioritize the importance of journalism as a force of power capable

of producing social good and deserving of a powerful position in relation to local authorities and systems, while non-critical journalists often articulate their loyalty to the country of Rwanda, viewing journalism as a tool to strengthen Rwandan unity by providing information to the public that will inspire hope and confidence, rather than journalism as a tool for providing information to hold powerful people accountable or to provide information for its own sake.

In other words, the journalists who practice critical journalism are, to some extent, the journalists who WANT to practice critical journalism, and they also believe that the watchdog approach will achieve meaningful development goals in Rwanda. A number of journalists in Rwanda, particularly employed in upper editorial and reporter levels at the *New Times* and *KT Press*, are skilled enough to work for transnational outlets if they wanted to, by their own admission and by the assessment of their peers at transnational outlets. In some cases, reporters are excluded from transnational jobs because the opportunities are limited. But in other cases, journalists choose to produce non-critical journalism for locally based publications out of a sense of loyalty and a decision that journalism in service to national unity is more important than journalism in service to freedom of information. For journalists who want to pursue a critical journalism practice, they must do so by essentially exiting the field and working under the organizational protection of news outlets that are not strongly motivated by local favoritism or advertiser negotiations.

## **6.2 Rwanda's relevance to other contexts**

Rwanda is an example of a modern authoritarian state. Moreover, it is one of the many countries with, seemingly, relatively benign, development focused authoritarian governments where life is, as political scientist Thomas Pepinsky describes, “boring and tolerable” (Pepinsky, 2009, 2017). Traditional understanding of governance held that, as economies strengthened, democracy would follow and thus countries would naturally become democratic. How-

ever, recent events have called that link into question as, particularly in Rwanda and Ethiopia, authoritarian governance has grown stronger alongside a strengthening economy (Matfess, 2015). President Paul Kagame's governance style of benevolent authoritarianism has facilitated economic growth and physical security for Rwandans that outpaces its peers, as noted in the introduction. Rwanda is not ruled by an authoritarian dictatorship, a style of governance that is becoming less common but has been defined by a state media monopoly controlled by formal censorship, a closed economy, lack of civil society organizations, and prevalent state exercise of force to control disputational counternarratives (Freedom House, 2017b). Instead, the Rwandan government has implemented laws protecting freedom of speech for journalists paired with economic incentives to self-censor, relatively open trade policies with increasing openness to foreign investment, regular elections, and a general lack of force.

Since the genocide, elections inclusive of multiple political parties have occurred in Rwanda at regular, seven-year intervals, with the most recent in August 2017 (Baddorf, 2017; Gettleman, 2010; Lacey, 2003). The elections have been, for the most part, peaceful, and multiple parties have been represented on each ballot. However, Kagame, the incumbent, successfully campaigned in 2015 to extend presidential term limits so he could continue to run for office (Associated Press, 2015). Critics have noted that the heavily controlled campaign process serves to silence some contenders and favor the incumbent (Human Rights Watch, 2010, 2017). Rwandan policy has grown increasingly favorable to international trade (Heritage Foundation, 2018). Most news organizations are, ostensibly, privately owned and market-regulated; as a result, journalists report that the primary source of direct external pressure shaping media content comes from advertisers threatening loss of revenue, rather than state threats of jail or other legal sanctions (Rwandan Governance Board, 2016). This shift in media control has parallels in many countries, including Turkey (Yesil, 2014), Hong Kong (Ngok, 2007), and Indonesia (Tapsell, 2012). In Rwanda, non-governmental organizations like Pax Press exist to support the development of civil society by promoting inde-

pendent media and critical reporting, but these organizations are functionally at the mercy of state authorities, who provide most of the funding needed to facilitate training programs and grants to journalists (author interview). A close examination of the Rwandan journalism field highlights the ways that journalists and media organizations are persuaded on moral and practical grounds to partner with ruling authorities. These noncoercive methods are likely similar to those practiced in other states with contemporary authoritarian governments.

A growing number of countries lean toward authoritarianism. Global watchdog organizations including Freedom House and The Economist Intelligence Unit documented decreasing levels of respect for and practice of democratic institutions over the past decade. Freedom House data documents the spread of authoritarian practices from authoritarian regimes to partly democratic countries. These practices include election practices unfairly weighted toward ruling parties and the suppression or discouragement of dissenting voices in the public sphere (Puddington, 2017). Overall, over the past decade, democratic practices have been gaining ground less quickly than authoritarian practices for the first time in 40 years (Puddington, 2017). The Economist Intelligence Unit documented a similar trend, measuring a move to more democratic practices for only 27 countries, while 89 countries shifted to more authoritarian behavior (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). The latter notes that roughly one-third of the global population live in authoritarian regimes. Along political dimensions, Rwanda shares similarities with many countries across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In its categorization as moderately authoritarian, Rwanda falls in with Congo (Brazzaville), Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Algeria, Cameroon, Cambodia, Myanmar, Venezuela, Hungary, Ecuador, Russia, Ukraine, and Afghanistan. Comparison across specific indicators highlights possible points of comparison. Over recent decades, referenda and special elections have extended presidential term limits in many countries, including Bolivia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Venezuela, Cameroon, Algeria, Uganda and, in late May 2018, Burundi (Dahir, 2018; Guliyev, 2009; Puddington, 2017). Some other countries, like Turkey, have more heavily democratic institutions but are shifting

toward authoritarianism. These countries appear to be adopting similar practices of media control, and the Rwandan example sheds light on how this might occur.

Not only is Rwanda exemplary of many countries governed by a contemporary authoritarian regime, but it is an important country to understand because it occupies a role of power and leadership on the African continent. Rwanda is a bellwether for governance across sub-Saharan Africa. In July 2017, Kagame was elected president of the African Union for the year 2018, chosen to lead the 55 heads of African states in a process of reform, fighting corruption to create a “sustainable path to Africa’s transformation” (African Union, 2018). Rwanda is considered a prime model of efficient development policy, exhibiting rapid growth over the past two decades in gross national income and per-capita income, decline in poverty rate, and a rise through the rankings in the United Nations’ Human Development Index (Molt, 2017). It is touted for its high degree of gender parity in salaries and in political representation (Stéphanie Thomson, 2017). Matfess (2015) argues that the strength and durability of Rwanda’s model of authoritarianism is likely to serve as an example to other African rulers, proving that it is possible to cultivate economic development through foreign investment while also suppressing political dissent and preventing the development of strong civil society spaces.

Rwanda also invites parallels with other countries that have experienced conflict, especially where journalists are seen as instigators or promoters of that conflict. A unique element of the Rwandan journalism field, at least in scope and extremity, is the social and historical role the genocide takes in shaping the contemporary mythology of the field. However, even here parallels can be drawn. As information is increasingly highlighted as a tool for various political ends, the Rwandan case shows how the instrumental use of media organizations can affect the field itself. The countries within former Yugoslavia exhibit strong parallels to this element of the Rwandan story; across the ethnically divided republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia, media organizations

published messages of distrust in the other republics, setting the stage for the ethnic violence of the 1990s (Oberschall, 2000; Pejic, 1998; M. Thompson, 1999). This dissertation highlights through the case of Rwanda how a journalism field can be shaped persistently and for long periods of time by its perceived or actual role in a civil or cross-national conflict, and how that perceived role can shape and limit the social role journalists are able to fill in the future. More broadly, a study of Rwandan journalism reveals the ways that journalists rebuild their occupational field after it is essentially decimated in a conflict; on this level, Rwanda has parallels with other post-conflict countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, and Kosovo, all of which have received substantial amounts of foreign media assistance on the grounds that journalism has great power to reduce or inflame political tensions immediately following conflict (Kumar, 2006).

