Interventionist Media in Times of Crisis

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On December 3rd, 2003, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) announced that "Ferdinand Nahimana, founder and ideologist of the *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM), Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, high ranking board member of the *Comité d'initiative* of the RTLM and founding member of the Coalition for the Defence of Republic (CDR), and Hassan Ngeze, chief editor of *Kangura* newspaper, were convicted today for genocide, incitement to genocide, conspiracy, and crimes against humanity, extermination and persecution."[1] In what was dubbed 'the media trial', the ICTR examined the role of the radio station RTLM and the newspaper *Kangura* in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda to address, for the first time since the Nuremberg Trials, the role of the media in the context of international criminal justice. The ICTR judgment echoes the 1946 judgment of the International Military Tribunal against the NS journalist Julius Streicher, and will continue to inspire commentary on media accountability and the status of the long-dormant 1948 UN Genocide Convention as a core element of contemporary international criminal justice.[2,3]

But rather than approaching the controversial case as a new benchmark in the politics of human rights, I want to explore some of its implications for the idea of an 'interventionist' media: What happens to the idea of a media 'intervention' in the context of media incited and sustained mass violence, when 'intervention' is no longer conceptualized in the subversive terms of an autonomous counter-imperial multitude, over and against corporate mediaspheres and over-powering states, but may have to be rearticulated in the imperial terms of an interventionist 'peace media' in response to violent conflict in weak or failing states? Aware of the scope of such an effort, I offer no more than an initial research report that identifies possible vectors of inquiry. What follows are comments on the rise of media as a new direction in humanitarian intervention, the emergence of state failure as permanent feature of the post-colonial era and as conflict-analytical concern, and the increasing attention to media as autonomous actor in conflict-analytical work, concluding with the suggestion to explore in greater detail, with more attention to nuance than such a short essay allows, the implications of an imperial humanitarian media interventionism for 'alternative' theories of autonomous, interventionist, and tactical media.

New Directions in Humanitarian Intervention

Following the end of one-party rule and the establishment of a transitional coalition government in 1992, the Hutu-dominated Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND) lost its control over Radio Rwanda. The quasi-governmental Radio Rwanda had been the only national radio station and had already been used to broadcast a violently pro-Hutu message, but moved toward a non-partisan agenda when moderates took over the Ministry of Information. Radio Muhabura, a new station established by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), a Uganda-based rebel army composed of mostly Tutsi exiles, also followed a nationalist – rather than ethnic – emphasis consistent with the RPF commitment to minimizing the differences between Hutu and Tutsi. In response, Rwandan Hutu hardliners incorporated their own radio station as RTLM and began broadcasting in 1993, circumventing the ban imposed on 'harmful radio propaganda' to which the new Rwandan government had formally committed itself. Nominally independent of Radio Rwanda, RTLM was linked in a number of ways with the national radio, with other state agencies, and with the MRND: RTLM was allowed to broadcast on the same frequencies as the national radio when Radio Rwanda was not transmitting; it included well-known MRND and Radio Rwanda personnel, it used equipment owned by various government agencies, and it had access to an emergency source of energy. While this structural support helped to quickly extend the reach of RTLM, its popularity had its roots in the informal, spontaneous and witty style it pioneered, including the use of interactive broadcasting. Prior to the genocide, RTLM became popular even among the Tutsi soldiers of the RPF. Following the death of President Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash on April 6, 1994, and the subsequent seizure of power by a self-proclaimed interim government, a systematic genocide commenced, intensifying a process of informal repression that had already begun in 1992, orchestrated primarily by centrally-organized militias linked to the MRND and its extremist offshoot, the CDR. Once the genocide began, targeting minority Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus opposed to the MRND, RTLM took up themes of the extremist press, never losing its spontaneous style that gave voice to both

government officials and listeners, and soon displaced the paper *Kangura* as the most influential voice of extremism. Eventually, Radio Rwanda came under extremist influence as well. Taking advantage of their reach and popularity, the two 'sister' stations broadcast incitation to slaughter and directions on how to carry it out. Throughout the genocide, the two stations collaborated to deliver a single message about the need to extirpate the 'enemy', articulated in the terms of an essentialized Hutu-Tutsi difference, of lavish praise for everyone who took matters into his or her own hands, and of disdain for political action that fell short of such radical extremism.[4,5]

