



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Bachelor's Degree in Global Communications
Final Dissertation

**A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF
FRAMING STUDIES ON THE RWANDAN
GENOCIDE: A CASE OF LOCAL INCITEMENT,
INTERNATIONAL SILENCE, AND THE
PREVALENCE OF THE “TRIBALISM” FRAME**

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Abstract

The 7th of April 2024 witnessed the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. In barely three months, more than a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically killed (United Nations, 2024) in what would become one of the worst chapters in the recent history of humankind (Lawal, 2024). While in the 2003 *Media Trial*, the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda established the influence of Rwandan hate media in fueling the violence, international media covered mostly expatriates' evacuations, attracting little attention to the extent of the conflict at hand (Thompson, 2007).

This thesis aims to shed light on the role that international media played in the lack of international response to the Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsis. By assessing the existing gap in the literature regarding comprehensive literature reviews on international media framing of the genocide, it seeks to depict how Western newspapers partook in silencing the extent of the conflict. Building on previous research, this thesis will focus on the prevalence of certain news frames when it comes to the depiction of the events, most notable, that of the atrocities as a *tribal war* downplayed by Eurocentric visions of the African continent, instead of a systematically planned genocide.

The study will systematically review the existing literature on international media framing of the events that took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994, with the purpose of finding the frame that has been most consistently identified by researchers, which has been found to be that of *tribalism*. Because of the inconsistencies in the use of framing as methodology, systematic analysis has been chosen as a means of finding whether different authors have reached similar conclusions in spite of the inherently subjective nature of framing studies. Ultimately, this research aims at highlighting the impact of mainstream newspapers in the perception of the conflict in Rwanda on public opinion.

Key words: Rwandan genocide, literature analysis, systematic review, framing theory, tribal war, Western media bias

Resumen

El 7 de abril de 2024 se cumplió el 30 aniversario del genocidio contra los Tutsis en Ruanda. En apenas tres meses, más de un millón de Tutsis y de Hutus moderados fueron asesinados de forma sistemática (Naciones Unidas, 2024) en lo que se convertiría en uno de los peores capítulos de la historia reciente de la humanidad (Lawal, 2024). Mientras que, en el conocido como *Juicio de los Medios* de 2003, el Tribunal Penal Internacional para Ruanda estableció la influencia de los medios de comunicación de odio ruandeses en el fomento de la violencia, los medios internacionales cubrieron principalmente las evacuaciones de los expatriados, prestando poca atención a la magnitud del conflicto en cuestión (Thompson, 2007).

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo esclarecer el papel que desempeñaron los medios de comunicación internacionales en la falta de respuesta internacional al genocidio ruandés contra los Tutsis. Tras identificar una laguna existente en la literatura en lo que se refiere a revisiones bibliográficas exhaustivas sobre el encuadre mediático internacional del genocidio, se pretende describir cómo los periódicos occidentales participaron en el silenciamiento del verdadero alcance del conflicto. Basándose en estudios anteriores, esta tesis se centrará en la prevalencia de ciertos encuadres informativos a la hora de describir los acontecimientos, el más notable, el de las atrocidades como *guerra tribal* minimizada por las visiones eurocéntricas del continente, en lugar de un genocidio sistemáticamente planificado.

Este estudio examinará de forma sistemática la literatura existente sobre el encuadre mediático internacional de los acontecimientos que tuvieron lugar en Ruanda entre abril y julio de 1994, con el propósito de encontrar el encuadre que ha sido identificado de forma más consistente por los investigadores, que se ha determinado como el de *tribalismo*. Debido a las incoherencias en el uso del encuadre como metodología, se ha optado por el análisis sistemático como medio para averiguar si diferentes autores han llegado a conclusiones similares a pesar de la naturaleza inherentemente subjetiva de los estudios de encuadre. En definitiva, esta investigación pretende resaltar el impacto de los periódicos de gran difusión en la percepción del conflicto de Ruanda en la opinión pública.

Palabras clave: Genocidio de Ruanda, análisis de literatura, revisión sistemática, *framing* o encuadre, guerra tribal, sesgo mediático occidental

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Declaración de Uso de Herramientas de IA Generativa en Trabajos Fin de Grado en Relaciones Internacionales.

Por la presente, yo, Angélica Samaniego Arbide, estudiante de Relaciones Internacionales de Comunicación Global de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas al presentar mi Trabajo Fin de Grado titulado "A systematic literatura review of framing studies on the Rwandan genocide: A case of local incitement, international silence, and the prevalence of the tribalism frame", declaro que he utilizado la herramienta de IA Generativa ChatGPT u otras similares de IAG de código sólo en el contexto de las actividades descritas a continuación:

1. **Asistente en la elaboración de referencias bibliográficas:** Para asegurar que la estructura fuera correcta según el estilo APA, aunque su redacción fuera manual
2. **Traductor:** Para traducir textos de un lenguaje a otro
3. **Asistente en la reformulación de ideas:** Utilizado para sugerir alternativas de redacción, asegurando la autoría original final en todo caso

Afirmo que toda la información y contenido presentados en este trabajo son producto de mi investigación y esfuerzo individual, excepto donde se ha indicado lo contrario y se han dado los créditos correspondientes (he incluido las referencias adecuadas en el TFG y he explicitado para qué se ha usado ChatGPT u otras herramientas similares). Soy consciente de las implicaciones académicas y éticas de presentar un trabajo no original y acepto las consecuencias de cualquier violación a esta declaración.

Fecha: 27/04/2025

Firma:



“The power of the media to create and destroy fundamental human values comes with great responsibility. Those who control such media are accountable for its consequences”.

(International Court of Justice, para.6)

1. INTRODUCTION

The 7th of April 2024 witnessed the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda. Only since 2003 does that date bear the title of *International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsis in Rwanda* (UNESCO, 2024), with the respective commemorations that recognition entails, none of which will ever do justice to the hundreds of thousands that lost their lives. In barely three months, more than a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were systematically killed (United Nations, 2024) in what would become one of the worst chapters in the recent history of humankind (Lawal, 2024) or, indeed, the most evident example of genocide since the Holocaust (Stanton, 2004).

The Rwandan genocide has since become a *textbook case* of the role of the media in genocide incitement (Straus, 2009). The United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) charged three journalists with *incitement to genocide* as a crime against humanity after 230 days of trial. Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, founders of Radio Télévision des Mille Collines, for hosting a radio station that incited murder even bluntly, going so far as to broadcast the names and locations of intended victims. Hassan Ngeze, board member of the RTMC Comité d’Initiative and founder as well as Chief Editor of Kangura Newspaper, for publishing inflammatory content that dehumanized the Tutsi for months preceding the genocide. (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 2019) (United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, 2003).

Judge Navanethem Pillay, President of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, was clear in her judgement against the defendants and the influence the media can have on public opinion:

“You were fully aware of the power of words, and you used the radio – the medium of communication with the widest public reach – to disseminate hatred and violence...

Without a firearm, machete or any physical weapon, you caused the death of thousands of innocent civilians”. (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), 2003, para.3)

Nonetheless, while in the now known as *2003 Media Trial*, the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda established the influence of Rwandan hate media in fueling the violence, international media covered mostly expatriates’ evacuations, attracting little attention to the extent of the conflict at hand (Thompson, 2007). A blind eye was turned on the people of Rwanda and initial signs were systematically dismissed, time and time again. Ambassadors and professors had warned of plans to exterminate the Tutsi as soon as two years before the genocide took place, and human rights groups warned of the mass killings that already started in 1993. The international community remained silent (Stanton, 2004).

International media at the time depicted the 1994 killings as a result of *ethnic* or *tribal* hostilities, distancing themselves from the attacks and thus absolving those who were responsible from the appropriate level of blame. Western media’s portrayal of the events that took place in Rwanda in 1994 serves as a striking example of flawed and insufficient news coverage (Chari, 2010). Research and court cases have since clearly shown the systematic planning and enforced bureaucracy involved in the conflict, which was organized at national scale by state functionaries and military officers who rejected the implementation of the Arusha Peace Accords (M. Hintjens, 2001). That same research, however, has often focused on the press coverage of the genocide by international media more broadly, or the framing of the news by some media more specifically.

Due to the existing gap in the literature, this thesis will examine what the prevailing international narrative regarding the presentation of the events unfolding in Rwanda between April and July 1994 was through a comprehensive literature review of the framing studies revolving around the subject. Given the inherent subjectivity of news frames analysis, it will seek to analyze the most commonly identified frames in research on coverage of the Rwandan genocide by international media, the most common of which has been determined to be the so-called *tribalism frame*. It will serve as a case study on the prevalence of a particular issue frame applied broadly by the Western world when portraying the African continent, and its effects on a specific country’s public opinion of an international conflict.

1.1. PURPOSE AND MOTIVATIONS

“A free, uncensored and unhindered press or other media is essential in any society to ensure freedom of opinion and expression and the enjoyment of other Covenant rights. It constitutes one of the cornerstones of a democratic society. However, what if the media is abused as a tool to direct an entire community to commit atrocities? What if the media is used as a device to convey evil? What are the limits, if any, of what media can broadcast?”

(Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020, p.3)

Media are the means most individuals have to get to know the world beyond their immediate surroundings. People read the news, watch TV, listen to the radio and complain about it all on Twitter or Facebook, or post about it on Instagram. Our personal views are built upon the images that are shown to us and the voices we are allowed to hear, the side of the story we are able to witness. This remains particularly true when the audience has no previous knowledge of the subject (Harper & Philo, 2013), which clearly applies to most of Western society in relation to the genocide that was taking place in the remote country of Rwanda, since it resulted in the press ignoring the relevance of the events and presenting them as yet one more chaotic chapter in Africa's unlucky history.

It is inaccurate to portray the media as purposefully trying to deceive its audiences. It is equally deceitful, however, to absolve them of any responsibility, as it is clear that each channel, newspaper or radio broadcast has a specific ideology that both shapes and creates a new reality, that reality being the one that reaches the public. This is also largely due to the fact that not every side of a story can be communicated for said communication to be effective, and the decision to focus on certain information, or to present such information from a particular angle, will always carry the burden of responsibility with it: the responsibility of letting that perspective become a new reality, going so far as to fundamentally change the nature of a conflict, from ethnic cleansing to mere rivalry.

Since close before the darkest chapter in Rwanda's history, on May 3rd 1993, the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek, the World Press Freedom Day, is celebrated (United Nations, 2024).

Cases in which media are weaponized, however, raise important questions surrounding the limits of human nature, the extent to which the hate they channel incites violence and the role that each person plays in both empowering media and realizing its effects on us. The role of the media in the incitement of genocide in Rwanda is one of such cases. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was the first in history which delivered verdicts against individuals responsible for genocide. It was also the first in history to recognize rape as a method of carrying out genocide. Even more importantly for the purpose of this thesis, the ICTR's so-called *media case* was the first in which an international court held media personnel accountable for charges related to the incitement of genocide (United Nations, s.f.), underlining the power of media to ignite human nature's worst impulses. And, yet, it was of those instances of global apathy, in which the world chose to look away as unimaginable horror engulfed a nation. It is this unbelievable dichotomy, of the power of media to both incite violence and suppress international interest, that caught the author's attention for this case.

A lot has been written on the international community's lack of response when forced to face the horrors of mass killings. A lot, as well, has been said on the local media's role in the incitement of the genocide. It is clear that the combination of both, hatred and silence, was key to sparking the conflict and allowing it to happen, since the literature has long shown that there is a link between the use of media and the crimes that unfolded, as well as there is between the lack of coverage and the lack of international response. It must be said, however, that the literature has mainly focused on international media as a whole or specific case studies centered around a single medium and its coverage of the conflict. There are no comprehensive studies on the prevalence of certain frames regarding the coverage of the genocide in Rwanda. In other words, there are no broad systematic literature reviews regarding the frames used by international media in the coverage of the events that took place in 1994. In fact, there is a wider lack of systematic reviews in the field of communications overall, most notably when it comes to the framing theory, as noted by Guenther, M. Gaertner & Zeitz (2020): "Despite the often-stated theoretical and conceptual weakness of [framing], and the different methodological approaches used, research on framing has grown steadily over the years. However, the number of systematic reviews of research on framing is limited in communication science" (p.1).

