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Project report

MACS390, “Media, war and peace”

Autumn session, 2011

Media and Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS390_11outline.pdf

Kate Walsh prepared

- (1) an information pack in the form of slide show, available as a separate file
- (2) a fictional dialogue about doing the project, which starts on the next page.

This document is located at http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/MACS390_11tops/.

MACS390 Project Dialogue

The following is a fictional conversation that took place between the creator of this project and another university student, who is studying politics and has a broad understanding of the events before and during the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

David: Hi Katherine, how is your work for Amnesty International going?

Katherine: Not bad, I'm developing a major project aimed at Year 12 students at the moment, so I have been quite busy researching and trying to interpret and present information in a way they will understand.

D: That sounds challenging. What is the project on?

K: Well, we are trying to make high school students, especially those studying Modern History, understand events that have happened in the last 20 years, as it seems these events seem to be skipped over a bit. I am focusing on genocide and the representation of it in the media, specifically a presentation about the 1994 Rwandan genocide, to make the students aware that atrocities are still being committed in the world and that crimes are still occurring in their lifetime. I guess it's all about awareness and encouraging people to take notice of world events.

D: Which is something the international media certainly didn't do back then!

K: Exactly. Which is partly why I took on the Rwanda as a case study, as I thought it was a good example in understanding how the media operates in times of social upheaval, such as during grand-scale genocide. It is quite astonishing that it took nearly a month for the majority of international media to start covering the genocide accurately, rather than terming it a civil war¹. It partly stemmed from the difficulties in understanding what was happening, as so few journalists had any background knowledge of the history of Rwanda. There is in fact only one known piece of video footage of an attack, taken by BBC correspondent Nick Hughes², which goes to show the lack of resources and the inability to understand the scale of what was happening.

D: Did any of the media in Rwanda actually speak out?

K: If they did, it is incredibly hard to find. I tried to find some examples of media that was against the actions of the Hutu government, but I couldn't find anything! While doing my research, I discovered that radio was probably the most important media form used to spread propaganda³ about the Tutsi and mobilise the Hutu against them, as many Rwandans couldn't read or write and I doubt many of the broadcasts were recorded.

¹ Stanton, 2004, p 231.

² Nick Hughes worked for the BBC and shot the only known video footage of a killing during the Rwandan genocide in April 1994 in the town of Kigali, where two women were murdered.

³ Des Forges, 2007 argues in her piece 'Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda 1994' that the radio connected with the Hutu through the use of contemporary music and having announcers that were more relatable on Radio-Television Libre Des Mille Collines than on the older Radio Rwanda, and thus was crucial in mobilising the Hutu against the Tutsi.

D: Where you able to find actual examples of the media disseminated through Rwanda during the lead up to the genocide?

K: That in itself was a challenge. I managed to find a few political cartoons from *Karanga*,⁴ but these were hard to understand as they were in different languages. Other than that, I found some snippets or things said by announcers during radio broadcasts,⁵ but I generally had to rely on the work of scholars in determining how the media acted in Rwanda during the genocides, and their findings were based on both research and anecdotal evidence. They were all credible scholars and there seemed to be an agreement among them over the media's portrayal of the genocide, so I believe them to be accurate. In regards to how the international media portrayed the genocide, I relied particularly on the eye-witness accounts provided by several media identities in the book *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide*⁶. These accounts were particularly useful, as they were from a range of people, both editors and journalists, who would have had very different roles in the production of media. Interestingly, they all noted was that international journalists had little understanding of the history of relations between the Tutsi and the Hutu peoples, making it hard to accurately report what was going on.

D: It certainly is a complicated history. How did you manage to keep that simple enough for young students without hardly any knowledge of the genocide without "dumbing it down"?

K: Well, that was something I had to think long and hard about. Obviously, I had to make sure I included the significant information, without giving them an hour-long history lesson! Luckily I had access to a "test group" of Year 12 students⁷, who were all over the age of 18 and therefore able to give me some feedback on the project so far. They thought there was too much information given on the history, so I had to cut that section back a bit. I did not want to loose their interest in the early parts of the presentation, so I focused on a few key factors, including the changes in government structures, the ethnic divides that had been drawn between the Hutu and Tutsi for many years and the subsequent power balance, the assassination of President Habyarimana as the catalyst for the 100 days genocide, as well as a few important facts and figures.

When I took it back to them, they were pleased I had made the changes, as they felt they had enough information to understand the broad reasons behind the genocide's origins and were informed enough to understand the rest of the presentation, without being weighed down by the history.

D: I suppose it is lucky you had the room to expand on points in the PowerPoint presentation if you need it, though.

⁴ *Karanga* was a bi-monthly magazine that was incredibly critical of the Tutsi and anyone that supported, worked with or for, or was married to one of them.

⁵ See both Des Forges, 2007, 'Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda 1994' and Caplan, G, 2007, 'Rwanda: Walking the Road to Genocide' in *Media and the Rwanda Genocide* for examples of quotes from both Radio Rwanda and Radio-Television Libres des Milles Collinse prior to the genocide.