From a policy perspective, Rwanda serves as an example of a country that has been an ongoing recipient of media assistance programs aimed at improving various aspects of the journalism field with an end goal of strengthening and promoting democratic institutions. These programs often aim to promote independent and professional media, with the assumption that a strong, independent, and professional media field will lead to democratization by “facilitating the free flow of information, transparency, accountability in the government, and economic growth” (Kumar, 2006, p. 652). These interventions are motivated by the assessment of local journalism fields as “poorly equipped, inadequately trained, and largely controlled or owned by the state or dominant political and/or economic elites” (de Zeeuw, 2005, p. 493). Media assistance aims to reduce the degree to which media outlets and individual journalists withhold useful information from the public due to censorship or self-censorship, instead creating a media system that encourages debate and discussion around public policy and other political issues. The amount of aid earmarked for media assistance grew through the 1980s and 1990s and was seen as an important tool for democratization in countries like Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, and many other countries across Eastern Europe and Latin America (Cary & D’Amour, 2013; Kumar, 2006). More recently, media assistance

has been deployed to countries in the Middle East, including Afghanistan and Iraq (Barker, 2008; Al-Rawi, 2013). USAID has awarded hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Rwanda since the genocide in 1994, with one goal being to develop the governance structures in the country, partly by professionalizing the media sector. In 2017, USAID planned to spend \$137.2 million in the country. As part of this assistance, from 2009 to 2011 a media assistance program was implemented by the Millennium Challenge Corporation on behalf of USAID with an objective of promoting “free, responsible media in Rwanda” by building capacity of professional media associations and skills of individual journalists (USAID, 2018). A study of Rwanda provides the opportunity to examine the kind of journalism field that grows locally in contexts of media assistance.

### **6.3 *My position in the field***

Research is a process and, as England (1994) notes, an important element of good research involves reflecting on research experiences and evaluating research critically. In qualitative interpersonal research, especially, the researcher is an instrument of research, not just a blank slate with a voice recorder, and the researcher’s biography affects the research, making certain insights easier to grasp and others more difficult. An obvious challenge inherent in this approach is that the researcher cannot objectively identify which insights he or she is grasping and which are being overlooked. However, my experiences in the field shifted my positionality and highlighted some gaps in my understanding. In the following pages, I outline some of the ways that I found myself missing important insights and reinterpreting experiences with Rwandans in the field.

My presence in the field affected the kind of research I could pursue, shaped my interactions with those I studied, and inevitably shaped the field itself. This occurred in practical, tangible ways, some of which are outlined in chapter 2. For instance, my very limited grasp of Kinyarwanda limited my ability to observe the full scale of newsroom interactions, even

though I sat in several newsrooms for weeks and listened to editorial meetings conducted in English. On a more intangible level, though, my presence in the newsroom signaled Western power in a country that has been dependent on Western aid. As one reporter pointed out to me in my first day of observation, white researchers often visit Rwanda for one reason or another, but very rarely do Rwandan researchers visit the U.S. to conduct research. There are ways in which I hope and believe my relative power serves Rwandans, by providing a platform on which I can tell a more complex and thoughtful story of their journalistic endeavors than has yet been told. However, there are other ways in which I am sure my presence in the field highlighted this power discrepancy in ways counter to my intentions. I was careful to follow instructions around communicating with and interviewing journalists who felt they faced possible danger for interacting with me, but inevitably, the danger faced was relatively one-sided, as I could leave the country at any point with relatively few repercussions, while they could not.

Herod (1999) points out the challenges of interviewing through an interpreter, including the loss of language subtlety, the lack of verbal and silent emphases, and questions raised about whether respondents answering in different languages conceptualize and categorize questions and experiences in the same way as the different-language interviewer. For some of these reasons, I elected to conduct interviews myself, in English, even though this meant excluding from my interview pool research subjects who were fluent in Kinyarwanda but not English. This also means that I bounded my pool of possible study subjects around the more educated and cosmopolitan journalists in Rwanda, excluding those who might be practicing journalism but have less education and, potentially, a more local perspective on journalism practice. Even conducting interviews without a translator but with subjects from a different culture, concepts take on different meanings in different contexts. In the study of unions, “collective bargaining,” “labor relations,” and “welfare policy” can have different meanings across political and social contexts (Herod, 1999). Studying journalists in the Rwandan context, I found that, for instance, the concept of “press freedom” had a somewhat different

meaning to the journalists I interviewed than it did to me. I used the term inclusively, to mean freedom from the pressure of self-censorship, and freedom to publish any content in line with standards of journalism ethics. My interview subjects, on the other hand, generally defined the term around legal provisions — while readily admitting that they regularly withheld content from publication over threats of financial repercussions, they considered themselves free because journalists were not being thrown in jail for publishing news critical of governing officials or the ruling party. To me, this difference in itself revealed an important lesson about journalists in Rwanda. On one hand, it is possible that journalists presumed I would define “freedom” following the simplest definition used by indices like the Freedom House. But on the other hand, this interaction revealed the limits and challenges of introducing a metric of journalism function, developed in stable, affluent, Western democracies, into the fabric of a journalism field that exists in such a different context. While journalists tended to go on to discuss with me the ways they found their work to be constrained by many external factors, they felt that, by international standards, they were “free.” This interaction revealed my own position in the field as one of expectation that my research subjects would immediately trust and understand me, whereas I learned that in fact trust would be gained through multiple interactions and research sources would be more forthcoming about the contexts of their work after multiple interactions, over a drink at a bar, rather than in workplace interactions.

For better and worse, my interactions with the field were shaped by my background as a U.S. journalist. This identity brought an important value to my fieldwork, as it allowed me to understand the Rwandan journalism field in the context of U.S. and global journalism in light of my own practice and conversations with other journalists through the years. However, it also presented an obstacle in the way that I understood the work I observed and in the way that my research subjects understood me and my perspective. While I tried to understand Rwandan journalism in the context of local pressures and incentives, my frame of reference was oriented more around contextualizing Rwandan journalism within journalism

more broadly, rather than understanding it as one occupation among many in the Rwandan economy. My interview subjects contextualized their field with other fields in Rwanda when I asked, but they often seemed most eager to contextualize it with journalism as well by asking for my own comparative assessment on the field or asking how my observations in Rwanda compared with my work in the U.S. Often, the interviewee would draw a comparison with the U.S. to highlight similarities and downplay differences in things like the level of political control exercised over journalists and the financial constraints facing journalists. Occasionally, I would play up these similarities myself in interviews, partly because this is my interview style but also partly in an attempt to establish points of connection. I encountered many more instances of journalists attempting to normalize their experience in comparison with journalism practice in the U.S. and elsewhere, with statements like “oh, of course there are topics we cannot write about — but that is the case in every country.” Fewer of the people I interviewed emphasized the differences between journalism practice in Rwanda and journalism practice elsewhere, and I attribute some of this distinction to my positionality as a Western journalist and researcher. A researcher from an East African country or from within Rwanda might find journalists more interested in comparing differences, with perhaps less face to lose in comparing more similar fields.