As a communications student, the author of this thesis could not help but wonder what role the press played in the silencing of the conflict. There seems to be consensus in the literature that the way the genocide was framed by the international media stemmed from both an inaccurate understanding of the conflict and a lack of interest and/or importance given to issues in the African continent. Notable issues with the theory of framing as too broad, too subjective or too inconsistent, however, undermined the rigor of further original analysis of framing in international media coverage of the Rwandan genocide. This is because different language styles were interpreted in different studies as characteristic of similar frames present in the news published by different newspapers, yet somehow many of the frames identified coincided across the research. The predominant use of textual analysis for the identification of frames equally provided too big of a space for subjectivity, potentially undermining the reliability of the findings. This is why a broad literature review was conducted, centered around news frames identified by multiple authors, in search of common ground on the issue.

In *Media as Political Actors? Issue Focusing on Selective Emphasis in the German Quality Press* Eilders (2000) argues that solely when different media give importance to the same matters is a political response to be expected. This statement highlights the importance of shedding light on the international media landscape as a whole, in order to understand the policies or lack thereof that news instigated. When researching the international media coverage of the genocide, a recurrent observation points at it not being presented as such, but rather as a *tribal war*, undermining the gravity of the events that were unfolding. There is no true justification for the identification of this frame, nor is it well researched outside of specific case studies, which is both why the main hypothesis of this thesis will be that *tribalism* was the predominant frame, but also why a systematic review is needed in order to determine if research agrees on this point.

These pages, then, do not aim at unraveling any truth that has not been previously brought to light. The aim of this thesis is, rather, to synthesize the existing literature on the international framing Rwandan 1994 genocide. While bringing together key conclusions reached by previous work on how Rwandan media played a role in the incitement of violence and how international media's framing of the conflict affected the international community's response, it will aim at establishing what the most commonly identified frames are in the literature on the international coverage and

whether they coincide with portraying the conflict as unimportant, or lesser than what it was: a large scale systematic genocide.

Specifically, it underscores the role of international media in fundamentally shaping public opinion to the point it hindered an international response to such atrocities. It also aims to reflect on the role of media in society through a case that represents the epitome of what could happen if there were no limits; if hate speech was protected under an ever ruling right to free speech and blunt propaganda set the agenda, and, despite the clarity of it, the international community chose to ignore the gravity of the situation.

Indeed, the importance of hate speech control has been on the rise, as governments around the world come together in an effort to combat online radicalization while protecting freedom of expression (Christchurch Call, 2024). Extremism online and radicalization on the streets are at an ever growing risk of real life attacks (Kaplan, Abou-Sabe, & De Luce, 2025) and the role of new technologies and social media has been put into question, as a uniting force that can force divides in society (Etumnu & Williams-Etumnu, 2023). In this context, a systematic study of how the framing by traditional media can affect international behavior, opinion and even public policy is a necessary step before delving into the intricacies of social media. A literature review of the role of mass media in the Rwandan Genocide contributes to further research on common ground and thus to a greater understanding of mass media influence in conflict and, more broadly, its effects on society.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Once the purpose has been presented, the questions this thesis will attempt to answer are the following:

- I. **How many framing studies are there on the international media coverage of the 1994 Rwanda genocide? What frames have these studies identified?**
- II. **Has the so-called *tribalism* frame been the most widely used frame regarding the portrayal of international media of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda?**

In order to answer these questions, the following pages will first dive into the theory of framing and the commonly found inconsistencies within this theoretical framework. This will serve as justification for the focus of this thesis on a broad literature review of framing studies on newspapers' coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis and the underlying purpose of finding common frames in spite of the methodological issue.

After the theoretical framework, a brief summary of Rwanda's recent history and the unfolding of the genocide against the Tutsi population between April and July 1994 will serve as a basis for the understanding of the gravity of the situation that was ignored by the international community. Because of this, as part of the historical background, this thesis will also briefly dive into the existent Rwandan media at the time and their role in inciting the genocide, in order to then move on to the state of the art when it comes to international media's portrayal of the country of Rwanda and their subsequent response to and portrayal of the mass killings. A brief overview on the literature specific to the portrayal of the events by international media will serve as understanding for the assumption that there is indeed a common frame mentioned time and time again, namely that of *tribalism*.

Finally, the discussion on the existent literature on the framing of the events revolves around the systematic review of the articles that specifically relate framing theory to the coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide by international media. Then, comparative analysis will serve as basis for the identification of the frames pointed at by framing research and the most prevalent ones amongst those. Once the most prevalent frame is identified, the last pages will briefly dive into its broad use for the depiction of African news by international, mostly Western, media.

1.3. HYPOTHESIS

Through the review of studies carried out on Western media, the main hypothesis of this thesis will be that the predominant frame associated to news coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide as portrayed by international media was the *tribal war* frame.

1.4. METHODOLOGY

This thesis conducts a comprehensive systematic review of scholarly articles covering framing of the genocide against the Tutsis by the international media. A systematic review is a type of scientific research in which the unit of analysis are the original primary studies on the same topic, which is why it falls under the category of secondary research (Sánchez-Serrano, Pedraza-Navarro, & Donoso-Gonzalez, 2022). As expressed by Dan & Julianna Raupp (2018):

“Systematic reviews – on account of their identification, evaluation, and synthesis of current knowledge – are crucial to the evidence-based movement and instrumental in revealing areas on which scientific consensus was reached and those in which consensus is still lacking. As such, they can help achieve consistency in a specific body of research by highlighting similarities and differences in conceptual work and methodology, which may be responsible for an apparent lack of consistency in previous studies. By revealing such differences, systematic reviews can help reconcile seemingly contradictory evidence, and enable researchers to build on each other’s work more efficiently” (p.4)

The choice of conducting a review of the literature lies in the recurrent lack of systematic reviews in the field of communications, more specifically when it comes to studies on framing theory (Guenther & M. Gaertner, 2020). There is an observed “tendency of framing scholars to focus on-issue specific frames [that] has been especially criticized in relation to experimental research. [...] For validation of these effects, it is imperative that researchers [...] connect findings to the broader theoretical framework of framing” (Brugman, Burges & Steen, 2017, p.3). In addition, systematic reviews present tangible advantages in comparison to narrative reviews, since the former contribute to a greater accuracy in the depiction of the current state of research by lowering the likelihood of selection bias (Dan & Julianna Raupp, 2018).

The chosen methodology is similar to systematic reviews with framing theory as their main theoretical framework conducted elsewhere. There is, as mentioned above, a worrying lack of such studies, but some of the few examples are: *A systematic review of frames in news reporting of health risks: Characteristics, construct consistency vs. name diversity, and the relationship of*

frames to framing functions (Dan & Julianna Raupp, 2018); *Research on media framing in Ghana, a systematic review* (Asiamah, Osei-Mensah, & Sackey, 2022); *Recategorizing political frames: a systematic review of metaphorical framing in experiments on political communication* (Brugman, Burgers, & Steen, 2017) or *A systematic review of responsibility frames and their effects in the health context* (Temmann, Wiedicke, Schaller, Scherr, & Reifegerste, 2021).

1.4.1. Study selection

The study selection process began with a broad search on Google Scholar, with the purpose of capturing as many articles, book chapters or theses as possible. Then, different databases were chosen based on how important the topic was perceived to be, in line with the methodology used by Burgman, Burgers & Steen (2017), through a screening of their relation to the field of communications. Similar to the approach in the study Dan & Julianna Raupp (2018), the Communication & Mass Media Complete database on EBSCOhost was examined. Additional databases such Academic Search Complete on MyEBSCO, Taylor&Francis online, Academic Search Premier were also included. Lastly, manual screening allowed for the inclusion of cited papers that could not be retrieved through the initial database screening.

The search tackled articles containing the words *Rwanda* and *genocide* and *framing* or *frame* or *theme* and *media* or *press* or *news* or *coverage* as part of their abstract, in order to conduct screening on articles that specifically focused on media framing of the conflict.

As mentioned above, Google Scholar was used for a broad first search, The words searched for were *allintitle: frame OR media OR coverage & "Rwandan genocide"*. This resulted 56 articles: 29 direct results and 27 cited ones. Out of those, 8 were duplicates. That left 48 articles for manual screening out of which 36 were deemed unrelated, either because they analyzed Rwandan media framing and its consequences in the incitement of genocide such as in *Multiparty transitions, elite manipulation and the media: reassessing the Rwandan genocide* by L Kirschke (2000) or because they studied a later point of Rwanda's history such as in *The Commodification of Genocide: Part.I Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)* by HJM Vianney & Woodward (2015).

This manual screening led to 12 articles found on Google Scholar which met the necessary criteria for the analysis and allowed for a multitude of master theses to be included in the study. Bachelor theses were excluded, but book chapters included.

Communication and Mass Media Complete showed 4 search results.

Out of those, 1 was deemed relevant: Alozie, E. (2007). *'What did they say?' African media coverage of the first 100 days of the Rwanda crisis*. In A. Thompson (Ed.), *The media and the Rwanda genocide* (pp.211-230). London: Pluto Press.

It was, however, too similar to another study by the same author on the framing of the same newspapers: Alozie, E. C. (2010). *Voices in the hills of Rwanda: African press accountability of the 1994 pogrom*. *International Communication Gazette*, 72(7), 589-617
<https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485103781>

Only the second was included, already within the 12 articles found through Google Search.

Academic Search Premier showed 10 results. Out of those 7, were deemed unimportant. The remaining 3 showed one duplicated from the ones already selected, so 2 articles were included.

Taylor&Francis online showed 10 results. Out of those, 9 were deemed irrelevant for the research. The remaining 1 was duplicated, so it was not included.

Academic Search Complete on MyEBSCO showed 10 results. 7 were deemed irrelevant. The remaining 3 were duplicated.

Finally, through screening of cited articles, 2 more articles were included, leading to a total of 16.

The two that were included manually are the following:

1. **Sendín Guetiérrez, J. C. (2008).** *Building Reality on TV: An Analysis of Televisión Española's Coverage of Ruandan Genocide*. *Zer* 13(24), 11-18.
2. **Wall, M. A. (1997).** *The Rwanda Crisis: An Analysis of News Magazine Coverage*. Sage Publications, London, *Gazette* 59(2): 121-124.

The unit of analysis comprised journal articles, book chapters and master's thesis published between the year that the genocide took place (2014) and 2024, thus encompassing a total of 10

years. The exact timeframe chosen is between April 1994 (the start of the events) and April 2024. The search was done in English, yielding articles that were either entirely written in English or had their abstract translated into English.

1.4.2. Article selection procedure

Following the selection procedure established by Brugman, Burgers & Steen (2017), the systematic review encompasses a total of five steps. The first step consisted of a database search through keywords. Secondly, the articles that were found to be duplicated in multiple databases were removed. The third step consisted of a manual screening of publications through a content analysis of the titles and abstracts, mainly to dispose of those that covered news coverage by Rwandan media, instead of international media. Then, through an examination of the methodology, only those studies with an established methodology were included. Finally, the last step was to qualitatively synthesize the articles selected.

The following table synthesizes criteria for inclusion and exclusion, as provided by Asiamah, Osei-Mensah & Sackey (2022) which includes *language, population, paper type, access* and *context* as criteria. On top of these criteria, *date* was added to this study, which they did not add in theirs because it was the first systematic review on media framing in Ghana. It was considered relevant to this study as only those written after the genocide took place can be taken into account and not those studies on past conflicts in the country.

Table I: Inclusion and exclusion for media framing articles on international news coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	Papers written in English and/or with the abstract translated into English	Any article which does not have its abstract translated into English
Population	Papers on non-Rwandan media as a data-source	Papers on Rwandan media as a data-source

Type	Academic journal articles, book chapter, master's theses	All other types: conference papers, books, reports, bachelor's theses...
Access	All content	No articles were removed based on access
Date	Articles published from April 1994 to April 2024	Articles published before and after that date
Context	Articles that used framing within the context of how international media made salience of specific issues in relation to coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide	Papers that used the keywords highlighted above as examples in the context of other topics, especially in relation to framing by Rwandan media

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the table provided by Asiamah, Osei Mensah & Sackey (2022)

Once the articles that fit the inclusion and exclusion criteria have been selected, Mendeley Reference Manager has helped map the research and dispose of the duplicates. Then, once the articles have been selected, they have been synthesized in relation to their content on the framing of the events.

Finally, comparative analysis has allowed for the identification of the most common frames from a broad interpretive standpoint. The identification of those key frames has allowed for the emergence of a recurring narrative pattern regarding the use of the *tribalism frame*. The choice for this frame as the most prevalent is explained in the following chapters, through historical Western coverage of Africa having a tendency to focus on *tribalism* and research by various actors pointing at this emphasis when it comes to coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis by international media.

2. STATE OF THE ART

“Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation”

(Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p.182)

First, the state of the art requires an overview of the events that took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994, in order to then understand how Western media completely underplayed the atrocities by portraying them as far less than what they truly consisted of: planned, systematic attacks against an group or ethnic community in society; or, in other words, a full-scale genocide.