The centrality of hate radio to both informal repression and the actual genocide campaign did not escape international attention and, with the likelihood of an armed intervention absent, raised calls for a media intervention. Early suggestions to jam RTLM by General Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of UN forces in Rwanda, were quickly taken up by human rights activists. But as is well known, no such media intervention occurred, in part because of technical difficulties: after RPF forces had captured the capital, RTLM switched to the use of mobile transmitters, whose jamming would have required precisely the kind of immediate involvement unpopular at home – not least because of the traumatic experience in Somalia, which major UN members were eager to avoid.[6,7] The official rationale for the decision not to jam provided by the US was, however, that radio jamming constitutes an act of interference and thus a violation of international law, and the question of whether or not such a 'humanitarian' media intervention could indeed have prevented massive violence continues to be a matter of controversy.

In his account of the role of RTLM in the genocide, Jamie F. Metzl, a former UN Human Rights Officer, traces the insistence on a position of non-interference to the Cold War and wonders "whether the US Cold War interpretation of the international law of radio jamming remains an appropriate standard in the post-Cold War world".[8] Metzl worries that "there is a danger that, in a post-Somalia world less willing to respond forcefully to international crises, the baby of information intervention will be thrown out with the bath water of armed humanitarian intervention", and makes the case for the creation of an independent information intervention unit under the auspices of the UN that could monitor local media in regions of conflict, offer 'peace broadcasts' to de-escalate a conflict, and intervene if need be, authorized on a case-by-case basis by the Security Council.[9] While the communications-rights NGO Article 19 also supports the use of radio jamming in individual cases and leaves no doubt that RTLM broadcasts should have been stopped once the genocide began, it also cautions that such media interventions can never prevent 'another Rwanda', since the genocide cannot be attributed exclusively to the influence of inflammatory media and would have continued with or without the support of RTLM.[10] In her case study for another Article 19 report on state-sponsored violence, the political theorist Linda Kirsche notes that many accounts and analyses of the genocide tend to foreground the role of inflammatory radio broadcasts in inciting the killing, even though "there is abundant evidence that the genocide was a carefully planned operation, directed by informal state networks against both Tutsi and moderate Hutu", and cautions that exclusive emphasis on the role of hate radio will "serve as an attempt to cover the lamentable failure of the international community to heed the abundant warnings of impending disaster" and

thus re-localize a conflict that needs to be understood in translocal terms.[11]

While there has been almost unanimous agreement on the need to jam RTLM, it is less obvious what should happen in other cases once the question of intervention becomes unhinged from the extremism associated with the Rwandan genocide. The idea of 'interventionist' media is inextricably intertwined with the ongoing controversy over the criteria used to identify the threshold for a 'humanitarian' intervention in general.[12] Approached in this context, interventionist media is always already on an imperial terrain, part of an imperial project of governance not (only) because of the geopolitical ambition of the powers that be, but because the complex contradictions of decolonization and the post-colonial order it helped create, including the inability of weak and failing states to protect the human rights of its own subjects, call for a conflict-analytical as well as media-theoretical response.

State Failure at the Edge of Empire

David Rieff, journalist and a sober observer of the practice of human rights, notes that most 'humanitarian' crises are not, in fact, humanitarian crises, but the by-product of civil wars and massive state failure, and cautions that humanitarian intervention should never be understood in terms of a selfless engagement: "So if we are going to intervene, let us understand the project that we must engage in, which is not just humanitarian intervention, nor even nation-building, but the de facto recolonization of some of the most unfortunate parts of the world".[13] Rieff suggests that, "[I]t may not be politically correct to say so, but there is a strong argument to be made that humanitarian interventions are positive for the people of a Liberia or a Bosnia and negative for the US since, whatever the conspiracy theorists of the anti-globalizing left and the isolationist right imagine, such wars almost never serve any geo-strategic or economic interest of the US or Western European powers". Michael Ignatieff has commented on the contemporary moment of empire in similar, if even stronger, terms. For him, the acknowledgment that decolonization has failed must be the point of departure for any politics of human rights: "The age of empire ought to have been succeeded by an age of independent, equal and self-governing nation-states. But that has not come to pass. America has inherited a world scarred not just by the failures of empires past but also by the failure of nationalist movements to create and secure free states – and now, suddenly, by the desire of Islamists to build theocratic tyrannies on the ruins of failed nationalist dreams. ... The case for empire is that it has become, in a place like Iraq, the last hope for democracy and stability alike".[14] In *Empire Lite,* a collection of essays on Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan originally published in *The New York Times Magazine,* Ignatieff has been even more direct: "Empire used to be the White Man's Burden. But just because empire has become politically incorrect does not mean it has become dispensable".[15] Such voices have often been dismissed as 'hawkish', offering a narrative of humanitarian legitimation whose claim to universality has become tainted by association with a geopolitical project of imperial expansion.[16] What emerges, however, is not so much (or not only) a naive view of empire often attributed to human rights activists by an older anti-imperialist left, but a sense of the inescapability, even inevitability of a transformation of the terrain on which the power of de-territorialized sovereignties is deployed.