I found that, because of my positionality as a white, Western researcher with experience in a Western journalism field, the journalists who were most likely to share their complex narratives with me were those who either held positions of power or who most strongly held a liberal democratic ideal of what journalism should be and were quick to summarize the ways in which Rwandan journalism practice did not match with this ideal. That is not to say that journalists who were dedicated to a development journalism model did not speak honestly with me; several people revealed fairly early in our relationships that they believed in the model of journalism practiced in Rwanda as the best thing for the country at the time. But it is likely that I uncovered quickly more prevalent examples of conflicted approaches to journalism than would a researcher from a shared Rwandan context or from

another development-focused journalism context. A specific area where context difference affected interviews was on the topic of technology, as mentioned in chapter 2. I found that my own assumptions and observations about the limitations imposed on journalism work by poorly functioning technology were primarily a function of my comparative experience with journalism in the U.S. and in Rwanda. Journalists in Rwanda with limited travel in their backgrounds did not experience technological limitations as limitations, but merely as context for their work. These are two instances of ways in which I found that my intended context and meaning for a subject of discussion were different from those in which my informants responded.

In interview interactions, I found that my background as an American researcher who had worked as a journalist in the U.S., paired with my interview style, impacted the sort of information I was given. I faced, foremost, the possibility that interview subjects would seek to present themselves as they might think I wished to see them, as journalists who prioritized and valued Western practices but were unable to implement them for reasons outside their control. To some extent, this was unavoidable. To diminish the likelihood that I and my interview subjects would spend long periods of time talking about different concepts using the same words, I conducted most of my interviews after I had been working in a newsroom for a week or two, and began my interviews by asking questions centered around newsroom routines rather than questions about intangible concepts and values. Because the interviewer is a tool in qualitative interviews, my personal interviewing style also affected the way that I engaged with subjects and the way subjects disclosed information (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). My interviewing style is informed by journalism training geared at print and produced videos, so I tend to respond with limited verbal feedback and to ask followup questions rather than responding with statements of self-disclosure or interpretation. As Pezalla et al. (2012) demonstrate, different styles lead to different sorts of disclosure from participants. While I generally found that the style of questioning and following up generated lengthy, detailed responses relevant to my research, it occasionally

frustrated interviewees who would ask for my reaction or opinion, seeking conversational engagement over interviewer-interviewee interactions.

#### **6.4 *Limitations and opportunities for future research***

The set of methods used in this dissertation — participant observation and interviews within the context of a network ethnography — bring particular benefits to this research, as outlined in chapter 2. These methods and my decisions around fieldsite selection also have limitations. In focusing primarily on one country, I gain the ability to explore in depth the processes by which journalists learn the roles and behaviors expected of them, which is an understudied area of journalism research. However, I cannot make claims about how prevalent or transferable my findings are to other countries. It is likely that some of the patterns I observe occur in other journalism fields, with broad resemblances but specific differences. Future research can and should examine whether my findings are relevant in other journalism fields. For instance, it is an established reality that journalists are shaped by various pressures, but there is little research on how these pressures coexist or what shaping effect they have exactly on journalists' roles and practice. In particular, researchers have tended to assume that, in restrictive societies, political pressure is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, factor leading journalists to practice their occupation in a particular way.

My choice to use a snowball sample approach rather than a random sample to collect interviews and conduct observations also imposes certain limitations on the data and observations presented in this dissertation. The findings outlined in this dissertation are based on the experiences, opinions, and reflections of a group of relatively elite journalists who speak English and most of whom work at Rwanda's elite news outlets. My subjects were mostly men, primarily because there were very few women at work in any newsroom I visited. The snowball sample strategy allowed me to build rapport with subjects and provided me access to some subjects I might not otherwise have been able to interview or observe. However, it also means, by definition, that the data I collected represents a network of journalists who are

connected with each other and are likely to also share some similar experiences with the field. While I interviewed some radio journalists, including a few who work for community radio stations, even these were fairly elite by virtue of their English ability and their involvement with training outlets and other organizations in Kigali. The experience of the isolated local community radio station DJ or journalist who speaks only Kinyarwanda is not represented in this study. This is a loss, and future studies should explore the particular social function and role development of journalists in these more peripheral roles in diverse countries. However, by centering my interviews and observations around the power centers of Rwandan journalism, I was able to grasp the values, routines, and roles important to field leaders. In an uncertain economic environment such as that facing Rwandan journalists, institutional theories of organizations suggest that organizations on the periphery will attempt to imitate those that are more central and successful in order to survive (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, the findings in these pages are not representative of Rwandan journalism as a whole, but they are representative of the practices likely to have influence and perhaps be imitated by news outlets throughout the country, and they are worth understanding in greater detail.

While the analyses in this dissertation draw directly from the Rwandan journalism field, this study is also informed by research interviews conducted throughout the region concurrently with the Rwandan field research. I visited Kampala, Uganda, Harare, Zimbabwe, and Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to interview journalists so that I could better understand the context for the Rwandan journalism field. These countries were selected for their variance in political environment and quality of technology infrastructure; Table Table 6.1 outlines the variation between these fields. According to this data, Zimbabwe has a similarly restrictive policy environment but cheaper access to technology infrastructure; Tanzania has expensive technology and a more supportive policy environment; and Uganda has cheaper technology infrastructure access and a more supportive policy environment. While these distinctions are not explicitly analyzed in this dissertation, they help situate the Rwandan media in geographic context. Journalists in these other countries who were familiar with

Rwanda unanimously said they would prefer to be journalists in their own countries over Rwanda; one had traveled to Rwanda from Uganda to report on an environmental problem recently. He had found it to be a boring and frustrating experience, spending much of his time swamped in bureaucracy waiting for permission to interview officials.

### Comparison of journalism fields across East Africa

Country	Tech Affordability <sup>a</sup>	Legal Environment <sup>c</sup>	Newspaper $N^d$	TV $N^d$	Radio $N^d$
Rwanda	3.7	23	4	1	7
Tanzania	3.7	18	11	6	9
Uganda	5.6	18	3	6	8
Zimbabwe	5.9 <sup>b</sup>	24	8	1	7

Table 6.1: The World Economic Forum’s affordability scores are calculated from data on mobile tariffs per minute, fixed broadband access per month, and a score for Internet and telephone sector competition. Higher numbers are more affordable. Legal Environment scores are calculated on a 0–30 scale, with 0 being most free and 30 being most restrictive.