2.1. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RWANDAN 1994 GENOCIDE

“The Rwanda genocide is neither reducible to a tribal meltdown rooted in atavistic hatreds nor to a spontaneous outburst of blind fury set off by the shooting down of the presidential plane on April 6, as officials of the Habyarimana regime have repeatedly claimed. However widespread, both views are travesties of reality. What they mask is the political manipulation that lies behind the systematic massacre of civilian populations. Planned annihilation, not the sudden eruption of long-simmering hatreds, is the key to the tragedy of Rwanda”

(Lemarchand, 1995, p.8)

This chapter will first focus on Rwanda’s historical background and the succession of events that allowed for the atrocities that eventually unfolded to take place. The main purpose is to show the delicate intricacies of social inequalities exacerbated by the colonial experience, and the eventual emergence of ethnic extremism, all of which served as catalysts for a message that has been proven to have been exacerbated and disseminated by media outlets, leading to a rise in violence towards a specific social group only comparable to that of the Holocaust.

Once the context for the emergence of the violence is established and the role of Rwandan media in the incitement of those crimes discussed, it will be compared to the perspectives of international

media on Rwanda and their role in the underplaying of the atrocities. As has been mentioned, the analysis will focus on the literature on media framing in relation to the international media's perspective, in order to list and identify the frames recognized by the literature. Once tribalism is pointed out, the last pages will dive into how a tribalist perspective of news framing of Rwanda has been built historically through a similar coverage of African news as a whole from the Western world.

2.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: COLONIALISM

There were *early signs* of the genocide, but they were consistently ignored by the international community. In fact, the dehumanization of Tutsis had already taken place during the massacres of 1959, 1962 and 1972 (Stanton, 2009) and long before, as a result of colonialism, since it had “helped to intensify colonial differentiation between Tutsi and Hutu, [...] by relegating the vast majority of Hutu to [...] forced cultivation [...], and by actively favoring Tutsi in access to administrative posts, education, and jobs in the public sector” (Newbury, 1995, p.12).

It has been suggested that “classification in itself is not problematic. Problem emerges when this classification becomes a means and basis of hierarchies, inequalities which further lead to deprive and violence” (Bisht, 2021, p.18). Before 1994, Rwandan society is often portrayed as divided in three main groups: Hutu (85% of the population), Tutsi (around 14%) and Twa (near 1%). Before colonialism, Tutsis typically held higher social positions, while Hutus occupied lower strata of society (United Nations, s.f.). These, however, cannot be seen as racial or ethnic groups, as the process of colonization tried to portray them (Newbury, 1995). In fact, “being identified as Tutsi or Hutu before colonialism was *fluid* and based significantly on class with wealthy Hutus able to attain an honorary Tutsi title” (Lawal, 2024, *What caused the Genocide?* para.4). These groups were rather associated to wealth, with Hutus who owned more cattle being assimilated into the Tutsi group while impoverished Tutsi would be seen as Hutu (United Nations, s.f.). Put simply, “the Tutsi and the Hutu cannot be considered two ethnic groups because they share too many common traits. They share the same language, live in the same area, intermarried, and followed the same traditions” (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020, p.4).

The origins of these classifications remain debated. It is generally believed that the Twa, a hunter gatherer community, were first to settle in the region. They were later joined by Hutu horticulturists migrating from the East, who gradually became the majority. Between 12th and 15th centuries, a small number of armed pastoralist Tutsis, likely from Southern Ethiopia, arrived in Rwanda and established political control over the Hutu and the Twa. Historically, then, the distinction between the Hutu and the Tutsi was not rooted in ethnicity but rather in geographic origin and political affiliation with the ruling monarchy. Interactions amongst groups remained mostly peaceful before the colonial period, and the system was more comparable to a caste system than it is to ethnic divisions. (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020)

The Berlin Conference assigned the territory of Rwanda to Germany, under whose rule the existing hierarchy of Tutsi chiefs above Hutus would be maintained (United Nations, s.f.). In 1916, however, Belgian troops arrived from Congo and would seize control of the territory, and it was under Belgian rule that all of Rwanda's population was categorized according to those three categories presented above. This formal classification clearly facilitated the rapid scale and intensity of the events that unfolded. Ethnic classification was first introduced on Rwandan ID cards by the Belgian colonial administration, but the system persisted after independence. It proved fundamental in shaping, solidifying and sustaining ethnic identity (Fussell, 2001). The colonial administration classified people as belonging to one group or another in terms of physical characteristics: While Tutsis were tall, Hutus were shorter, and any *mixed* origin Rwandans were classified as Hutu (Gonzalo, Lavin, & Rukebeshu, 2017). "By the end of the colonial period in Rwanda, though not all Tutsi were wealthy and powerful, most of those who were wealthy and powerful were Tutsi" (Newbury, 1995, p.12).

These ethnic classifications, as a result of 19th century European racial theories, would then respond to supposed racial differences that would eventually fuel Hutu extremism. Tutsis would be portrayed as superior, an "aristocratic race" of "black Caucasian conquerors", Hutus as second class Bantu peasants, and Twa hunter-gatherers as "aboriginal Pygmies" (Omaar & De Waal, 1995, p.156).

2.1.2. EARLY SIGNS OF VIOLENCE

“Although evidence existed to suggest that genocide was imminent, and then occurring, few in the international community acknowledged it as such and even fewer considered intervening to end the violence. This failure of the international community to intervene is one of the twentieth century’s greatest tragedies”

(Harrison, 2009, p.1-2)

Palpable ethnic conflicts commenced during the wave of decolonialization in the 1950s. The Hutu political movement was gaining traction, while parts of the Tutsi elite feared a loss of their acquired privileges and opposed democratization. By 1959, a violent incident triggered a Hutu uprising, which marked what would later be known as the beginning of the *Hutu Peasant Revolution*, which lasted until 1961 and brought Tutsi dominance to an end (United Nations, s.f.). This movement would have likely lost momentum were it not because of the sustained political, moral and logistical backing of the Catholic Church and the tutelle [*sic*] authorities. This intervention facilitated a drastic transfer of power from the Tutsi to the Hutu, forcing thousands of Tutsi families to flee to neighboring countries (Lemarchand, 1995).

It was in 1962 that Rwanda gained independence. Tutsi refugees in Tanzania and Zaire, seeking to reclaim their lost status and determined to regain power in Rwanda, started coordinating and launching attacks against Hutu forces and the Hutu-led government. These attacks fueled retaliation against the Tutsis, leading to a greater number of refugees, which, by the 1980s reached 480.000 in the neighboring countries of Burundi, Uganda, Zaire and Tanzania. While these Tutsi refugees persistently advocated for their internationally recognized right to return to Rwanda, President Juvenal Habyarimana opposed their repatriation, arguing that the country’s population was already too large and its economy too weak to sustain them. (United Nations, s.f.)

His negative led to the formation of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1988 (United Nations, s.f.) and subsequent invasion of Rwanda by Ugandan Tutsi exiles on October 1, 1990 (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020). There were 7,000 fighters, mostly Tutsi, but also some Hutu (United Nations, s.f.). They successfully defeated an army three times larger, in the hopes of

quickly overturning a corrupt government, but did not foresee the consequences it would have on fueling further ethnic hatred and political manipulation (Lemarchand, 1995). Tutsis everywhere were now labeled as accomplices of the RPF (United Nations, s.f.), with Tutsis suspected of collaborating with RPF being arrested and even executed (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020). Approximately 8,000 Tutsis were killed as part of these political assassinations (Omaar & De Waal, 1995). Hutu members of the opposition parties were denounced as traitors, with the media, notably the radio, deepening ethnic tensions by spreading unfounded rumors (United Nations, s.f.).

The Arusha Peace Accords were signed in August 1993, seemingly bringing the conflict between the Hutu-led government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to an end (United Nations, s.f.). These agreements, signed in Tanzania, aimed to distribute power between the government and the military, uphold human rights and deploy the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). The dispatch of these 2,500 UN peacekeepers had the objective of ensuring compliance, even if president Habyarimana sought to delay the process, as it would have politically sidelined Hutu extremists (Omaar & De Waal, 1995).

2.1.3. THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSIS

“Remember the figures, never forget them, in one hundred days up to one million people were hacked, shot, strangled, clubbed and burned to death. Remember, carve this into your consciousness: one million. This estimate equates to three hundred and thirty-three and a third murders an hour, or five and a half killings every minute”

(Ronyane, 2001, as cited in Estes, 2010, p.45)

In 1994, General Romeo Dallaire was the commander of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). He warned the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the Hutu's systematic campaign which aimed at exterminating Tutsis with little success (Stanton, 2009). On April 4th, 1994, the UN Security Council voted to maintain its mission in Rwanda. The following day, during a meeting at a regional summit in Dar es Salam, Tanzania, Rwanda's president agreed to a transfer of power. “As Habyarimana returned to Kigali” however, “extremists in the Presidential Guard [...] set in motion their final solution” (Omaar & De Waal, 1995, p.157).

On April 6th, 1994, President Juvenal Habyarimana's airplane was shot down at the airport in Kigali, effectively killing him, a Hutu. This event is often presented as the catalyst for the violence that would follow, igniting the longstanding ethnic tensions between the country's Hutu majority and Tutsi minority. The circumstances under which the President Habyarimana was killed are still disputed to this day, as responsibility is attributed both to Hutu extremists willing to retain power as well as the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front or RPF. (Saaida, 2024)

In the following days, events unfolded rapidly. On April 7th, 1994, Prime Minister Agathe Uwingiyimana and ten Belgian UN Peacekeepers charged with her protection, were assassinated. Within 48 hours, the targeted killings of political opponents would lead to the complete eradication of Hutu opposition (Gonzalo, Lavin, & Rukebeshu, 2017). When faced with the violence UN peacekeepers were starting to face, Belgium and the United States would pressure the UN Security Council for a withdrawal of UNAMIR, "and thousands of Rwandese who had sought protection at UN military bases were abandoned to their fate" (Omaar & De Waal, 1995, p.157). Around 5-10 % of the country's entire population was murdered "between the second week of April and the third week of May 1994; one of the highest casualty rates of any population in history from non-natural causes" (Prunier, 1995, as cited in Hintjens, 1999, p.242).

Because of the colonial background of the country and the ethnic tensions that already existed, international media presented the killings "as the outcome of deep-seated 'ethnic' or 'tribal hatred, between Tutsi and Hutu Rwandans" (Hintjens, 2001, p.25). It has since been proven, however, that the massacres were not a spontaneous and uncoordinated outbreak of violence. Rather, extensive research on this period; such as oral testimonies, and even legal proceedings at the UN Tribunal in Arusha, has demonstrated that the killings were meticulously planned and bureaucratically enforced, orchestrated by an inner circle of state functionaries, primarily high-ranking military officers from northwestern Rwanda, who resisted the implementation of the Arusha Peace accords (1993). The Hutu population was persuaded to go after those presented as their "enemy" in what remains one of the most extreme manifestations of race-based extermination since the Holocaust. (Hintjens, 2001)

Before April 1994, Rwanda had 7 million inhabitants and the highest population density of the continent. During the years leading up to the genocide, the country faced widespread poverty and recurring famine (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020). The scale of the violence that the country faced leading up to the end of the 20th century was unprecedented in magnitude. The government itself was extensively dedicated to genocide (Omaar & De Waal, 1995). By the beginning of July that same year, more than a million citizens were killed, and an estimated 150.000-250.000 women raped, in what constituted a clear genocide (United Nations, s.f.). The sexual violence aspect of the conflict is generally paid less attention to than the killings that took place (Rafferty, 2018), but it is important to note that “when a military force’s command utilizes systematic and widespread sexual violence as a weapon of war against a specific group, in both intent and effect, it fulfills every condition of the Geneva Convention standards of genocide” (Sitkin, Lee, & Lee, 2019, p.1).

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 955, passed on December 8, 1994, officially recognized the atrocities committed in Rwanda between April and August 1994 as genocide. While the official UN number of victims is around 800.000, the Ministry of Interior of Rwanda placed the death toll at 2.100.000 in December 1994 (Gonzalo, Lavin, & Rukebasha, 2017). The methodical and efficient planning behind the genocide should not be overlooked simply because of the simplicity of the weapons used, such as machetes, clubs or fragmentation grenades (Omaar & De Waal, 1995).