A 2003 NGO report on state failure suggests, "What is central to a failed state is

that the state apparatus is unable to uphold an effective monopoly of violence over its whole territory, lacks an effective judicial system to guard the rule of law and promulgate judgements that are internationally regarded as legitimate and sound (especially in commercial matters), is unable or unwilling to fulfil international obligations (such as in debt repayment) and cannot prevent various forms of transnational economic crime or the use of its territory for the perpetration of violence (politically motivated or otherwise) against other states in the international system".[17] The report examines the respective roles played by the colonial legacy and post-colonial state building, the end of Cold War, and processes of socio-economic globalization, and concludes that "it would be misleading to address failed or collapsed states merely as a temporary dysfunction of the Westphalia inter-state order. State inability to supply basic public services like justice, health and educational systems is not anymore an anomaly in the 'normal' inter-state system (something to be solved through technical institutional and capacity-building strategies), rather, it has become a structural trait of the contemporary international system" (ibid.). Few have been willing to acknowledge that state failure is here to stay. Some "have begun to take war into account in terms of development, but it is still considered a crisis and not as part of the economic and political make-up of collapsed states' societies, let alone as a manifestation of the changing international system. ... It should be realized by policy-makers that failed states, and particularly the ones that have collapsed, never return to how they were prior to breaking down, even in the event that they do succeed in regaining coherence after a period of failure (e.g. Uganda). What a post-state or other new entity will eventually become is one of the most important challenges facing the international system. ... Failed states, then, do not exist in isolation: they are an integral part of the world system of governance" (ibid.). Consequently, "[S]tate failure is the pivotal issue for explaining intra-state conflicts, the vulnerability of crisis countries to external destabilization and continued obstacles to development",[18] and it offers a possible point of departure for reflections on interventionist media.[19]

The 'intractability' of conflicts invoked to substantiate the claim that state failure is really a failure of decolonization is, of course, itself in need of explanation. One of the ironies of statist theories of international relations is that they cannot – or do not want to – offer much analyses of either the stealth interventionism associated with 'good governance' and 'trade liberalization' or the complex dynamic of ethnicization that exposes the common attribution of conflict to 'ancient ethnic hatreds' to analytical ridicule. Because the various brands of realist orthodoxy treat the state more or less as a 'black box', unable to give an account of its often violent constitution as actor and geopolitical subject, they also have little to say on the topic of weak and failing states, let alone their functionality in and indeed indispensability to various imperial projects. Instead, they envision a world with few stable states engulfed and threatened by a rising tide of non-state actors, whose chaotic activity amounts to nothing less than a tribalist counter-modernity. And while the attention to 'ethnic conflict' in the immediate post-Cold War era was widely believed to call into question the neo-liberal triumphalism of the end of history that coincided the arrival of Francis Fukayama on the stage of geopolitical commentary, Fukayama's controversial suggestion that all thought on the political will from now on be

contained in the idea of a free-market-cum-liberal-democracy seems to be confirmed by the specter of a statist modernity coming apart at its ex-colonial seams, calling into existence an imperial sovereignty based on these very principles.[20]

Conflict Analysis meets Interventionist Media

Statist and non-statist approaches do not, then, differ so much in their diagnosis of state failure than in the account they offer of its emergence: an often presentist analytical internalism, even pathologization on the one hand, and translocal, historical, process-oriented approaches on the other. While peace and conflict researchers have long been attentive to the limits of an analytical statism,[21] the field of conflict analysis itself has only recently begun to address the way issues of media and representation in general complicate its task. When the US-Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (CCPDC) "moved to recognize this issue of the media and the information edge in conflict" in the 1990s, this was applauded as exceptional yet long-overdue by the BBC journalist Nik Gowing.