Sources: (a) (Dutta, Geiger, & Lanvin, 2015) (b) Author’s calculation based on data from Gambanga, 2015 and Dutta, Geiger, and Lanvin, 2015 (c) Freedom House, 2016 (d) BBC country media profiles, accessed May 2016 (BBC News, 2012, 2014, 2015a, 2015b)

Future research can and should explore Rwanda in more comparative context, using a sample of a few nearby countries such as these to add further depth to the Rwandan case and to elaborate on factors unexplored in this dissertation. A comparative study could, for instance, provide deeper insight on the roles policy and technology play in shaping journalism fields, and the ways in which their influence is incorporated by journalists.

### 6.5 Implications of this research

One common assumption about journalism is that if journalists have autonomy, they will construct coherent professional fields with powerful social positions and that, moreover, they tend to choose to publish information that is critical or otherwise misaligned with government

goals or the goals of others in power. In the U.S., the journalism field is sometimes conceptualized as a “fourth estate,” holding the three branches of government in check (Cook, 1998). In some cases, media independence or autonomy has even been operationalized as a measure of news coverage critical of authorities (Althaus, 2003; Bennett & Livingston, 2003). Conversely, where journalists occupy social roles that are relatively affirming of government aims and national development, they are assumed to do so because an oppressive government has pressured them to do so (Kalyango Jr et al., 2017). These assumptions are rooted to some extent in a broader tendency to approach journalist roles from a Western perspective, oriented toward journalism’s contribution to democracy and citizenship (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016). Recent research, including Kalyango Jr et al. (2017) and Hanitzsch and Vos (2016), has thrown this idea into question, and this dissertation likewise problematizes this assumption. I find that, in spite of some freedom to do otherwise, most journalists in Rwanda choose to occupy a social role of relative weakness and to serve as government advocates rather than watchdogs or guardians. The pressures leading journalists to do this originate in part outside of the field, coming from shared social history and advertisers, but they are perpetuated and internalized through routines and beliefs that journalists institute for themselves.

Journalism serves a valuable social and political role in a variety of democratic and non-democratic regimes. News produced by journalists can provide an important social role by routinely informing the public of official events and other items of public interest (Cook, 1998; Ryfe, 2006a). It can influence political culture and political engagement across different regime types (Mattes & Bratton, 2007; Paluck & Green, 2009). The journalism field holds an influential position in shaping transitional justice processes through newspaper coverage that can bridge opposing communities, break down stereotypes, and cultivate empathy (Laplante & Phenicie, 2009). Journalism has been shown to improve chances of peace or conflict in conflict situations (Bläsi, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2004; Shaw et al., 2011). It also plays an important role in constructing a shared community around citizenship and information (B. Anderson, 2006; Höhne, 2008). Even where the media are strongly controlled

by hegemonic forces, as with television in apartheid-era South Africa, they communicate powerful social messages that can undermine official narratives and change the framework of social engagement (Krabill, 2010). But it is simplistic to assume, as some past research has, that journalists who fill similar social functions in different countries do so out of similar motivations or similar limitations. In fact, there are a range of factors at work in any journalist's choice to approach his or her work in a certain way. This dissertation takes a step toward understanding how journalists in an understudied part of the world are motivated and approach their work, and what the journalism field looks like in an authoritarian context.

In Rwanda, journalists who have the perceived freedom to produce critical or independent news and yet rely on event coverage and official news presented by official voices are themselves criticized for lacking the capacity to “think critically.” This is evident in how expatriates talk about local journalists and also in the forms of humanitarian intervention I saw implemented during my fieldwork. The assumptions tended to be that, because journalists were not actively critiquing or investigating authorities, they did not know how or had not even considered the possibility. I show that in fact it takes a great deal of intellectual work to be a journalist in Rwanda, whether one produces and publishes critical work or not. Several factors, not only government intervention, determine how journalists will go about their work, and even when the government is known for its authoritarian approach to dissent and media coverage, factors internal to the field can be at least as influential as external, political pressure in determining how powerful of a social position journalists will take and how they will position themselves relative to political authority (as critics or as supporters). Organizational routines internal to the field are also powerful forces shaping and constraining journalists' abilities to produce particular kinds of news content, with the pressure to produce news quickly and often counterbalancing and often suppressing the counter-mandate to produce news that is creative, investigative, and skeptical of authority. Journalists who want to take a routinely critical perspective tend to have a view of journalism as a social tool to provide information, rather than a tool for promoting a particular cause or goal, and

they are able to pursue sustainable careers of criticism by aligning with an organization that is financially independent of Rwandan advertisers.

Circling back to field theory, the journalism field in Rwanda is somewhat lopsided. Journalists possess some autonomy and have field-specific measures of quality, so it meets the minimum definition of a field, but the typical tension between cultural capital and economic capital is somewhat less evident here, at least among elite organizations. Economic capital comes primarily from advertising organizations rather than from audiences or subscriptions, so editors are less interested in appealing to broad audiences than in producing news that makes particular advertisers happy (or at least is not unsatisfactory). Cultural capital — field-supported measures of excellence, primarily around creative and investigative reporting — tends to be encouraged in theory but prioritized below economic capital, because the incentives accrued in pursuing cultural capital do not outweigh the associated loss in economic capital. As a result, the field is weighted heavily toward a practice that keeps advertisers happy at the expense of cultural capital. This weighting is encouraged and solidified by field-level routines and by journalists' self-perceptions of their social roles, currently and historically. Because the field is off-balance, journalists who wish to practice their craft in a way that accrues more cultural capital must do so by leaving the field and affiliating with organizations that can provide economic cover from external sources. This reality highlights the fact that fields are dependent on and interact with other fields. It also calls for further research on the process whereby journalists gain the tools necessary to shift their roles within a particular field. The Rwandan journalism field is constrained not only by external forces but also by internal forces, making it difficult for journalists to change field structures even though they have some autonomy to do so if they wished. In this situation, autonomy from other fields of power does not exactly equal the ability to set the rules of the game (as field theory suggests).

This dissertation adds a new perspective to the research on journalism fields, providing

a detailed examination of the ways that hard and soft rules and pressures shape journalist's beliefs, roles, and routines. Along with scholars such as Usher (2014) and Roudakova (2017), I add to the journalism literature a fieldwork-based perspective on journalists' daily work. I bring this perspective to a conversation with scholars of global journalism, including Kalyango Jr et al. (2017) and Hanitzsch and Vos (2016), offering fresh empirical evidence and a new theoretical angle to better answer old questions of how and why journalists do their work.

## Appendix A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following protocol is adapted from the Worlds of Journalism survey, which has been administered in more than two dozen countries so far. An advantage to exactly copying this protocol would be that I could compare data with that collected in other countries; a disadvantage is that it might restrict me unnecessarily from asking additional questions that arise as I observe and interview participants. Thus, I formulated my interview questions based on this highly scheduled, standardized structure, starting from these questions where appropriate in the context of the particular interaction and adding open-ended questions throughout to further unpack key answers.<sup>1</sup>

- Which of the following categories best describes your current position in your newsroom?
  - 1 Editor in chief
  - 2 Managing editor
  - 3 Desk head or assignment editor
  - 4 Department head
  - 5 Senior editor
  - 6 Producer
  - 7 Reporter
  - 8 News writer
  - 9 Trainee
  - 10 Other, please specify.
  
- Which of the following categories best describes your current employment: full-time, part-time, freelancer, or other?