The international community has been deeply criticized this past three decades for its inaction in stopping the bloodshed, leaving the small country of Rwanda alone in leading with such devastation and trauma lasting to this day (Saaida, 2024). But, were the media responsible for the genocide? AlJazeera notes that “a combination of colonial-era favoritism towards the Tutsis that angered other groups, a media landscape that was ripe for spreading hate and the slowness of the international community to respond to the crisis all combined to fuel the genocide” (Lawal, 2004, para.2).

2.2. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE GENOCIDE

2.2.1. THE ROLE OF RWANDAN MEDIA IN THE INCITEMENT OF THE GENOCIDE

“If the downing of the plane was the trigger, then RTLM, Kangura, and CDR were the bullets in the gun. The trigger had such a deadly impact because the gun was loaded. The Chamber therefore considers that the killing of the Tutsi civilians can be said to have resulted, at least in part, from the message of ethnic targeting for death that was clearly and effectively disseminated”

Response of the trial Chamber of the International Criminal
Tribunal for Rwanda in (May, 2010, p.183)

The role of media in the development of the 1994 conflict in Rwanda has extensively been discussed in the literature. The most comprehensive book on the matter is likely Allan Thompson’s book titled *The media and the Rwanda genocide* in which the combination of works by a multitude of authors sheds light on what is described as the “media dichotomy”; that is, “the strange dichotomy of local media, on one side, fueling the killing, while the international media, on the other side, virtually ignored or misunderstood what was happening” Roméo Dallaire in (Thompson, 2007, p.12).

President Juvenal Habyarimana’s party, the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND) used two main channels for the delivery of their hate speech: *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (which was endorsed by the president’s relatives), and the newspaper *Kangura*, financed by members of government, the ruling party and the military. Through radio and print, both media outlets spread anti-Tutsi and anti-rebel faction propaganda.

As early as January 1994, in response to the signing of the Arusha Accords, the radio station began calling for the extermination of the Tutsis. After Habyarimana’s assassination, the rhetoric intensified, encouraging murder as an act of vengeance. On May 5th, the message was that Rwanda needed to be “cleansed” of Tutsis (Chari, 2010). Their publications included provocative cartoons of Tutsi women seducing UN peacekeepers and promoting the Hutu ten Commandments, which denounced any Hutu who associated with Tutsis as traitor (Li, 2007). There was another

government-owned television channel at the time called *Télévision Nationale Rwandaise*, which had existed since 1992. It is argued, however, that access to television was limited to a privileged elite. It was a similar case when it comes to the film industry, since there were no “proper Rwandan cinemas” other than a few that screened foreign films (Gustafsson, 2024).

Rwandan media outlets *Radio-Télévision des Mille Collines* and *Kangura* Newspaper were tried for playing a major role in inciting violence before and during the Rwandan genocide (International Court of Justice, 2003) as demonstrated by the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda. The chief founders/editors of these media were assigned individual criminal responsibility “for this incitement to genocide on the basis of what it call[ed] ‘superior responsibility’ of the defendants for failing to act to prevent the genocidal harm that they should have predicted would result from their publications, broadcasts and speeches” (May, 2010, p.183). In their paper *From hate speech to incitement of genocide: the role of the media in the Rwandan genocide*, Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas (2020) go as far as to argue that “without the media, the genocide would have never reached the dimensions and levels of rage that it did” (p.3). Others, such as Estes (2010), that “the purpose of [Radio-télévision des Milles Collines], had always been to incite the Rwandan Hutu majority to genocide” (p.44-45).

The *hate media* policies of the MRND and their proven role in the incitement of the genocide have since served as justification for strong media censorship and lack of freedom of the press, with the excuse of preventing further tragedies. Criticism against the corrupt government or denouncement of violations or human rights have been violently suppressed, moving the country to a level of information-control reminiscent of the one during pre-genocide times. (Li, 2007)

2.2.2. INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

“Despite the objectivity that the media is expected to maintain, there is no denying that the media, whether intentionally or not, has occasionally reported on events and issues in ways that have misled or been misinterpreted by the public. The Western media’s treatment of the Rwandan Genocide is a clear example of inaccurate and incomplete news coverage”
(Estes, 2010, p.33)

At the beginning of the conflict, most American press conveyed the idea of a tribal war taking place in Rwanda (Newbury, 1995). Journalists, with little previous knowledge of the country and certainly on the developments of genocide “failed to understand that the killing was something totally new, that this was not a continuity of what happened before” (Estes, 2010, p.34). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum states in its website that “the international community largely ignored the Rwandan Genocide, labeling it as an ‘internal conflict’” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, s.f., para.2).

While in April international media presented the killings as resulting from *ethnic hatreds*, by May, reports surfaced in some newspapers in France, the UK and the US providing evidence of genocide and contradicting earlier claims of civil war and disorder. In November 1994, the United Nations Security Council established an international tribunal for Crimes Against Humanity, formally acknowledging the genocide. Despite this, during this period, US government employees were allegedly instructed not to use the term genocide in official statements regarding Rwanda (Hintjens, 1999). “The enormity of the bloodshed should have been recognized as genocide immediately, but, due to Rwanda’s remote geographic location and its lack of influence in the international arena, thousands of men, women, and children were slaughtered while world powers turned a blind eye” (Estes, 2010, p.45).

In *How the Newspapers El País, Le Monde, Le Soir and The New York Times Treated Information on the Genocide in Rwanda*, Gonzalo, Lavin & Rukebesha (2017) found a correlation “between the volume of information and the degree to which the respective countries were implicated in the conflict” (p.1216), showing a direct link between media coverage and public policy. This is only

the top of the iceberg when it comes to the effect that a certain portrayal of the events occurring in Africa may have on Western society's views on the continent. In the words of General Dallaire, commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR): "one good journalist on the ground was worth a battalion of troops" [...]. "But the media coverage was not enough in April, May and June to create an outcry in the international community" (Dallaire, 2019, p.16). It was most ironical that international media only paid attention to Rwanda when the genocide was over, in order to cover the increasing "refugee crisis" (Dallaire, 2019). There seems to be a general consensus on the lack of in-depth and accurate coverage of the events.

It might be necessary to also show a lighter note on the subject. In spite of the general trend pointing towards misleading coverage of the events that unfolded that would lead to the biggest most atrocious killings of the second half of the 20th century, the role of the journalists that covered the conflict must not be completely disregarded. In other words, while "a fair share of the blame has [...] been put on Western media for not reporting in an accurate way on the genocide" and "this view implies that a more accurate way of conveying news and information could have prevented the genocide" it must be admitted that, when compared to the news coverage of similar conflicts in Bosnia or South Africa, the press was actually quicker and more accurate (Gustafsson, 2010, p.80).

In a similar light, Catherine Bond (2019) wrote a chapter in Allan Thompson's book *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond* titled *Listening Carefully, Looking Harder: The Role of Language in Media Coverage during the Rwandan Genocide, 1994* in which she argued that "most of the articles [...] were partly "right" in that [the] choice of words conveyed the systematic nature of the killing, and not wholly "wrong" in that being caught up in it was, for a while at least, chaotic for everyone" (p.59). The simplification of the news, however, is undeniable, and had in many cases to do with the media itself. For instance, "all footage of the genocide used in Swedish television news was purchased from international news agencies, such as Associated Press and Reuters TV News, which provided these images to other countries as well" (Gustafsson, 2010, p.93). The limits of the media quickly translate into the limits of the narrative itself.

2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE RATIONALITY OF GENOCIDE VS. ITS PORTRAYAL AS A TRIBAL WAR

A brief overview of the literature on international media coverage of the 1994 Rwanda genocide reveals a tendency towards the focus on *tribalism*. Even if not from a *framing theory* perspective, this emphasis is common across the literature.

In 1995, a mere months after the genocide took place, Lemarchand (1995) wrote *The rationality of genocide*, a brief article on the image portrayed by the media of the killings that had recently taken place in Rwanda. He questions “the image of Rwanda conveyed by the media” as that of “a society gone amok” (p.8) by emphasizing the *rationality* needed for the eruption of the planned, systematic killing of such a large part of the civilian population. In his words:

“Ironically, just as ‘tribalism’ is being reaffirmed by the media as the bane of the continent, Rwanda’s descent into hell makes it a society not unlike others in Europe or Asia where genocide has been intrinsic to their recent historical experience. Seen the broader context of 20th century genocides, the Rwanda tragedy underscores the universality – one might say normality – of African phenomena. The logic that set in motion the infernal machine of the Rwanda killings is no less ‘rational’ than that which presided over the extermination of millions of human beings in Hitler’s Germany or Pol Pot’s Cambodia” (Lemarchand, 1995, p.8).

That same year, in 1995, Catherine Newbury wrote *Background to genocide: Rwanda*. While focusing on the economic, social and political factors that led to the spark of the violence, she also mentions the role of the media in the change of narrative: “The international community was shocked by what happened in Rwanda. We should be equally shocked by the distortions of the media and the dithering of the western [*sic*] powers in formulating a response” (p.16). In the conclusion, she refers to the dominant narrative soon after the events unfolded: “Far from tribal warfare erupting in the vacuum created by the collapse of the state, genocide in Rwanda resulted from the machinations of state actors seeking to extend and consolidate their power” (p.16).

In *When identity becomes a knife* Hitjens (2001) analyzes the violent events of 1994 Rwanda through identity politics. She argues that the identities of Hutu and Tutsi were historically constructed and later weaponized by the government, leading to the catastrophic mass killings. She also critiques the narrative given by the international media at the time: “The story given was that the killings of April-July 1994 were the result of the killing of the President, and arose from the intense anger of Hutu against Tutsi Rwandans” (p.41). She names this phenomenon “international media’s susceptibility of propaganda” (p.50) and equates it to similar news coverage during the violence in former Yugoslavia, where “naïve, one-sided accounts of the conflict were fabricated and swallowed whole by western journalists who knew no better, and were easily duped” (p.50).

In Cherice Joyann Estes’ essay on *The Western Media and the Portrayal of the Rwandan Genocide*, the main argument is that Western media understated the magnitude of the violence that was taking place in Rwanda, while “recognizing the outside media’s role in mischaracterization of the Rwandan situation [as] particularly useful when attempting to understand why western [sic] governments were ineffective in their response to the atrocity” (p. 33). The main characterization of the media identified is that of a *tribal war* or the continuation of a *civil war* (Estes, 2010).

In *The role of the media in escalating conflict (a case of the Rwandan Genocide)*, Were reiterates:

“International media [...] misunderstood the nature of the conflict in Rwanda, terming it as tribal warfare. The majority focused on covering the evacuation of expatriates from Rwanda rather than focusing their efforts on the conflict itself. By mid-April the genocide had intensified and there were hardly any international journalists on site. They had left with the rest of expatriates” (Were, 2012, p.24).

These are examples of the many essays and articles that do not per se study the use of certain frames in the international coverage of the Rwandan genocide, yet still reference this specific treatment of the news.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Once the state of the art has been established, it is essential to describe and define the theories that have been used for the analysis of newspaper articles in those studies that will be discussed under the literature review. The main theoretical framework of this thesis revolves around the so-called *framing theory*, which has been selected because of its salience in the field of communications research. In spite of its wide use, however, inconsistencies surrounding both the theoretical meaning and practical use of the theory have proven challenging when it comes to new original analyses, which is why the theoretical framework will serve as basis for the finding of common ground in regards to the frames that have most consistently been pointed at by the literature on frames used in the international media coverage of the 1994 Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis.

3.1. MEDIA EFFECTS THEORIES

“Communication does not stand apart from reality. There is not, first, reality and then, second, communication. Communication participates in the formulization and change of reality”

(Ericson, 1998, as cited in Carter, 2013, introduction)

The mass communication environment is changing faster than it ever has (Baran & Davis, 2013). The last century has seen enormous changes in how individuals inform themselves, as messages could suddenly travel instantly, with the development of new media such as the radio and television. These changes also meant “people more and more depended and relied on information gathered by individuals whom they have never met” (Carter, 2013, p.2). This proves particularly essential, since, as “the conduits through which individuals learn of issues outside of their immediate life space” (Moy, Tewksbury, & Rinke, 2016) (p.1), media represent a great portion of who the audience is, where it gets the information from and how its delivery shapes it.

While the field of mass communications is grounded on the premise that media impact its audiences, the extent of these effects is paradoxically also the area with the most theoretical disagreement (McQuail, 1987). After all, are media not part of the reality they supposedly shape?

Do media originate conflict or are they a means to bring it to light and thus amplify it? Do individuals not hear what they are willing to listen to? To what extent can the amplification of a single perspective of an issue completely distort it in the public agenda? These are simply some examples of questions that studies on mass media have historically sought answers to.

