

Conference: Technology and Material Culture in African History: Challenges and Potentials for Research and Teaching

Paper Title: *Missionaries, Medium, and the Message: The History of Communications Technology in Rwanda, 1900-1962*

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The media and its role are still debated topics in Rwandan history, in particular whether propaganda and radio did or did not promote the participation of ordinary people in a genocide that claimed one million lives in 1994.¹ My research explores media technology as a vector in the development of indigenous consciousness in Rwanda beginning in 1900, and the impact of Rwandan appropriation on their pursuit of independence in 1962. The historical actors in this narrative are the missionaries who established schools in Rwanda and brought printing presses and typewriters with which to produce evangelizing materials. And the Rwandans who attended these institutions, many going on to found political movements and become leaders in independent Rwanda.²

Through an investigation of the pastoral writings, seminary curriculums, media missionaries published, and media Rwandans wrote and consumed, this study analyzes the introduction of media technology, the appropriation of material culture, and the social impact of both. The goal is to comprehend how the founders of Rwanda's decolonization movements came to produce successful media campaigns. I argue the ability to produce and distribute media internationally bolstered nascent decolonization movements that formed globally in the wake of WWII. The history of the printing press and radio in Rwanda, 1900-1962, is also one of African aspirations for self-determination and adoption of "patterns of thought and material culture."³

¹ Liz Gunner, "Powerful Frequencies. Radio, State Power and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002," *Kronos*, no. 45 (2019): 83.

² Julia Cagé and Valeria Rueda, "The Long-Term Effects of the Printing Press in Sub-Saharan Africa," *American Economic Journal. Applied Economics* 8, no. 3 (2016): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20140379>.

³ Andrew E. Barnes, *Making Headway: The Introduction of Western Civilization in Colonial Northern Nigeria*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, v. 41 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 1.