Gowing has written extensively on the complex relationship between media and conflict since the early 1990s.[22] Following an early study that examined the common assumption of a 'CNN effect', i.e. a direct link between increased conflict coverage and foreign policy action, one of his primary concerns has been the way the emergence of new media actors complicate the task of conflict analysis.[23] In an influential report on the African Great Lakes crisis in 1996-7, Gowing concludes that "there has been an important paradigm shift in the principles of handling and managing information in conflict. Even modest sub-regional forces from small, supposedly badly-resourced nations and factions have learned and assimilated much of the latest thinking of information warfare, information control and information manipulation".[24] The easy availability and proliferation of communications technology has transformed the notion of media itself, no longer exclusively associated with the institutions of official journalism but an ever-expanding network of media makers. It is less obvious what 'independence' means when the state against which it could be defined no longer, or not yet, exists, and as the role of hate radio in aggravating the genocide in Rwanda suggests, the mix between state failure and (nominally) independent media can be quite volatile.

Gowing's work stands out because he worries about the mismatch between the "tyranny of real-time news" and the speed of political processes that articulate and authorize possible responses, far from celebrating such a shift to an access-for-all information regime in terms of a 'tactical' subversion of mainstream media. Instead, he carefully assesses the troubling implications of circumventing official information management. As international media coverage becomes a symbolic resource for local actors, their clout and leverage vis-à-vis a government concerned about its image abroad increase. Some events take place only to generate their own representation, upsetting the traditional logic of conflict reporting as mere 'witnessing of the truth'. And as Gowing notes in his contribution to a forum on war and accountability organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross, "[M]ost significantly, the bearing of witness in crises can now often be done not just by journalists but by a whole new cadre of impromptu information 'do-ers', amateurs with little or no training in the principles of good journalism – namely, balance, impartiality and

accuracy. A growing number are motivated advocates or partial campaigners who have found low-cost, low-tech but highly effective ways firstly to record and then to distribute their information and views in near real time".[25] Since news saturation and sheer overload might cause stock images and interpretations to prevail, the proliferation of media 'agents' Gowing outlines complicates enormously the task of conflict analysis. So for better or worse, it seems that 'interventionist' media theory will have to take at least some of its cues from conflict analysis, preferably those approaches whose non-statist conceptual idiom is capable of articulating the complex interdependencies Gowing outlines.[26]

In the late 1990s, the issue of media as an active force in the process of conflict management has received increasing attention, and various journalistic think tanks and human rights organizations have created manuals on conflict and human rights reporting.[27] While many of these manuals continue to embrace the concept of objectivity, others share the interventionist approach outlined by Robert Manoff of the US Centre for War, Peace and the News Media: they turn the traditional approach to the media-conflict nexus around to ask what it is conflict prevention and management require of the media. Among the various approaches that already exist, *Reporting the World* (RTW) is most explicitly based on the analytical apparatus of peace and conflict studies. Published by a UK journalism think-tank, RTW incorporates a set of analytical principles from *Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means*, a manual published by the peace research centre *Transcend*, and prepared originally for the Crisis Environments Training Initiative and the Disaster Management Training Programme of the United Nations.[28] As Manoff notes, such propositions continue to be controversial: "[I]n a number of countries, no single issue has so bedevilled the discussion of Media & Conflict as the deeply held belief on the part of many journalists that the very idea of media-based preventive action violates the norm of objectivity – whose corollary, disinterestedness with respect to the events being reported, is an essential element of the professional creed. ... But whenever in recent years events such as the war in Bosnia or the genocidal violence in Rwanda have provoked discussions concerning the role of the media, the conversation-stopper has been the passionate assertion by senior correspondents that such concerns lie beyond the pale of legitimate journalism".[29] And even though it is far from promoting a simplistic sense of partisanship over and against the cherished journalistic principle of impartiality, RTW's 'peace journalism' approach, too, continues to generate controversy.[30]