Particularly, the process of media agenda eventually shaping the public agenda is one of the most widely studied in the field of mass media effects. For media narratives to influence the public agenda, there are three key conditions that must be met: the repeated presence of certain elements in the media (the so-called *accumulation*) alignment of these themes across different media (*consonance*) and their widespread *presence* generating a dominant climate of opinion, as argued by Noelle-Neumann (1980) (as cited in Gaitán Moya, Piñuel Raigada, & Aguila-Coghlan, 2016). The topics that receive the most extensive coverage, by occupying largest spaces in television, newspapers and other mass media, create conditions for a more systematic exposure (called *cultivation*), which, in turn, contributes to a limited perception of reality by fostering shared narratives, interpretations and values, as argued by Gerbner (1976, as cited in Gaitán Moya, Piñuel Raigada, & Aguila-Coghlan, 2016).

The theory that media are able to set the public agenda is called *agenda-setting* and was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (Moy, Tewksbury, & Rinke, 2016). It argues that the media may not tell people what to think, but does have an effect on what they think about (Cohen, 1963 as cited by Abdulkhamidova, 2021). The way that the media covers conflicts sets the agenda of *what* matters and *why* this is the case (Chernow, 2016), as *agenda-setting* “refers to the ability of the mass media to signal to the public to the public what is important” (Moy, Tewksbury & Rinke, 2016, p.2).

Framing shares a lot in common with *agenda-setting*. Both theories emphasize the connection between media coverage of public policy and public perception of such policies (McCombs & Shaw as cited by Griffin, 2012). Framing, nonetheless, “expands beyond agenda-setting research into what people talk or think about by examining how they think and talk about issues in the news” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p.70). *Framing theory* and *agenda-setting theory* are media effects known as “long-term or cognitive” theories, sometimes referred to as “first-level” and “second-level”

agenda-setting (Linström & Marais, 2012). De Vreese (2005) summarizes this by writing that, while agenda-setting “deals with the salience of issues” the theory of framing is, instead, “concerned with the presentation of issues” (p53).

Dimitrova (2018) agrees that these concepts are fundamentally linked in nature: “Agenda-setting focuses on the perceived salience/importance overall. Framing focuses on the perspective taken on the issue” (p.9). She notes that contemporary research in political communication recognizes that it is not possible to discuss events without implicitly conveying an underlying perspective or narrative. She contrasts this acknowledgement, however, with the once prevailing *hypodermic model*, which was referred to as the *magic bullet*. This theory is also known as the *uniform effects model* and argued that exposing oneself to a message sent by the media has the same effect on everyone (Griffin, 2012). Communication studies have since evolved, and this is now known not to be the case. Media do not have such a direct effect on society. Dimitrova (2018) expresses this idea as follows: “That is not how political motivation works. Speakers and listeners both have motivations, preconceptions, and independent information. If a message is well received, it might be better characterized as resonating rather than having a mechanical effect on the message’s recipient” (p.9).

3.1.1. FRAMING THEORY

“When journalists select and produce news, how they frame it is consequential for citizens’ understanding of important issues”

(Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019, p.1)

The so-called framing theory has acquired significant standing within the field of communication studies (Koziner, 2013). It is one of the most widely used research theories in social science and, more specifically, in the field of communications (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019). The concept was introduced in 1972 by Gregory Bateson (Arowolo, 2017) in his book *A Theory of Play and Fantasy* (Tannen, 1993) who, according to Deborah Tannen (1993), “demonstrated that no communicative move, verbal or non-verbal, could be understood without reference to a metacommunicative message, or metamessage, about what is going on – that is, what frame of interpretation applies to

the move” (p.3). In other words, he used the term to describe how individuals understand the world around them by selectively focusing on certain aspects of reality while disregarding others, a process driven by individual cognitive mechanisms (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019).

According to McCombs and Ghanem (2001) “the origins of the term ‘framing’ in the context of communication trace back to photography and cinematography, where framing refers to variables such as camera angle and perspective in shaping the style of a visual message” (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019, p.6). While the theory was introduced into the fields of communications and psychology (Tannen, 1993), *framing* was largely developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in his book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (1974) (Linström & Marais, 2012). Goffman coined the framing theoretical framework from a philosophical concept of *frame*, which “centers the meaning of the world as it is constructed by individuals” (Collison-Randall, Hayday, Spaaij & Pippard, 2024, p.3). Since then, it has been applied to various disciplines, often with subtle changes in meaning (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019).

3.1.2. DEFINING FRAMES

Frames are defined in multitude of ways by different scholars. Gitlin (1980) stated that they are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (De Vreese, 2005, p.52). Sweetser and Fauconnier (1996) cited by Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar (2015) as “structured understandings of the way aspects of the world function” (p.2). Tankard (2001) and Reese (2001) are also widely quoted in the literature. As stated by Koziner (2013), while Tankard defines it as “a central organizing idea of information content that provides context and suggests what the subject matter is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion or elaboration” (p.3), in a close definition to that provided by Gitlin; Reese presents them as “socially shared and enduring organizing principles that symbolically work to structure the social world in a meaningful way” (p.3).

It is likely the definition provided by Entman, however, which stems from a sociological perspective, that has been most used to describe the process through which information is handled

by journalists (Muñiz, 2020). He would say that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, [...] to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, as cited by Mchaulu, 2011, p.7). In other words, “framing involves an active process that ‘implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction’” (Benford & Snow, 2000, as cited by Collison-Randall, Hayday, Spaaij & Pippard, 2024, p.2). Increasingly, it has been applied to the way media promote certain interpretations of news by highlighting specific facts. (Linström & Marais, 2012).

The framing of “events and issues in particular ways” is said to be an “influential way that the media may shape public opinion”, which is why the theory of framing has been used both to analyze media content as well as to focus on the link between media and public opinion (De Vreese, 2005, p.51). Media framing, it is argued, has a significant influence on public opinion, by shaping perceptions when it comes to the views created around conflict (Collison-Randall, Hayday, Spaaij, & Pippard, 2024).

3.1.3. TYPES OF FRAMES

Since frames can be understood as structures both when presenting and interpreting news, there are two main categorizations: *media frames* and *individual frames* (Scheufele, 1999). Tuchman (1978) mentioned by (Scheufele, 1999) suggested “viewing media or news frames as necessary to turn meaningless and non-recognizable happenings into a discernible event” (p.106). Gamson and Mondigliani (1987) described them as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Scheufele, 1999, p.106). Individual frames, on the other hand, are defined in the field as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individual’s processing of information” (Entman, 1993, as cited by Scheufele, 1999, p.107). Within individual frames, we can distinguish between “long-term political views and short-term, issue-related frames of reference” (Scheufele, 1999, p.107).

Going back to the general notion of frames De Vreese (2005) suggests the categorization of issue-specific frames and generic frames. While issue-frames “are pertinent only to specific topics or

events”, generic frames “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (p.54). Finally, framing studies also distinguish between frames as dependent variables and frames as independent variables. Research on frames as dependent variables have traditionally explored the influence of factors on their formation or alteration. Those studies in which frames are the independent variable, however, tend to make more emphasis on their effects. (Scheufele, 1999)

With these types of frames in mind Scheufele (1999) has provided a typology of the questions that should be asked in each case. In this thesis’ case, since the aim is to combine previous studies on the use of media frames as dependent variables in relation to the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the questions those articles should have aimed at answering are the following:

- (1) “What factors influence the way journalists or other societal groups frame certain issues?”
- (2) “How do these processes work and, as a result, what are the frames that journalists use?”

The articles that have provided for the revision of the literature then, make use of media frames that are issue-specific and correspond to the dependent variables of those studies. Studies of news frames as independent will not be examined since they study *frames effects*. This is important to note since those studies that provide the literature review for the identification of the most predominant frames when it comes to news coverage of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis use unreliable methodologies such as content analysis for the identification of frames, but have these variables in common. The analysis will focus on the comparison of the answers to that second question by the authors who have studied international coverage of the genocide; that is, ‘what are the frames that journalists use?’

3.1.4. INCONSISTENCY OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO FRAMING

“Framing has become one of the most popular areas of research for scholars in communication and a wide variety of other disciplines, such as psychology, behavioral economics, political science and sociology. Particularly in the communication discipline, however, ambiguities surrounding how we conceptualize and therefore operationalize

framing have begun to overlap with other media effects models to a point that is dysfunctional”

(Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015, p.1-2)

The comprehensive study carried out by Linström & Marais (2012) titled *Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology*, provides a comparative research on the literature on qualitative news framing. After thorough examination of the existing literature, they conclude that a thorough qualitative news analysis consists of the following steps (p.29-30):

- (1) Choice of medium/topic
- (2) Determination of a timeframe
- (3) Drawing of a sample
- (4) Identification of a unit of analysis. (Usually individual articles from the selected newspapers/other media in the selected time-period)
- (5) Selection of a frame typology. (Frames can be selected inductively, in relation to the specific articles chosen. The researcher can decide whether to choose one dominant frame or a dominant and a secondary one).
- (6) Operational definitions. (The selected frames need to be properly defined before the beginning of the. Linström & Marais (2012) cite De Vreese (2005) and Capella & Jamieson (1997) in the selection of specific criteria a frame ought to have) (p.30):

- (1) “A frame must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics;
- (2) It should be commonly observed in journalistic practice;
- (3) It must be possible to distinguish the frame reliably from other frames;
- (4) A frame must be recognised by others and not be a figment of a researcher’s imagination”

- (7) Identification of news frames

Their framework develops from deductive approach by De Vreese (2005); that is, “analyzing news stories with a priori defined news frames in mind” (p.53), as has been preferred by scholars in the field of frame studies. He cites Capella and Jamieson (1997) who, in his words, stated that

“considering any production feature of verbal or visual frames as a candidate for news frames is a too broad view” (p.54), which is why they propose four different criteria that a frame must meet in order to be considered as such, cited in the paragraph right above (De Vreese, 2005).

While Linström & Marais (2012) provide a useful comprehensive approach to qualitative news framing, the truth is that ultimately the frames chosen are still a product of the researcher’s own bias and imagination, given the lack of consensus in the field on what frames exactly consist of how they should be selected. Because of this, some authors in the field have gone as far as to “urge scholars to abandon the general term ‘framing’ altogether, and, instead, distinguish between different types of framing” (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015, p.2).

Literature reviews by other authors on the use of framing as a research tool in the field of communications have argued that there is a significant lack of consistency in the use of common methodologies for the identification of frames (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019) (Gaitán Moya, Piñuel Raigada, & Aguila-Coghlan, 2016) (Muñiz, 2020). This has in part to do with its transdisciplinary nature, which has led to widespread use of the theory across academic disciplines (Muñiz, 2020).

In fact, “an important by-product of the expanded definition of framing brought about by the sociological-rooted tradition has been that the term is often applied to similar but distinctly different theoretical concepts”. Some scholars argue some of the definitions used for framing would also apply to the idea of *schema* or *script*, and other highlight its overlap with other media effects theories such as agenda-setting (Cacciatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015, p.6).

It is arguably challenging to find a single clear methodology for the identification of frames in qualitative studies (Gaitán Moya, Piñuel Raigada, & Aguila-Coghlan, 2016) (De Vreese, 2005). The absence of a standardized measurement tool further complicates research of such nature (Gaitán Moya, Piñuel Raigada, & Aguila-Coghlan, 2016) particularly when it comes to inductive studies, that is, those with frames that “emerge from the material during the course of analysis” (De Vreese, 2005, p.53). In contrast, deductive frames are “defined and operationalized prior to the investigation” (De Vreese, 2005, p.53).

For instance, on *The Presence of Framing in Articles Published in Spanish American Communication Journals Indexed in Scopus*, the authors conclude that Hispanic American studies on media framing have largely aimed at describing, through an inductive approach, the way issues are covered and presented in the news, relying heavily on content analysis as a research method (Piñeiro-Naval, 2019). In a similar light, in *Framing as a Research Project: a review of concepts, fields and methods of study*, Muñiz (2020) emphasizes the need for new research on framing as a communicative process, since the stages of *frame-building* and *framing effects* have been largely forgotten.