---

<sup>1</sup>Survey administration instructions are omitted from the below question list.

- 1 Full-time employment
  - 2 Part-time employment
  - 3 Freelancer
  - 4 Other, please specify.
- Do you have a permanent position, or do you work on a temporary contract?
  - 1 Permanent
  - 2 Temporary
- For how many newsrooms do you work at present? Different news outlets produced by the same newsroom count as one.
- For how many news outlets do you work?
- Besides working as a journalist, do you engage in any other paid activities?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No
- Do you belong to any organizations or associations that are primarily for people in journalism or the communications field?
  - 1 Yes
  - 2 No
- Do you usually work on or supervise a specific beat or subject area (such as politics, economy or sports), or do you usually work on or supervise various types of stories?
  - 1 Work on a specific beat
  - 2 Work on various topic and subjects
- Which beat or area do you primarily supervise or work on?
  - 1 News/current affairs
  - 2 Politics
  - 3 Foreign politics
  - 4 Domestic politics
  - 5 Economy
  - 6 Crime & law
  - 7 Culture
  - 8 Sports

- 9 Health
  - 10 Entertainment
  - 11 Other, record verbatim:
- (For editors) On average, how many news items do you produce and/or edit in a usual week?
  - Please tell me, in your own words, what should be the three most important roles of journalists in [add country]?
  - Thinking of your work overall, how much freedom do you personally have in selecting news stories you work on?
  - How much freedom do you personally have in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized?
  - How often do you participate in editorial and newsroom coordination, such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters?
  - Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work.
    - A Be a detached observer.
    - B Report things as they are.
    - C Provide analysis of current affairs.
    - D Monitor and scrutinize political leaders.
    - E Monitor and scrutinize business.
    - F Set the political agenda.
    - G Influence public opinion.
    - H Advocate for social change.
    - J Be an adversary of the government.
    - K Support national development.
    - L Convey a positive image of political leadership.
    - M Support government policy.
    - O Provide entertainment and relaxation.
    - P Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience.
    - R Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life.
    - S Provide information people need to make political decisions.
    - T Motivate people to participate in political activity.
    - U Let people express their views.
    - W Educate the audience.
    - X Tell stories about the world.
    - Z Promote tolerance and cultural diversity.

- The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree.
  - A Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context.
  - B What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation.
  - C What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment.
  - D It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.
  
- Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?
  - A Paying people for confidential information
  - B Using confidential business or government documents without authorization
  - C Claiming to be somebody else
  - D Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story
  - E Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission
  - F Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information
  - G Using hidden microphones or cameras
  - H Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors
  - J Publishing stories with unverified content
  - K Accepting money from sources
  - L Altering or fabricating quotes from sources
  - M Altering photographs
  
- Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work.

- A Your personal values and beliefs
  - B Your peers on the staff
  - C Your editorial supervisors and higher editors
  - D The managers of your news organization
  - E The owners of your news organization
  - F Editorial policy
  - G Advertising considerations
  - H Profit expectations
  - J Audience research and data
  - K Availability of news-gathering resources
  - L Time limits
  - M Journalism ethics
  - N Religious considerations
- Here is another list. Again, please tell me how influential each of the following is in your work.

- A Your friends, acquaintances and family
  - B Colleagues in other media
  - C Feedback from the audience
  - D Competing news organizations
  - E Media laws and regulation
  - F Information access
  - G Censorship
  - H Government officials
  - J Politicians
  - K Pressure groups
  - L Business people
  - M Public relations
  - N Relationships with news sources
  - O The military, police and state security
- How many years have you been working in journalism?
  - ASK ONLY IF years working in journalism  $\geq 5$ :
  - The importance of some influences on journalism may have changed over time. Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in [add country].
- A Journalism education
  - B Ethical standards

- C Competition
  - D Advertising considerations
  - E Profit making pressures
  - F Public relations
  - G Audience research
  - H User-generated contents, such as blogs
  - J Social media, such as [add 1 or 2 examples]
  - K Audience involvement in news production
  - L Audience feedback
  - M Pressure toward sensational news
  - O Western ways of practicing journalism
- ASK ONLY IF years working in journalism  $\geq 5$ : Journalism is in a state of change. Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the following aspects of work in [add country].
    - A Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions
    - B Average working hours of journalists
    - C Time available for researching stories
    - D Interactions of journalists with their audiences
    - E The importance of technical skills
    - F The use of search engines
    - G The importance of having a university degree
    - H The importance of having a degree in journalism or a related field
    - J The credibility of journalism
    - K The relevance of journalism for society
- Please tell me how much you personally trust each of the following institutions.
    - A The parliament [add name]
    - B The government [add name]
    - C Political parties
    - D Politicians in general
    - E The judiciary/the courts
    - F The police
    - G The military
    - H Trade unions
    - J Religious leaders
    - K The news media
- Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?

- Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?
- What is the highest grade of school or level of education you have completed?
  - 1 Not completed high school: GO TO O7/C22
  - 2 Completed high school: GO TO O7/C22
  - 3 College/Bachelor’s degree or equivalent
  - 4 Master’s degree or equivalent
  - 5 Doctorate
  - 6 Undertook some university studies, but no degree
- ASK ONLY IF college or higher education:
- During your studies, did you specialize in journalism or another communication field?
  - 1 Yes, specialized in journalism
  - 2 Yes, specialized in other communication field
  - 3 Yes, specialized both in journalism and another communication field
  - 4 No, did not specialize in these fields
- ASK ONLY IF specialized in journalism in college:
- During your studies did you specialize in a field that relates to your area of coverage?
  - 1 Yes, did specialize
  - 2 No, did not specialize
- What is your gender?
- In what year were you born?
- In political matters, people talk of “the left,” “the right,” and the “center.” On a scale where 0 is left, 10 is right, and 5 is center, where would you place yourself?
- What is your ethnic group? [Add a list of common ethnic groups in your country.]<sup>2</sup>
- How important is religion or religious belief to you? 5 means you find it extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means it is of little importance, and 1 means unimportant.
- Do you consider yourself as affiliated with any particular religion or religious denomination? If yes, which one?

---

<sup>2</sup>It is illegal to discuss ethnicity in Rwanda, so this question was omitted.

- 1 No religion or denomination
  - 2 Buddhist
  - 3 Christian: Protestant/Lutheran
  - 4 Christian: Orthodox
  - 5 Christian: Roman Catholic
  - 6 Hindu
  - 7 Jewish
  - 8 Muslim
  - 9 Other, record verbatim.
- In which of the following categories does your monthly salary fall, after taxes?
  - Rank of respondent
    - Senior/executive manager with strategic authority
    - 2 "Junior" manager with operational authority
    - 3 Rank-and-file journalist with limited authority
  - Name of organization:
  - Type of medium
    - 1 Daily newspaper
    - 2 Weekly newspaper
    - 3 Magazine
    - 4 Television
    - 5 Radio
    - 6 News agency
    - 7 Online outlet (stand-alone)
    - 8 Online outlet (of offline outlet)
  - Reach of medium
    - 1 Local
    - 2 Regional
    - 3 National
    - 4 Transnational
  - Ownership of medium
    - 1 Purely private ownership
    - 2 Purely public ownership
    - 3 Purely state ownership
    - 4 Mixed ownership but mostly private

- 5 Mixed ownership but mostly public
- 6 Mixed ownership but mostly state-owned
- 777 No information

## Appendix B

### OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Project Title:<sup>1</sup>

Observer: Ruth Moon

Observation Date:

Observation Begin Time:

Observation End Time:

**Social Setting and Physical Environment** Describe the various attributes of the scene that is being observed or studied — building size, physical features, internal organization, location of the scene in the building.