One of the consequences of such analyses might be the acknowledgment that the separation between imperial and counter-imperial forms of interventionist media is not, or no longer, easily made. David Rieff insists that to intervene is to take sides. But even more so, to witness is to intervene; and the gaze of such interventionist media is inextricably intertwined with the ambiguities of empire. This is apparent, for example, in a 2003 report on 'Media in Vulnerable Societies' by Mark Frohardt, Africa Regional Director of the US communications NGO Internews, and a former official with the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda, and co-researcher Jonathan Temin that was published by the United States Institute of Peace. Introducing an entire spectrum of possible media interventions that include radio jamming, but also the training of journalists, support for independent media, and the monitoring of local media content, the report offers a

revealing definition of intervention: "The term 'intervention', as it is used here, does not denote any sort of military or armed initiative (with one exception in the segment on 'aggressive interventions'). Rather, the term refers to support for the development of diverse, pluralistic independent media outlets giving voice to a variety of views and opinions. Such interventions are not carried out by soldiers or peacekeepers, but by journalists, professional media trainers, and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers".[31] Possible media interventions are then divided into three categories: structural interventions (support for independent media and diversity in media ownership, journalism training, legislative interventions to protect private media outlets and address hateful and antagonistic content, cooperation with international media networks as well as NGOs to complement and monitor local media), content-specific interventions (directly addressing the content produced by media outlets), and aggressive interventions (using force or prohibiting media outlets from operating).

The assumption about what media constellation and content escalates or de-escalates conflict must also – and necessarily – imagine a rather specific form of communicative sociality, for example, and the comprehensive manual of such a media interventionism is also a script of multicultural co-existence that is based, more or less, on the pluralistic public sphere, sandwiched between state and market but never subsumed by them, that is supposed to characterize liberal democracies. And without exception, the US serves as the point of reference and paragon of a 'really existing' media pluralism. This is, of course, the report's main assumption: a society that does not have a pluralistic media is, by definition, more vulnerable to conflict. One could also draw the conclusion, however, that the absence of major social contestation in the US is in no small part related to the particular structure of its mediascape, and that the unquestioned invocation of these structures as point of reference for other non-conflictual public spheres raises a host of questions regarding, for example, the future structures of ownership in vulnerable societies: the privatization of state media is no longer legitimized in economic but in conflict-analytical terms. And yet, the interventionist gaze of humanitarian surveillance the report envisions appears to remain neutral, untroubled by the need to explore its own locatedness vis-à-vis the space in which it aims to intervene.

I am not suggesting that the report does, in any way, support specific foreign or trade policy objectives. On the contrary, its focus on media interventions is a most welcome contribution to the de-militarization of the logic of humanitarian intervention. But its logic resonates with other projects of global governance that are, in turn, related to the issue of state failure. It is here that theoretical approaches to 'interventionist' media need to link up with conflict-analytical work. The report seems to approach intervention as neutral in the sense that the emergence of conflict is what authorizes the intervention on behalf of a general humanitarian concern that is itself left unexplored: conflict is just not a good thing. Ultimately, the report, it seems to me, reproduces the Hobbesian assumptions of mainstream conflict analysis. But what constitutes conflict, and who is to judge the desirability of any one conflict over another, cannot be answered by a just-say-no-to-conflict approach, and the question of which kind of conflict analysis is to ground the broad array of media interventions is indeed crucial. Coverage cannot solve the question of what comes after

information, and one of the fallacies of an interventionist journalism might be that it subsumes the necessarily contentious politics under 'better' coverage and 'better' protocols of conflict analysis. This is where 'best practice' expertism creeps in even in the case of 'counter-imperial' human rights journalism, reflecting in an odd way the techno-determinist faith that open media will necessarily give voice to those who suffer and deserve our support the most. Human rights journalism that follows 'best practice' anticipates a post-conflict 'public sphere' where actors follow certain scripts of civic co-existence, and as long as both local and trans-local reporting followed 'best practice' in its coverage of human rights issues, how could the emergence of the corresponding multiethnic civil society implied in these protocols possibly be jeopardized? But what if they do not? What role does genuine incommensurability play in these scripts that all-too-often follow a logic of diversity and a tolerant mutuality? Local journalism, an important element of the much celebrated re-emergence of 'civil society', is centrally linked to the work of transnational non-state actors like Internews, and such 'subaltern' views are likely to be affected by the protocols of an international human rights journalism. Internews claims, for example, that it "uses the media to reduce conflict within and between countries". This is a rather sweeping claim, and if conflict journalism and conflict analysis are as closely intertwined as I am suggesting, it matters which conceptual and historical assumptions regarding the genesis of conflict feed back into local and trans-local human rights reporting.