Scheufele (1999) underlines this by stating that “research on framing is characterized by theoretical and empirical vagueness” (...) “due, in part, to the lack of a commonly shared theoretical model underlying framing research”. This situation means that “conceptual problems translate into operational problems, limiting the comparability of instruments and results” (p.103). De Vreese (2005) effectively summarizes this in his literature review on news framing. In his words: “Previous research on frames in the news shares little conceptual ground and most studies draw on tentative working definitions or operational definitions” (...) “There is little consensus on how to identify frames in the news” (p.53). Because of this inherent methodological issue that the author of this thesis has also encountered when trying to analyze frames used by the media on the 1994 genocide news coverage, this study aims at bringing together frame studies on the Rwandan 1994 international media coverage through various methodologies, seeking to find common ground in the existent literature.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

4.1. SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

As mentioned under the *Research Questions* chapter, the questions this analysis will aim at answering are the following:

- I. How many framing studies are there on the international media coverage of the 1994 Rwanda genocide? What frames have these studies identified?**

II. Has the *tribalism* frame been the most widely used frame regarding the portrayal of international media of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda?

The review on the 16 articles found on the subject will be carried first, through a quantitative lens and then through a qualitative lens.

4.1.1. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative analysis will aim at proving answers to the first question presented above; that is:

I. How many framing studies are there on the international media coverage of the 1994 Rwanda genocide? What frames have these studies identified?

The following table is based on the one titled *Published journals on media framing in Ghana* created by Asiamah, Osei-mensah & Sackey (2022). The column for *Framing theory?* was added in this table to differentiate between studies that analyzed international media framing of the events within the theoretical context of *framing*, or whether it was labeled as *portrayal* or *perception* or *image* or *theme*, etc. All articles, however, referred to either frames or thematical characterizations in their abstracts.

The themes or frames found across different studies have been grouped together in 5 major categories listed below. The following colors have been used for the visual differentiation of these categories:

- Tribalism or ethnic violence
- Humanitarianism or Western savior theme
- Western indifference or failure to report on the genocide as such
- Broader African narrative
- Western interests

Table II: Published studies on international media framing of the Rwandan genocide of 1994

Author & Year	Title	Journal Name	Methodology	Frames/Themes discussed	Framing theory?	Media Source for Data Collection	Examples
1.Noam Schimmel - 2011	An invisible genocide: how the Western media failed to report the 1994 Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi and why	The International Journal of Human Rights Vol. 15, No. 7	(Narrative) Literature review examining reporting of the Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi in 1994 in the American and European media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Characterization of the conflict as “tribal war” - Media’s failure to report on the genocide - Racism - Ignorance of African Affairs - The journalistic imperative to report “balanced” news - Western satisfaction: The business bottom line of creating news that sells well, but may not reflect reality 	No. “Media’s skewed coverage”, “failure to report”, “angle”	Articles on European and American newspapers	“The Times ran several articles about what it obviously considered an angle to interest its readers: the fate of the Rwandan gorillas. ¹ – Richard Dowden”
2.Emmanuel C. Alozie - 2010	Voices in the hills of Rwanda: African press accountability of the 1994 pogrom	The International Communication Gazette 72(7) 589-617	Qualitative analysis on newspaper articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bane of a nation: Rwanda’s historical instability and ethnic divisions that resulted in ethnic violence - Rwandan National Introspection: How colonialism changed traditional social ethnic structures - African cataclysm and introspection: instability and violence as part of a continental trend - World inaction and indifference: failures of the international community 	Yes.	Kenya’s Daily Nation and Nigeria’s Guardian	“If the seeds of Rwanda’s violent history and the 1994 genocide were sown through ethnic hatred and distrust, competition for power and greed, political instability, discrimination, famine and presidential deaths, Daily Nation (16 April 1994) and The Guardian (12 May 1994a, 12 May 1994b) underscored that these problems were not limited to Rwanda”
3.Tendai Chari - 2010	Representation or	African Identities,	Quantitative analysis for the story count. Then	- Historical baggage: “Rwanda is portrayed as yet another	Yes	Articles in New York Times	““Tribal battle for Rwandan capital;

	misrepresentation? The New York Times's framing of the 1994 Rwanda genocide	8:4, 333-349	mostly qualitative study of newspaper articles	<p>hopeless African country”, with the use of the same stereotypes</p> <p>- Tribalisation: “the Rwanda genocide as a result of long-running tribal hatred between the Hutu and the Tutsi”</p> <p>- Western benevolence: “The New York Times represented western governments and relief agencies which responded to the refugee crisis in the country as messiahs”</p> <p>- Western indifference: The US government took 3 months to acknowledge that the atrocities were in fact a genocide</p>			new massacres reported’ (16 April 1994), ‘Don’t write off Rwanda’s violence as ethnic; Uganda shares the blame’ (20 April 1994)”
4. Linda Melvern - 2001	Missing the story: The media and the Rwandan genocide	Contemporary Security Policy, 22:3, 91-106	Content analysis	<p>- Ancient tribal hatreds</p> <p>- Failure to use the term “genocide”</p> <p>- International indifference and inaction</p> <p>- Insignificance of Rwanda</p> <p>- Focus on Western evacuations</p>	No. “portrayal” “reporting”	Western press - (French Le Monde, Liberation) - American (Washington Post, New York Times) - Canadian (Toronto Globe and Mail) - UK (The Guardian)	In a letter to the Guardian on 16 April 1994 Stewart Willis, the Overseas Director of Oxfam, had pleaded for the UN to immediately reinforce its peacekeepers in Rwanda: ‘It is outrageous and despicable that at the same time as the UN Security Council is acting with vigour to protect civilians in Gorazde, French and Belgian troops have to look away while people are hacked to death.’
5. Melissa Wall - 1997	The Rwanda Crisis: An Analysis of News	SAGE Social Science Collections.	Content analysis of articles	- “The Rwanda violence was a result of irrational tribalism ”	Yes. Although the term “themes” is	News magazine articles in Newsweek,	‘Rwanda is helpless against its demons’ “The Rwandan coverage continued

	Magsazine Coverage			<p>- Rwandan people are little better than animals, ranging from the barbaric to the helpless and pathetic</p> <p>- The violence is incomprehensible, and thus is explained through comparison to biblical myths, supernatural causes, natural disasters or diseases</p> <p>- Neighboring African countries are just as violent and thus unable to help solve Rwanda's problems</p> <p>- Only the West is capable of solving Rwanda's problems</p>	used more consistently	Time and US News	the adherence to old patterns such as interpreting conflicts in Africa as a result of backwardness
6. Sendín Gutiérrez -2007	Building Reality on TV: An Analysis of Television Española's Coverage of the Rwandan Genocide	Zer Vol. 13 Num. 24, 11-18.	Qualitative-qualitative content analysis	<p>- Situation in Rwanda: depolitized and presented as ethnic hatreds and primitive violence</p> <p>- Regional consequences: focus on refugee exodus</p> <p>- Relationship with aid and social agencies</p> <p>- Participation and implications for Spain</p> <p>- International intervention</p> <p>- Chain's self-reference for coverage</p>	No. "Strategies", "thematic categories"	Spanish TV: Televisión Española broadcasts	"Information on the events in Rwanda in April 1994 appeared associated with tribalism and backwardness, thus introducing qualifications and pre-judgements into the information. It provided little context, concentrated on the consequences of the phenomenon rather than its causes, and was presented in a confusing way"
7. Roman Prokopenko - 2020	Norwegian Newspaper Coverage of Distant Conflicts: A comparative Analysis	UiO DUO Research Archive - Master thesis in journalism studies at the Department of Media and	Quantitative content analysis	- Drama/violence/ human suffering. Dramatization of events: "in other words, the conflict tends to be reported as an immediate dispute between two sides that culminates in a dramatic situation"	No. The term "frame" is used multiple times, but the concept is referred to as "story focus"	Norwegian newspapers: - Dagbladet - Klassekampen - Verdens Gang	"In many ways, Western news media chose the easy road when it came to covering Rwanda. This was evident from the fact that the refugee crisis received much more attention than the

	of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the 2017 Rohingya Crisis	Communication, University of Oslo		- Elite nations: “The newspapers connected it to or framed the conflict in terms of Western European interests and involvement”			genocide, because it was an easier story to frame”
8. Ryanne Louise Harrison - 2009	The Rwandan Genocide and the Media: A two-Stage Analysis of Newspaper Coverage	University of Manitoba: Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts for the Department of Sociology	A combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis from a cultural criminological perspective.	- Presetation of Rwanda as an archaic and primitive country, much as the rest of the continent - The genocidal nature of the violence was largely ignored - The violence as a result of a primitive and tribal society	No. Rather categorized as “themes” through use of language	American & Canadian Newspapers: - New York Times (United States) - The Globe and Mail (Canada)	“The reader is given the impression that Rwanda did not belong to the ordered and civilized world of law and order. For the most part, the situation in Rwanda was presented as due to chaos and disorder, which emerged because Rwanda was a ‘primitive society’”.
9. John Nathaniel Clarke - 2017	British Media and the Rwandan Genocide	(1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315675589	Quantitative and qualitative analysis	- Humanitarian response to the crisis - Refugee exodus	No. “Thematic focus”	British newspapers: - The Guardian - The Observer - The Financial Times	“The extrication of the small number of Europeans trapped in Rwanda received lots of attention, as did the arithmetic of death: body counts serve journalism's desire to quantify”
10. Candice Lynn Tyrrell - 2015	The Rwandan Genocide and Western Media: French, British, and American Press Coverage of the Genocide between April and July of 1994	Electronic Theses and Dissertations. University of Central Florida	Content analysis	- The colonial legacy of the genocide: ethnic differences as a result of colonialism - Human rights and international responsibility - Aversion towards the use of the term “genocide”	No. Referred to as “larger themes” perpetuated by the press	France - Le Monde - L’express United States: - The New York Times - Time UK: - The Times - The Economist	“The news media [...] put the situation in Rwanda into the context of the larger discourses of colonial and neocolonial Africa, mainly the fate of Africa and the problems with democracy on the continent”
11. Tommy Gustafsson - 2010	Swedish Television News Coverage and the Historical	Scandia	Content Analysis	- “Anarchy”: Colonial narrative of savages against civilization	No. Only sporadically. Referred to as “perspective”, “angle”,	Swedish Public Television broadcasts (SVT)	“this out-of control “anarchy” connotes the colonial narrative of savages against civilization”

	Media Memory of the Rwandan Genocide			<p>- A story of Civil war and violence and the situation as a “lost cause”</p> <p>- Historical determinism: Tribal quarrels of ancient date</p> <p>- Focus on European expatriates and Western interests</p>	<p>“narrative”, “thematic approach”. The most common use is “colonial angle, colonial narrative, colonial frame of interpretation”.</p>	<p>- SVT’s Rapport - STV4 Nyheterna</p>	
12. Jeremy Sarkin & Carly Fowler - 2010	The responsibility to Protect and the Duty to Prevent Genocide: Lessons to be Learnt from the Role of the International Community and the Media During the Rwandan Genocide and the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia	Suffolk Transnational Law Review, Vol. 33, N 1	Narrative review of the literature on “how Rwanda was framed”	<p>- “Tribal enmity” rooted in thousands of years of mutual hatred</p> <p>- Depiction of Africa’s ‘heart of darkness’: Characterization of Rwanda as being geographically, culturally and economically remote</p> <p>- The westernization of Rwanda: efforts to put the conflict in a Western context so that the reader can understand</p> <p>- “Balanced conflict” framework under the belief that “the other side was just as evil”</p>	Yes.	Studies on the coverage of “Western media” (American & British newspapers)	“Concurrently, however, the Western media displayed a tendency to try to put Rwanda into a “Western” framework. The New York Times, when describing the size of the country, labeled it “slightly larger than Vermont.” ¹⁹⁰ A correspondent for the Rocky Mountain News described Rwanda as both the “Switzerland of Africa”—for its scenery—and the “Yugoslavia of Africa”—for its ethnic violence”
13. C. Victor Herbin III - 2011	Silent Voices: The New York Times and the Washington Post Coverage of the Rwandan Genocide and the American Response	Journalism electronic theses and dissertations (MU). Master of Arts of Journalism. University of Missouri	Textual analysis	<p>- “Death and murder is an African reality”: murder as routine and customary, focus on ongoing ethnic conflicts in the region</p> <p>- “Rwandan murder is a reality distortion”: “Since death and murder is perceived as an African reality, this frame illustrates how killing is depicted in an environment that has become extremely chaotic, uncontrollable, and dangerous where anyone has the</p>	Yes. Framing theory	New York Times and The Washington post articles	“the article reports, “President Clinton listed Rwanda among the world’s many bloody conflicts where the interests at stake did not justify the use of American military power.”