**Space and the Objects in the Setting** Layout of the space in which the observation occurs, including specific objects and purported or possible meaning of those objects.

**Actors in the Setting** Number of people in the setting and physical descriptions in terms of such characteristics as sex, age, ethnicity, height, weight, skin color, and other general features that might have some significance in understanding behavioral interactions. Each actor will be given a pseudonym or a five digit ID number (beginning with 00001).

**Events** Information about the purpose of any planned events. If not written or explicit, possible tacit reasons the event(s) is/are taking place.

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<sup>1</sup>This observation guide has been adapted from Whitehead, 2006.

**Individual Behavior** Record of specific behavioral acts taking place, including characteristics of behavior that might have meaning. For example, did the behavior appear animated, tense, stiff, lackadaisical, etc.

**Activities** Note of any groups of behavioral acts that seem to be related.

**Actor Groups** Record of ways actors in the setting seem to be related, linked or differentiated.

**Interactive Patterns** Patterns of interaction between actors, including dominant and subordinate personality (i.e., do certain actors seem to defer to or be controlled by other actors?), compatibility or opposition, and instigation of particular behavior patterns or types.

**Language** Record of comment from participants that seems interesting, curious, etc., with attention to content (what is said); participation (who said what for what audience); method (how something is said, i.e., low/high volume and clarity); location (where it is said); time and routinization (when said and whether there is a pattern?); medium over which comment occurs; and rationale (what seems be the purpose or reason behind what is being said).

**Non-Verbal Behavior and Metalingual Properties in Conversation** Record of any gestures or other forms of non-verbal behavior that might have some relevance to interactions in the setting.

**Expressive Culture** Record of any forms of expressive culture beyond general language (e.g., music, song, dance, art, etc.) in the social setting.

**Ideational Elements** Do the contents of any of the other domains (behaviors, char-

acteristics of actors, space, objects, interactive patterns, expressive culture, etc.) seem to reflect beliefs, attitudes, values, or any other cognitive constructs suggestive of socio-cultural meanings that might be present?

**Goals, Motivations, or Agendas** Record whether various individual actors or groups of actors seem to have specific goals, motivations, or agendas with regards to the event or behavior under observation.

**Broader Social Systems** Note whether broader social systems (such as family, community, workplace, wider society and social policies, or extra-societal factors) seem to have some influence on individual behaviors or interactive patterns in the setting.

**Human Needs** Note any human needs that seemed to be fulfilled or expressed within the setting, event, activity, or act being observed.

**Other Notes**

Appendix C

**CODE OF ETHICS GOVERNING JOURNALISTS, OTHER  
MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND THE MEDIA IN RWANDA**



**CODE OF ETHICS GOVERNING JOURNALISTS,  
OTHER MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND THE  
MEDIA IN RWANDA**

**Adopted June 2011**

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**CODE OF ETHICS GOVERNING JOURNALISTS,  
OTHER MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND THE MEDIA  
IN RWANDA**

**Adopted June 2011**

**FORWARD STATEMENT**

Public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of a journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility.

This Code of Ethics is not intended as a set of legally enforceable "rules" but as a resource for ethical decision-making. It is voluntarily embraced by Rwandan journalists and is intended to be widely used in newsrooms and classrooms as a guide for ethical behavior.

This Media Code of Ethics could not have been realised without the broad participation of Rwandan Journalists and the help of several Media Associations spearheaded by the Association of Rwanda Women Journalists (ARFEM), the Association of Rwandan Journalists (ARJ) and Rwanda Editors Forum (REFO). We are indebted to USAID and the (MCC) Millennium Challenge Corporation, Rwanda Media Strengthening Project implemented by IREX for

their support in the elaboration and printing of this Code of Ethics. We are also grateful to Mr Nsabimana Innocent a veteran Burundian journalist whose ideas were very important to the realisation of this Code of Ethics.

**Preamble**

We, journalists and other media professionals of Rwanda,

Convinced that the free flow of information and public's blossoming constitute the foundation of freedom, democracy and development;

Drawing on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) ratified by the Government of Rwanda;

Considering that freedoms of speech, opinion, conscience and press are enshrined in the Constitution of June 2003 as amended to date;

Drawing lessons from the media's social role in Rwanda;

Aware of the evolution of the Rwandan Society;

Have adopted this Code of Ethics spelling out the obligations and rights of journalists and media professionals in Rwanda.

**TITLE I: JOURNALISTS' OBLIGATIONS**

In the exercise of their profession, information collection, processing, broadcasting and publication, journalists and other media professionals have the following obligations:

**ARTICLE 1: Defence of universal values**

The journalist and any other media professional shall defend the universal human values of peace, tolerance, democracy, human rights, social progress and national cohesion respectful of each citizen in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**ARTICLE 2: Honesty and search for truth**

The journalist and any other media professional shall abhor lies. They have the obligation to respect facts and search for truth, keeping in mind the public's right to true information. In no way shall they suppress essential information or distort any kind of remarks, texts and documents. They shall consider slander, abuse, libel and groundless accusations as the most dangerous professional faults.

**ARTICLE 3: Social responsibility**

The journalist and any other media professional shall keep in mind their social responsibility. They shall, therefore, distribute or publish only information for which they have established the origin, veracity and accuracy. They shall abstain or express necessary reservations in required professional forms for any doubt however slight it may be.

**ARTICLE 4: Incitement to hatred**

The journalist and any other media professional shall avoid broadcasting or publishing biased information inciting to racial, tribal, ethnic, religious hatred or hatred based on sex, age, social status, disability, any disease or health status of the people mentioned or anything likely to serve as a basis for stigmatisation. The contrary will be justifiable only when precision contributes to the search for truth. They shall proscribe any form of discrimination.

**ARTICLE 5: Rectification, right of reply and right to retort**

Broadcasted or published false news and inaccurate information shall spontaneously be rectified. Individuals and organisations are entitled to the right of reply and the right to retort in the conditions provided for by the law.

Rectification, right of reply and right to retort shall only be exercised in the press organ, which broadcasted or published the information raising controversy.

**ARTICLE 6: Respect for private life and human dignity**

The journalist and any other media professional shall respect human dignity and privacy. The broadcasting or publication of any information related to private life shall only be dictated by public interest.

**ARTICLE 7: Violence and obscenities**

The journalist and any other media professional shall avoid broadcasting or publishing scenes of violence or obscene pictures encouraging violence or other illegal activities.

**ARTICLE 8: Protection of minors and victims of rape**

The journalist and any other media professional shall show sensitivity and exercise caution while handling information relating to rape involving minors less than 18 years of age.