One might also object that one of the countries where the media is likely to aggravate conflict along pre-meditated vectors of escalation is the US itself, as became evident in the belligerence of mainstream coverage of the Iraq crisis and a corresponding meekness in relationship to what critics have called the Official Sources Industry. Commenting on the militarized expertism that characterized much network coverage, for example, the independent journalist Amy Goodman contends that CNN et al were already giving the concept of 'general news' an entirely new meaning.[32] But rather than focusing on the contradictions of such a media pluralism, what is important to me in this context is that the implied focus (and site of deployment) of any and all media interventions appears to be an imaginary abroad, understood in terms of a social volatility that renders it open to outside intervention. Such an approach might, as Kirsche suggest in the case of the RTLM, encourage a re-localization of conflict that obscures the role played by non-local actors. While I share the assumption of the Internews/USIP report that "robust independent media can play a critical watchdog role in societies vulnerable to civil conflict, but that the capacity of underdeveloped media to resist insidious abuse and manipulation is often limited", the interventionist localism of its approach to the question of 'vulnerability' says very little about the need to challenge mainstream references to 'ancient tribal hatreds', for example, that contribute their own share to the stabilization of a conflict in local terms and the reluctance to organize a humanitarian intervention.

The Internews report is, I think, a good example of the irreducible imperial ambiguity of any kind of 'interventionist' media. A key player in the 'official' US politics of media intervention, Internews receives almost four-fifths of its funding from USAID and the US State Department and might be an all-too-easy target of criticism.[33] Similarly, the faith of its director that US-sponsored media initiatives might "bring the light of free speech to places that breed terrorism"

can be dismissed as the arrogant voice of a new imperial mission.[34] But while Internews cele-
brates its cold-war origins, such networks do not constitute a post-Cold War Congress for
Cultural Freedom, and the open-society idiom it employs is already shifting from an older anti-
totalitarian statism that used to serve as foil for the concept of independent media in an open
society, not least in response to the question of media in 'vulnerable' societies'.[35] And yet,
if state failure is taken seriously, the project of a NGO-sponsored media pluralism rooted in
local 'civil society organizations', shared even by 'peace media' organizations like the
Hirondelle Foundation,[36] might still fail if the (teleological) assumption of statist normalcy serves
to stabilize the construction of a pluralist mediasphere.

Interventionist Media on New Terrain

For better or worse, interventionist media will operate on imperial terrain, and in this con-
text, media theory can no longer ignore the imperial implications of weak, collapsing, or
failed states. Empire is not, of course, merely a consequence of the 'failure' of the con-
ceptual and geopolitical agenda of third worldism, of its project of tri-continental liberation,
and of a new world economic order. On the contrary, Empire is itself the ambiguous
consequence of a multitude of social struggles whose logic of self-organization is
markedly different from the logic of sovereignty imagined in Bandung, and it still remains
necessary to articulate alternative genealogies of Empire, and indeed reclaim the concept
of Empire itself.[37] But this is also where the question of an interventionist media arises, chal-
lenging the re-localization of conflict encouraged by the conceptual idiom of statist ortho-
doxy by drawing on trans-local approaches to conflict analysis.

It is in this context, sketched all-too-briefly, that I have come to wonder – a question I
have, not an assumption I am making – whether the various 'subversive' concepts of
autonomous, interventionist and tactical media also depend on the assumption of a strong
state, and whether there is a need to examine the (constitutive) assumption that such inter-
ventions are part of a counter-imperial dynamic of multitudinal self-organization. I am not
suggesting that the post-colonial in general is somehow absent from media-theoretical
reflection. Quite the contrary, the 'info warriors' and 'communication guerrillas' in the idiom
of contemporary (metropolitan) media activism continue to refer to the anti-colonial strug-
gles of an earlier era and serve as – often unexplored – markers of post-coloniality. Even
the "ABC of Tactical Media" by David Garcia and Geert Lovink, an attempt to offer an alter-
native media aesthetics that is ambiguous enough to approach analytically even the kind of
media usage characteristic of the RTLM, acknowledges the centrality of such martial
metaphorics by both mobilizing and mocking it: "Tactical media do not just report events,
as they are never impartial, they always participate and it is this that more than anything
separates them from mainstream media. ... But once the enemy has been named and van-
quished it is the tactical practitioner whose turn it is to fall into crisis".[38] Having lost its sub-
versive innocence in the gruesome, unexpected literality that characterized the media-
orchestrated genocide in Rwanda, it seems to me now that it is the idea of interventionist
media itself that is called into question. And one way to approach something like a rethink-
ing of this idea is to acknowledge that state failure, and the deterritorialization of violence
that this implies, is indeed a permanent feature of the post-colonial era.

NOTES

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