				<p>capability of committing murder”</p> <p>- “Visualized reality through graphical depiction”: Deaths are very graphically depicted</p> <p>Three more frames are identified but those relate to the American response to the atrocities</p>			
14. Lindsay McRae Sumner - 2009	Problematising Humanitarianism: A critical Analysis of Major American Newspaper Coverage of the 1994 Rwanda Genocide	OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center. http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1243880099 Master's Thesis. Ohio State University	Content analysis	<p>2 main broad frames:</p> <p>- Humanitarian: “People starving,” “People sick/injured/diseased,” “Infrastructure damaged/destroyed (and needing repair),” “Children in peril/Orphans,” “Chaos,” and “Displaced persons/refugees.”</p> <p>- Historical/Political: Identifying tags are “Rwandan politics,” “Historical/Colonial legacy,” “Economics,” “RPF/Ugandan history,” and “Ethnic hostility.” As a subcategory.</p>	Yes	<p>American newspapers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New York Times - The Washington post - Los Angeles Times 	“During the conflict in Bosnia, U.S. officials had tried to convince journalists that the conflict was born of ‘ancient tribal hatreds’; in Rwanda reporters in the field adopted this frame on their own.”
15. Gianluca Zanelli - 2017	The Rwandan Genocide in Italian Media: the Cases of La Repubblica and La Stampa	Dalarna University, School of Humanities and Media Studies, African studies. Master's Thesis	Content Analysis	- Long-standing “tribal hatred”	No. “Perspectives,” “media coverage”	<p>Italian newspapers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - La Repubblica - La Stampa 	La Repubblica and La Stampa, in line with the western media coverage, shared a nearly similar vision of the genocide as an explosion of a presumed long-standing tribal hatred, a perspective characterized by stereotypes and biased interpretations that prevented to

							investigate the complex causes behind the event.
16. Georgina Homes - 2011	Rwanda and the Commonwealth: The Evolution of the BBC's Institutional Narrative on the 1994 Rwandan Genocide	The Round Table Vol. 100 No 416, 519-530 Routledge	Content analysis	Evolution of the BBC's Institutional Narrative. - During the Conflict: "tribal civil war and primitive ethnic conflict", not referred to as genocide - when genocide was declared by the international community: "memorializing genocide" - Since Rwanda joined the Commonwealth: "framing news in the context of democracy and freedom of speech"	Yes	UK newspaper the BBC	In The Bloody Tricolour, the BBC puts France in the frame by evidencing its support for a genocidal regime, announcing that a 'European power was deeply—and shame- fully—implicated in the tragedy' (Bradshaw, in Panorama: The Bloody Tricolour (BBC, 1995),

Source: Author's own elaboration

There is a total of 16 studies on international media framing of the Rwandan 1994 genocide. Out of those, however, only 7 use framing theory as such, whereas others tend to use conceptually close synonyms such as *thematic categories*, *themes*, *perspectives*, with the words *frame* or *theme* always present in their abstract. This study found it important to still include them and bring together key conclusions found by authors in spite of linguistic differences.

The vast majority of articles used content analysis (also referred to as textual analysis or qualitative analysis) of newspaper articles, 11 to be exact. Another 2 used a mix between qualitative and quantitative analysis and, finally, two articles were narrative literature reviews. Only one of the articles, namely the one carried out by Wall (1997), was written before the 2000s, highlighting the emergence of a framing theory trend later in time. There is a tendency to study framing theory in master's theses, as highlighted by 6/16 of the articles, as well as a tendency to choose American newspapers for the study of media frames used in the coverage of the Rwandan genocide. More

than that, 8 studies focus solely on coverage by English speaking media and 11 on English speaking media alongside another European medium (always French).

In fact, out of the narrative reviews on studies of international media frames of the events, Schimmel (2010) focuses on the failure to report the genocide fully due to “ignorance, incompetence, willful neglect and lack of investment of resources” (p.1128). While he claims to focus on *European and American media*, it largely focuses on US, British and, to a lesser extent, French coverage of the crisis. The same happens in the review by Sarkin & Fowler (2010), in which only studies on American and British media are analyzed. The latter emphasizes how “Western assumptions about Africa” (p.29) have shaped the portrayal of the Rwandan genocide. In this context, however, it is important to note that a systematic review allows for the compilation of news frames identified by studies on non-English speaking media and, more broadly, a reduction of bias in the choice to focus on certain studies and not others.

4.1.2. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Under the qualitative analysis sub-chapter, the second question addressed by this thesis will be explored, namely:

II. Has the “tribalism” frame been the most widely used frame regarding the portrayal of international media of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda?

What stands out is the variety of frames or themes identified by the research, especially in terms of how broad or specific the frame is. Summer L. M. (2009), for example, divides coverage in either humanitarian or historical/political. These stand out as *generic frames* instead of *issue-specific*. The key words used for their identification, however, are *issue-specific*. Under historical/political, these are: *Rwandan politics*, *Historical/Colonial legacy*, *Economics*, *RPF/Ugandan history*, and *Ethnic hostility*. Other authors simply point at the use of a single main issue-specific frame, such as Zanelli (2017) with *tribal hatred*, or use very different concepts for the portrayal of the same *theme*: *elite nations* or *focus on European expatriates and interests*, for example.

Overall, the **tribalism** theme is pointed at as a theme or frame in 15/16 articles, since the missing one focuses on the presence of **humanitarianism** themes. As a subcategory of the historical/political frame, however, she still places special emphasis on the *tribal frame*:

“In April, the first month of the genocide, 45 articles appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times (combined) that attempted to contextualize the crisis historically and politically [...] However, of these 45 articles, 32 of them – or 71% - state that the genocide was based on “tribal” or “ethnic” hostility, which most scholarship on Rwandan history proves to be a misleading characterization” (Sumner L:M:, 2009, p.52).

6 articles highlight the use of the **Western interests**’ frame when covering the events. 6 other articles also point at the *Western savior* or **humanitarian** perspective. 7 articles highlight **Western indifference** or *failure to report on the genocide as such* as a key theme and 8 articles refer to the **broader African narrative** used when describing the events in Rwanda as violent, helpless and common in the continent. It seems clear, then, that the most common *frame* or *theme* pointed out by the literature on framing of the events that took place in Rwanda in 1994 is indeed that of *tribalism*, as the brief literature review on the topic had already suggested before.

In *An invisible genocide: how the Western media failed to report the 1994 Rwandan genocide of the Tutsi and why*, Schimmel (2010) underlines “how the genocide was mischaracterized as a ‘tribal war’ and an act of spontaneous violence and primordial hatred, rather than being accurately reported as a meticulously planned and implemented political project of ethnic extermination” (p.1125). He later concludes with:

“Although the media no longer distorts the fact that what happened in Rwanda was a genocide, and not a series of tribal fights based on a series of spontaneous explosions of ethnic hatred, the structural poverty of the media and its unwillingness and willful inability to educate its audiences on human rights violations around the world and specifically in Africa and in Sudan remains as pertinent today as it was in 1994” (Schimmel, 2010, p.1133).

Sarkin & Fowler (2010) describe “tribal enmity” as “the most ubiquitous frame that the Western media used to portray the violence in Rwanda” (p.30). They emphasize that “this frame was widely utilized in the Western media – even in some of the most respected publications – throughout the duration of the genocide” (p.31).

The Sociology thesis by Rynne Louise Harrison (2009) titled *The Rwandan Genocide and the Media: A two-Stage Analysis of Newspaper coverage* analyses articles published by Canadian and American newspapers the *New York Times*, the *Globe and Mail*. She argues that “by ignoring the organization and systematic execution of the genocide, [these] newspapers presented Rwanda as a dangerous country that exists well beyond our borders and whose presence is only made available to the reader through the stories of the journalists” (Harrison, 2009, p.116).

In *Building Reality on TV: An Analysis of Television Española's Coverage of the Rwandan Genocide*, Sendín Guetierrez (2008) explores coverage of the genocide by TVE, Spanish public TV broadcast. The paper concludes that the crisis was poorly covered and made use of stereotypes that resulted in a sensationalized portrayal of Africa. Two of the main simplifications identified are first, that “the Rwandan conflict is portrayed as a series of massacres driven by tribal hatred in an unspecified war-torn country, where local population flees in terror while foreign residents decide to leave” (p.17) and, secondly, that the information is provided without relevant context, which is particularly telling if “it is assumed that the greater the contextualization of the information, the greater the relevance given to the event by the media” (p.17). When it comes to framing as such, the perspective of development aid or what is named by the author the *African humanitarian crisis* is most prevalent. (Sendín Guetierrez, 2008).

In *The Western Media and the Portrayal of the Rwandan Genocide*, Estes (2010) includes examples of American, Canadian and European newspapers mischaracterizing the genocide, placing significant attention of the use of tribal related vocabulary. These include *The New York Times* article *Terror Convulses Rwandan Capital as Tribes Battle* published on the 9th April 1994 blaming the high death toll on “tribal bloodletting” and attributing the violence solely to the murder of the president Juvenal Habyarimana, or *Africa Has Yet to Come to Terms with its Tribal Divisions* in which the author stated that “Rwanda is Africa” (Estes, 2010).

In *Norwegian Newspaper Coverage of Distant Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide and the 2017 Rohingya Crisis*, Prokopenko (2020) argues that the Rwandan genocide was likely “easier to frame in the context of the immediate post-Cold War landscape of foreign conflicts. In this geographical paradigm, Western nations were not directly involved in ideological warfare overseas. This allowed foreign conflicts to receive more attention from Western media” (p.88). It is also mentioned that only 24 of the 240 articles studied referred to the situation as *genocide* or *ethnic cleansing*:

“The fact that the Rwandan genocide received so much more coverage than Myanmar can be partially explained by the existing French and Belgian presence in the region. Because of this, the media had a way to directly connect the conflict to the involvement of these troops, who were initially deployed to rescue Europeans that found themselves in the midst of drama and instability in Rwanda” (Prokopenko, 2020, p.88-89).

Other authors place the coverage of the genocide by Western media in a larger *colonial narrative*. Such is the case of Tyrell (2015). She argues that “the reporters perpetuated colonial ideologies and language, therefore becoming part of the larger colonial narrative and reinforcing dichotomy between the West and Africa” (p.7). It is also contended that Western Media used the failures of the United Nations in keeping its peacekeeping forces effectively on the ground as a way to allocate responsibility and that there was a general aversion to use the term *genocide*. In sum:

“The West sees Africans as backward, non-industrialized, and destitute. Essentially, Africans are non-European. This influenced and continues to influence the West’s perceptions and interpretations of African conflict and construction of Africans themselves. And, in a Western world that rebukes racism, the press coverage during the Rwandan genocide came to perpetuate racial stereotypes created by this dichotomy” (Tyrell, 2015, p.4).

Ultimately, what the aggregation of these studies highlights goes further than showcasing a focus on tribalism. The study of frames also highlights the appearance of *counter themes* or frames such as the *mantra* “everybody knew, but didn’t do anything” (Gustafsson, 2010, p.81). In other words,

the review of frame studies highlights new frames portraying the original portrayal of the events, by highlighting certain elements of the narrative and sewing them into a new story: the story being that the West portrayed Rwanda as yet another African nation bound to chaos, in which violence was too common to be viewed as genocidal.

4.2. PREVALENCE OF THE “TRIBALISM” FRAME

“Language produces power. This means that the language according to which the media refer to other realities creates that reality. Thus, Rwanda, and Africa by extension, is whatever is said about it”

(Sendín Gutiérrez, 2008, p.25)

It seems clear now that *tribalism* was a recurrent frame in the portrayal of the genocide by the international media. While this study has focused on the portrayal of the events that took place in Rwanda, the same frame has been pointed at by literature on the coverage of other conflicts in the African continent. In a study on the *Tribalism frame in U.S. press coverage of the Kenya post-election crisis of 2007-2008*, Lynett (2011) found that “while still adhering in large part to tribalism as a source of the conflict, [themes of coverage] had strayed from traditional portrayals of Africans as tribe-obsessed, helpless savages” (p.35). This brings hope that the frame that has most prevalently featured on conflict news coverage in relation to Africa may be starting to fade, even if it was still prevalent 30 years ago at the time of the object of this study.

4.2.1. TRIBALISM BEYOND RWANDA

“It has been more than a quarter of a century since I was appointed as the Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). When I took on the task, I knew very little about the tiny country, located in the heart of Africa, just below the equator. At that point in history, the internet was nowhere nearly as developed as it is today, so my primary source of information on current events for the region came from the scant coverage that the country received in the media. To say the least, Rwanda was not a place that attracted much attention from the western [*sic*] world before 1994, and we had no

indication that within five months of the mission's commencement we would find ourselves in the middle of genocide that was unprecedented in violence and intensity"

Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire, Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda at the time, in his foreword for "Rwanda Revisited: Genocide, Civil War, and the Transformation of International Law"
(Drew, Oswald, McLaughlin, & Farrall, 2020, p.1)

Frame building refers to those factors that shape the structural qualities of news frames (De Vreese, 2005). When it comes to media coverage of the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda, the emergence of the *tribal conflict* frame responds to a general Western trend of coverage of news in the African continent. A quote by a Western correspondent of a news agencies portrays this issue very well:

"Although a vital question could be that why they believe what they believe, what they read, see and hear in the media the real issue is that western [*sic*] audience are rarely offered an alternative view of Africa. Positive Africa is dry news and dry news does not sell. What sells is PIDIC- Poverty, Instability, Disease Illiteracy and Corruption" (Jere-Malanda, 2008 as cited by Chari, 2010, p.16).