They shall be careful not to identify the names of minors, their picture and photos or details likely to lead to their identification, except if this serves the child's interests.

They shall equally avoid identifying victims of rape unless the latter agree, are of age and received explanations on possible consequences of such information.

**ARTICLE 9: Professional honour and dignity**

Unless it proves to be necessary, the journalist and any other media professional shall avoid using unfair methods to obtain information, photos or pictures. Nor shall they abuse the good faith of their sources.

They shall refuse any advantage, financial or in kind, from those who might wish to influence the coverage of an event and thereby endanger the professional integrity and honour of the

journalist, any media professional and all public communication professions.

**ARTICLE 10: Independence**

The journalist and any other media professional shall withstand any external or internal pressure aiming at having them modify or distort information. They shall receive editorial guidelines from only editorial staff officers, and they are fully accountable for their writings or reports, in the conditions provided for by the press law.

**ARTICLE 11: Sensational headlines and exaggeration of facts**

The journalist and any other media professional shall refrain from using any sensational headline which is not proportional to the facts and content of the information broadcasted or published.

**ARTICLE 12: Professional confidentiality and protection of sources**

The journalist and any other media professional have the obligation of professional confidentiality. While broadcasting or publishing information, they shall mention their sources. However, they have the obligation to protect those having

requested for confidentiality. This protection becomes necessary if identification may be prejudicial to these sources.

**ARTICLE 13: Separation of comments from facts**

The journalist and any other media professional are free to make a stand on any issue. They have the obligation to separate comments from facts.

**ARTICLE 14: Information balance**

The journalist and any other media professional shall be mindful of balance in the broadcasting or publication of information in line with fundamental regulations.

**ARTICLE 15: Plagiarism**

The journalist and any other media professional shall refrain from plagiarism and, instead, strive to respect intellectual property. If the need arises, it is imperative that the source be mentioned even when it comes from one's colleagues.

**ARTICLE 16: Incompatibility between the duties of journalist and those of the media relations officer**

Duties of media relations officer, public relations officer, institutional spokesperson and other related duties are incompatible with the exercise of the journalism profession.

**ARTICLE 17: Separation of information from advertisement**

Information and advertisement shall be separated. The journalist and any other media professional do not sign in their names advertisement articles or read advertisement messages.

**ARTICLE 18: Innocence presumption**

The journalist and any other media professional shall observe the innocence presumption principle for those suspected of punishable or criminal facts before the verdict from competent courts and tribunals is announced.

While handling any legal information, they shall avoid establishing any individuals' relationship with the suspect, or referring to his or her ethnic group, tribe, religion, sex, family or friends, unless their mention serves public interest.

If suspects' pictures or photos are broadcasted or published before their guilt is established, the journalist or media professional responsible for publishing those pictures has the obligation to follow up the lawsuit and broadcast or publish the verdict from competent courts and tribunals.

However, if suspects are less than 18 years of age, journalists and other media professionals shall be careful not to broadcast or publish their pictures or photos before competent courts and tribunals establish their liability.

#### **ARTICLE 19: Solidarity**

The journalist and any other media professional duly accredited undertake to defend and protect the interests of their profession in general, and in particular those of a male and female colleague, being the subject of legal proceedings or administrative procedures resulting from his or her writings or media productions considered or established to be in conformity with this Code.

#### **ARTICLE 20: Peer jurisdictions**

Following the preceding article, the journalist and any other media professional that have voluntarily accepted to confirm to this code shall also accept their peer jurisdiction. Peer jurisdictions will be exercised through an independent board, to which the public can complain about perceived breaches of the code. If the independent board finds that the media has infringed the code of conduct it has the power to oblige the offending media house to issue and publish an immediate correction and apology. Under extreme and deliberate breach of the code, the independent board has the power to impose fines or even exclude the media house from the media board. The media in question must publish all the findings of the board.

The journalist and any other media professional shall make effort to know national legislation and regulation governing the press.

#### **TITLE II: JOURNALISTS' RIGHTS**

The journalist and any other media professional shall, in the exercise of their profession, claim for the following rights:

**ARTICLE 21: Free access to sources**

The journalist and any other media professional, in the exercise of their profession, shall have access to all sources of information, and they shall have the right to freely carry out investigation into the facts conditioning public life.

**ARTICLE 22: Subordination refusal**

The journalist and any other media professional have the right to refuse any subordination contrary to the press organ's editorial line.

**ARTICLE 23: Conscience provision**

The journalist and any other media professional, in the exercise of their profession, may invoke the conscience provision. They may refuse to write or read political comments and editorials in contradiction with the rules of professional ethics, or to censor articles, radio, television and electronic works, or any other mass broadcasting aid from their peers, on grounds other than professional ones.

The refusal shall not be ground of employment loss through firing and if this happens, peers shall show solidarity and strongly denounce the act.

**ARTICLE 24: Journalist's protection**

Considering the particularity of their profession, the journalist and any media professional are, all over the national territory, entitled to the security of their person and working materials, their legal protection and the respect of their dignity, without any condition or restriction.

**ARTICLE 25: Protection of sources**

The journalist and any other media professional have the right to refuse to disclose their sources. In no way shall they be subjected to threats owing to this stand.

**ARTICLE 26: Consultation obligation**

The editorial team shall compulsorily be informed about any important decision likely to have an impact on the life of the institution. It shall at least be consulted, before final decision is made, about any measure of interest to the editorial team: recruitment, dismissal, transfer and promotion of journalists and media professionals.

**ARTICLE 27: Contract and remuneration**

In view of their duties and responsibilities, the journalist and any media professional shall be entitled not only to collective conventions but also to an individual contract ensuring them material and moral security as well as a remuneration proportional to their social role, which guarantees their economic independence.

Done in Kigali, on 17 June 2011

**CODE DE DEONTOLOGIE DES JOURNALISTES, DES  
AUTRES PROFESSIONNELS/PROFESSIONNELLES DES  
MEDIAS ET DES MEDIAS DU RWANDA**

Juin, 2011

## Appendix D

### SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

This appendix includes information used to map the social network analyzed in chapter 2.

#### *D.1 Rwanda journalism network seed list*

This network was seeded using the list of media houses (media organizations) registered with Rwanda's Media High Council as of 21 November 2016.<sup>1</sup>

- Electronic Media
  - Amazing Grace Radio
  - City Radio
  - Contact FM
  - Flash FM
  - Isango Star
  - Radio Izuba
  - Radio Maria
  - Radio 10
  - RC Huye
  - RC Nyagatare
  - RC Rubavu
  - RC Musanze
  - RC Rusizi
  - Radio Rwanda
  - Radio Salus
  - Rwanda Television
  - Sana Radio (Restore Radio)
  - Umucyo Community Radio

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<sup>1</sup>This list includes broadcast and print media, which were the only outlets listed when I collected this information. The Media High Council has since expanded the list to include online-only outlets.