⁶ Thompson, A, 2007, *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London.

⁷ The writer of this report has a younger sibling in Year 12, who helped the writer show the report to three of their friends to attain feedback on the presentation.

K: Well, that was not my original idea. I was initially going to produce a brochure with the same information, but found this did not give me enough rough to include anything else but blocks of text, which was a sure-fire way to lose interest! I had to think of another way to do present it to the students, so I used Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats⁸ technique to get myself in another mind space.

D: What does that involve?

K: Basically, you use the hats to signify changes in your way of thinking. While I won't tell you all of the different hats I used to help me,⁹ I used the White Hat, which is for information and need, to consider what was relevant and powerful for the students to hear, as well as thinking about the students' background, what they may already know and what they didn't. I used the Black Hat to think about why a method of portraying it wouldn't work, and decided that a brochure was too constrictive for the detail of information that would be required, as it would only allow for a minimal amount of images to be included, as well as the fact a poster may gloss over an otherwise serious issue.

D: It sounds like you gave the strengths and weaknesses of your presentation a lot of thought.

K: I did. As it was aimed at younger students, it was important not to frighten them, which was why I made sure to include the note that there were graphic images contained in the presentation at the start of the text. I also had to ensure the theories I used were strong enough to provide analysis of both media and genocide as a whole, while giving specific examples of how this happened in Rwanda. While I was doing this I became started to think about their strengths and weaknesses too, whether they encompassed enough to be applied to all genocides.

D: I would say the media has a big part in dividing groups of people. I mean look at any other genocide in history, like the Holocaust, the media always plays a huge role in drumming up attention the cause of those in power.

K: I definitely agree. The two theories I utilised, Campbell's idea of genocide as social control and Stone's concept of genocide as transgression, overlapped as they required both people to try to stop an anomaly in their society,. Both are social theories, rather than media-specific ones, but each highlights the importance of community and the need to make a group a scapegoat for the problems in a society. Naturally the media plays a role in this, as it is supposed to represent the concerns and issues in a society accurately and fairly, so if an individual assumes the media is living up to that responsibility; of course they will tend to believe what is in the

⁸de Bono, Six *Thinking Hats*, available from <http://www.debonothinkingsystems.com/tools/6hats.htm>

⁹ I will give a quick overview of the other hats not explicitly mentioned in this dialogue and the ideas I came up with: Red Hat, I felt students would be easily bored with a text-heavy presentation and would want images and be able to engage with what they were learning; Yellow Hat, that students would be interested in the topic no matter how it was presented, as it was powerful and something they may not have come across before; Green Hat, I focused on all the creative ways I could portray this, such as on a website, or a video, but decided to follow a creative path I had considerable skills in and the Blue Hat; I was wary not to focus on other non-related thinking to this process, as I was trying to figure out the best way to present information, rather than how to obtain it.

media. In the case of Rwanda, negative propaganda about the Tutsi was there every day¹⁰.

D: It is strange to think the media has that kind of power over us.

K: Yes, but that is where I felt there were some weaknesses in both theories. While they both drew attention to the fact the media plays a mobilising role in the period before a genocide, it sounded to me they were basing their theories on the “hypodermic needle” model. Although there is some validity in that, it takes away all human will and the ability to live by moral codes rather than acting on the basis of what we hear. I suppose it is important to realise that the media was not the only instigating factor for the Hutu, rather it was years of oppression in a very complex political and social structure, which the media just drew on to further the cause¹¹.

D: Yeah, you make a good point. But the media’s role in any warfare goes a long way in shaping the public’s perception of it, as it is often the only information people get.

K: True, this is why it is so important that media do operate as free agents, rather than government or business ones. Which seems unlikely in the future, but I suppose you can always dream.

References

Caplan, G, 2007, ‘Rwanda: Walking the Road to Genocide’ in A Thompson (ed), *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London, pp 20-39.

de Bono, E., *Six Thinking Hats*, available from <http://www.debonothinkingsystems.com/tools/6hats.htm>, accessed 31st May 2011.

Des Forges, A, 2007, ‘Call to Genocide: Radio in Rwanda 1994’ in A Thompson (ed), *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, London, pp 41-54.

Stanton, G. H., 2004, 'Could the Rwandan genocide have been prevented?', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 6, no. 2, pp 211-222

Uvin, P., 2001, ‘Reading the Rwandan Genocide’ *International Studies Review*, vol.3, no. 3, pp 75-99.

¹⁰ While there are no exact figures recording the amount of negative broadcasts about the Tutsi, this writer feels they are safe in this claim as the research suggests nearly all spoken words by announcers spoke negatively of the Tutsi. Again, see the chapter by Des Forges in *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* for specific examples.

¹¹ Uvin, 2001, p 79. Uvin suggests there are three significant paradigms that can be used to understand the Rwandan genocide, elite manipulation, resource scarcity and socio-psychological features of the perpetrators. These three ideas are arguably the basis for media reports on the evil nature of the Tutsi, as the Tutsi were used as the scapegoat for the problems society was encountering.