This is why the following subchapter will discuss broad international media coverage of Rwanda and, by extension, the African continent.

The type of news that are published about foreign countries is still based on local priorities and values. This makes out of news covering not only a random collection of events but mostly a careful selection by journalists and editors of what is most significant and how it should be presented. Since news outlets tend to prioritize dramatic stories, particularly when in relation to other countries, conflict and crises tend to dominate the news (Wall, 1997). This would suggest why the crisis in Rwanda received significant press coverage in spite of the country's remote location and small size.

Politics and conflicts are specific in that most of society only gathers information about them through the media (Vladisavljević, 2015). When violence sweeps the street, the work put in by professional journalists becomes more valuable than ever, while it also becomes the only source into the conflict for most. Keith Sommerville, professor at the Centre for Journalism at the University of Kent, has written about news framing in relation to conflict. He identifies some of the historically commonly used generic frames for conflict, among which we can find: *The Cold War Frame*, *Tribal and Failed State frames*, *Post-Cold War Frames*, *Humanitarian Frames* or a *War on terror frame* and considers that there has been a reintroduction of “tribal and ethnic frames to describe conflicts – particularly in Africa, where old colonial mentalities and the simplistic and frequently racist depictions of Africa (backward, barbaric, vibrant, teeming with wildlife exciting but essentially dangerous) could be used to build new frames” (Chernow, 2016, under “Policy Implications or framing stories”).

Alozie (2007) quoted by Chari (2010) contends that Western media’s portrayal of the African continent is that of “plagued with political socio-economic upheavals ... prone to violent conflicts and [one that] often suffers from natural disasters as well as disasters caused by human beings” (p.334). While Rodrigo (1989) cited by Sendín Gutiérrez (2008), argues that the less internationally significant a nation is, the more criteria and event must fulfill to be considered newsworthy.

On the topic of press coverage of the African continent, Chari (2010) mentions that “the common thread running through [the] literature is concern about western media’s negative portrayal of the continent, charges of bias, misrepresentation and racial imagining of the continent” (p.334). Western media have also been criticized for focusing on the African continent on times of crisis, lacking contextual depth and painting the image of a continent in perpetual failure. “One of the disturbing features of western press is what might be called ‘crisis journalism – the tendency to devote a large amount of space, resourcing, to reporting the ‘abnormal’ in home and international affairs” (Legum, 1971, as cited by Chari, 2010, p.334).

Cited by Chari (2010), Ankomah (2000) contends that Western media’s approach to covering Africa is guided by an implicit four-pint rule (p.334-335):

- (1) 'National interest or "follow the flag"': when it comes to foreign policy western media follow their national interests
- (2) 'Ideological leaning': Western media's approach to domestic policies often favors political parties that share their viewpoints, but they tend to maintain positive relations with their governments in foreign policy matters, even if they may occasionally critique government policies or corruption
- (3) 'Historical baggage': The portrayal of Africa in the 20th century remains shaped by 19th century narratives, reinforcing the image of Africans as dependent subjects, rather than as drivers of their own fate
- (4) 'Advertisers/readers': their demands place substantial pressure on Western media, often pushing editors to adjust their content in order to meet their expectations

Wall (1997) mentioned, in her study of media coverage of Rwanda in 1994, that Western media have historically tended to cover intra-country conflicts in Africa one-dimensionally. This is partially because both interests and logistical obstacles prevent efficient coverage of news in the continent. Correspondents not speaking the local language, having little background knowledge of local history or even events of local censorship all have significant effects on the quality of news coverage in Africa from a Western perspective. The lack of widespread news bureaus in African countries and the value media often place on foreign conflicts to gather a larger audience, also place a significant role on media coverage in Africa. (Wall, 1997)

She mentions past examples of Western tendencies, particularly American, in the reporting of events in Africa over time, emphasizing the three overarching themes that have been most commonly found (Wall, 1997):

- (1) During the 50s independence movements, challenges to the colonial status quo were portrayed as negative
- (2) Wars and political events in Africa are depicted as resulting from irrational tribalism as seen during the Biafran War in Nigeria, for example, and "portrayals rarely probe for the underlying causes of conflicts"
- (3) Especially during the Cold War, the East-West lens was the most predominant

In the case of the genocide in Rwanda, the use of the “tribalism” frame by international media has been widely quoted. In relation to the use of this frame in the Biafran War, Wall discusses how a *tribe vs tribe* portrayal of conflicts in Africa by American media highlights the preference for simplification (Wall, 1997). It reinforces ideas about *African primitivism* and abstains from giving complex political explanations. Fair (1993), in the analysis of the Liberian war, argues that “symbolic distance also places Africa back in time, where ‘tribes’ engage in ‘violent black vs. black’ civil war, ‘internecine battle’, ‘rival fighting’, ‘factionalism’, ‘fratricide’. ‘guerrilla warfare’ and ‘chaos’ ” (p.14).

The role played by international media in the allowing of the genocide is still widely researched decades later, particularly how Western media neglected to expose the depth of the atrocities. While critics argue the conflict was framed inaccurately by journalists, emphasizing “ancient tribal hatreds” between the Hutu and the Tutsi, others maintain that the Western media’s failure to fully grasp the situation in Rwanda was rather due to a generalized broader disregard for the African continent (Chari, 2010).

“Too often, African political events that have particular and distinguishable contexts and precedents are simply labeled as irrational tribalism, without any attention given to the causes of a particular occurrence” [...] “Far too often, correspondents assigned to cover an event or issue involving Africa have not received the training necessary to ‘cover issues, activities and crises in developing countries’ (Estes, 2010, p.34-35)

The limited international response to early warnings of genocide can be attributed to general apathy and lack of understanding of the reality in Rwanda. Had it not been officially regarded as what it was, however; that is, as a crime of systematic genocide against a particular group in society, “a fatalism about African politics, already very fashionable in Western European and US military and political circles, would have been reinforced with potentially disastrous consequences for democratization policies in the continent” (Hintjens, 1999, p.275).

“To be sure, it was not the West that carried out the genocide in Rwanda: The leaders of those atrocities are well-known. But in this interdependent global community the West did help create

the conditions which allowed such horrors to occur – and then walked away when they did” (Newbury, 1995, p.17). Ethnic divisions provided by colonization, proliferation of arms in the continent, ‘democratization’ programs that have undermined African sovereignty and exacerbated local crises, or the lack of response to the development of such inhuman events have been some of the real factors behind the genocide against the Tutsis (Newbury, 1995). These factors were time and time again dismissed as a mere war between local tribes that had nothing to do with international society whatsoever. The role of the media in the coverage of human rights violations is crucial, but it does require balance. There is a fine line between the highlighting of relevant issues and “capitalizing on the pain of other human beings” (Sarkin & Fowler, 2010, p.27). There is, also, a fine line between imperfect news coverage and the participation in the creation of broader, harmful narratives such as the one studied in these pages: that a systematic, planned genocide was nothing further than a war between far-away, insignificant and primitive tribes.

5. CONCLUSIONS

“News has a distant and abstract quality to it when aligned in a newspaper as a series of images and texts, or when allotted 60 seconds of commentary and video on the television. It is disembodied, often foreign. But to those whom it reports about it is the polar opposite: immediate, local, urgent, conveying matters of life and death. When the duty to report is undermined so is the ability to protect. In telling stories and conveying information the media has enormous power. When this power is relinquished the media becomes an accomplice to the realities from which it looks away. People die in Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, Sri Lanka and beyond and will continue to die until the media holds itself to a higher standard of accountability, honesty, integrity and public responsibility to witness and educate to enable citizens to act, to advocate, to prevent and to stop genocide and mass atrocity”

(Schimmel, 2010, p.1133).

Distant war and conflict are one of those occasions in which the media become an almost almighty power, in the creation of a reality that no one else is able to witness. This was largely the case during the events that unfolded between April and July 1994 in Rwanda, with the limitations of

knowledge, number of journalists in the field and lack of other media other than traditional mass media to cover the events. It is in such cases that the framing of the conflict can have particularly direct effects on the public opinion and policy of the receiving country, which is why the purpose of this thesis has been to combine past research on the framing of the international media coverage of the genocide in Rwanda.

The cruelty and magnitude of the events that took place in Rwanda cannot be disregarded, nor can the underplaying of the events by the media be forgotten. Racial classifications exacerbated by the colonial experience in Rwanda fueled Hutu extremism, a message that was exacerbated through press and radio in a systematic, planned and state-driven way that culminated in a full-scale genocide. The International Tribunal for Rwanda charged individuals responsible of said media for the incitement of the genocide, while international media ignored the severity of the events and the international community failed to act. The gravity of the situation underscores the equal gravity of its systematic neglect.

By having assessed the existing gap in the literature regarding literature reviews on international media framing of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, this thesis has examined the prevailing narrative of international media at the time. Through a screening of relevant databases, it has found that there is a total of 16 studies on media frames used by international media on the of the genocide. The studies included were papers on non-Rwandan media as a data-source written in English, or which had their abstract translated into English. The unit of analysis was academic journal articles, book chapters or master's theses published between April 1994 and 2024 which used the terms "frame" or "theme" to convey the salience made of specific issues in the narrative. The reason why no original study was conducted on the subject is because of the theoretical and practical vagueness found across research on framing theory and an overwhelming use of content analysis for the identification of frames and because of the lack of systematic studies on the matter, which hinders further research.

This thesis concludes that the most prevalent frame highlighted in studies on media framing of the conflict of Rwanda is the so-called *tribal*, *ethnic* or *civil war* frame, chaotic and primitive in nature, and catastrophic in its effects on Western views of the African continent as backward and irrelevant.

The continuous use of this frame in the coverage of the Rwandan genocide by international media showcases the inevitability of such catastrophes in the African continent from an ever-present Western colonial perspective. The importance of the image given of the crisis that plunged Rwanda into the most absolute nightmare of its history is even greater when one considers that this was the first *African media crisis* of the 1990s, and undoubtedly the most serious. The way of presenting it to the public opinion of a third country creates predetermined patterns and frames that are replicated in future news about Rwanda, and more generally, about the continent of Africa as a whole.

When it comes to limitations, the main limitation has been the language, as only those studies written in English or those which have had their abstracts translated into English have been included for analysis. Out of these, the majority had studied framing by English-speaking media, which evidently limits the scope of the review. Moreover, the inconsistencies in the methodology of framing applied by each author, in addition to the subjectivity in its application, combined, both reinforce the importance of carrying out systematic reviews as well as equally highlight the complexities of finding common ground by grouping the categories established by each author within equally subjective categories. Finally, and more importantly, the lack of systematic reviews in the field and in the specific subject constituted a limitation in itself, as there have been very few similar studies to pave the way in regards to the theory of framing, and none systematically reviewing previous studies on international media framing of the 1994 Rwandan genocide .

Future research, then, should focus on carrying out further systematic reviews that allow for the search of common ground in such a qualitative field as is that of framing analysis. Studies on the *counter frames* used by the documentaries, historical books and articles that cover the genocide will equally be necessary in the future. This is because the study of the *frames* or *themes* as many authors insist on calling them used by the media in the portrayal of the genocide highlights the appearance of *counter themes* such as the idea that the international community was aware of what was happening and did not react to it, instead of the equally valid idea that the genocide was as chaotic from the outside as it was from the inside. Lastly, the lack of research on the frame-building and frame effects leaves room for future studies on how the tribalism frame has been built and

what its effects on Western public opinion on Africa have been. Ultimately, there is no going forward in the research if it is not constructed on aggregates.

In the meantime, the Rwandese have not forgotten, and have not let the world forget. Still today, Rwandan memorials around the world have taken the decision to show the immensity of the genocide through images. After all,

“survivors must have thought ‘if the international community turned a blind eye to the genocide, won’t they continue to ignore the genocide once the killing is finally over?’ The bold decision to use bones, bloody clothes, and murder weapons in Rwandan memorials throughout the country made the world take notice” (Herr, 2018, p.145, Kindle for Web edition).

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