- Voice Of Africa
- Voice Of Hope
- BBC
- RFI
- DW
- Voice Of America
- Radio Huguka
- Radio Isangano
- Radio Ishingiro

- Print Media

- Amahoro
- Amani
- East African Business Week
- Gasabo
- Goboka
- Hobe
- Huguka
- Ibiyaga Bigari
- Imanzi
- Impamo
- Ingenzi
- Ishema
- Isimbi
- Iwacu Africa
- Izuba Rirashe
- Kinyamateka
- Oasis Gazette
- The New Times
- Imvaho Nshya
- La Nouvelle Releve
- Le Reveil
- Rugali
- Rushyashya
- Rwanda Dispatch
- Rwanda News Agency
- The Rwanda Focus
- Umurinzi
- Umusanzu
- Umuseke
- Umusingi
- Umwezi
- Business Daily

## D.2 Full network visualizations

Figure D.1 and Figure D.2 show the full network visualizations that are presented in simplified form in chapter 2.

### Network with nodes sized by betweenness centrality

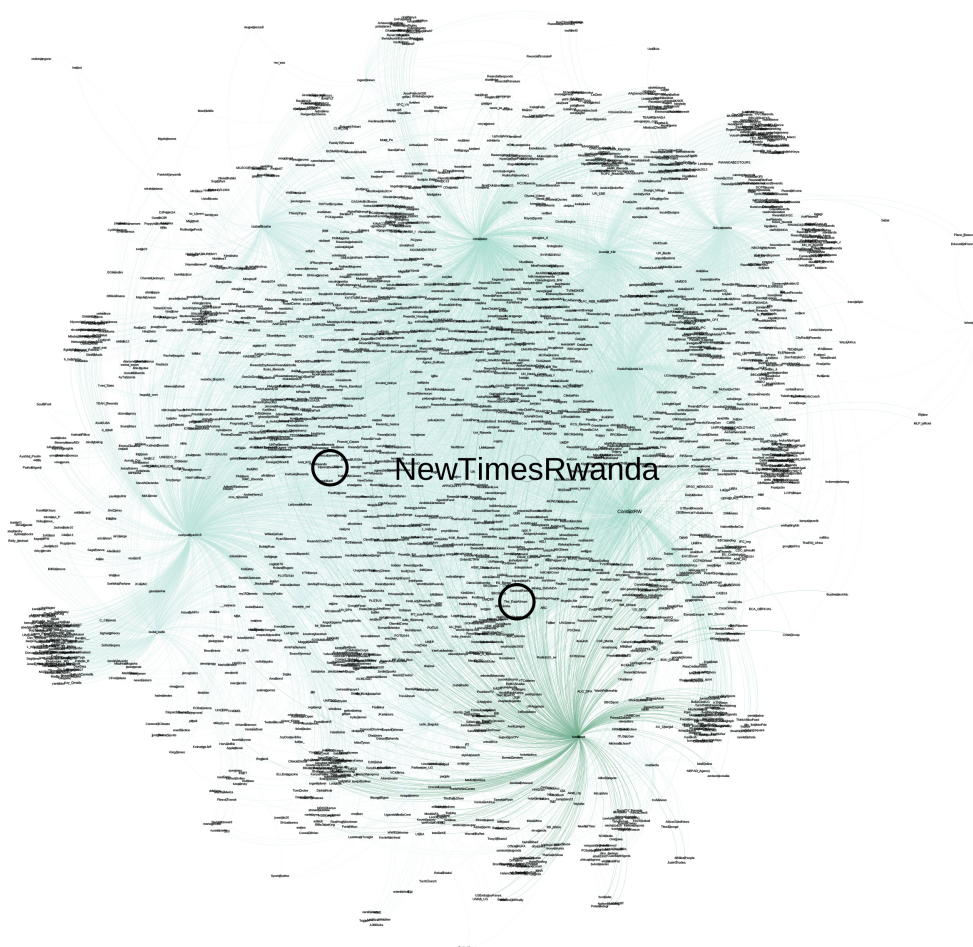


Figure D.1: This visualization shows the network of all nodes followed by at least two Rwandan news outlets, with nodes sized relative to each other by betweenness centrality. *KT Press* to the left of the *New Times* and the *East African* directly below the *New Times* are circled in black.

### Network with nodes sized by eigenvector centrality

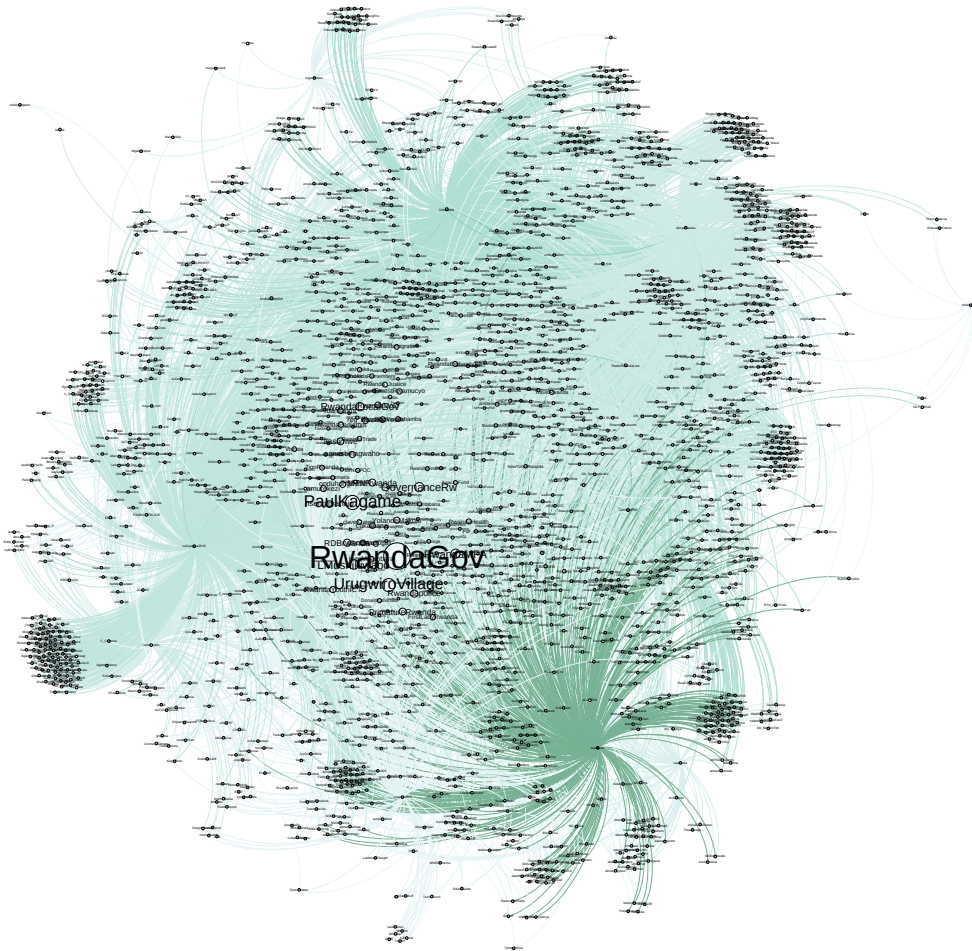


Figure D.2: This visualization shows the network of all nodes followed by at least two Rwandan news outlets. In this image, the nodes are sized relative to each other by eigenvector centrality, a measure of importance based on connections to other well-connected nodes.

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