

The Population's Perception of the Role of Radio in the Period of Identity Conflicts in Burundi: Mediator or Media Actor?

Didace Sunzu

Université du Burundi, Burundi

This article is distributed under the Creative Commons by-nc-nd Attribution License.
Copyright © 2022 Hikari Ltd.

Abstract

Since the 1960s, Burundi has been the scene of cyclical and deadly identity conflicts. During this same period, the radio was born. During periods of identity conflicts, the population listens to the radio to access information. Radio is the most accessible medium.

The objective of this study is to analyze the Burundian population's perception of the attitude of radio stations during periods of identity-based conflicts.

This work is the result of a questionnaire administered to the population of the city of Bujumbura. It was necessary to seek a representative sample so that the results would be credible by responding to national realities. Thus, the sample size is 423 people. All ethnic groups, religions, and various socio-professional activities were validly represented. Data entry was facilitated by the CSPro software.

Data analysis was conducted using Advanced Excel and STATA.

73.27% of the respondents own radios and 77.28% listen to radio from mobile phones. Then, 63.42% of the respondents affirmed that radios acted as mediators by amplifying conflicts while 49.09% found that radios played the role of mediators or peacemakers.

The radio has manifested itself as a media player, a supporter of identity conflicts. Sometimes it sides with the government in power, sometimes with the opposition, and what is worse, the information broadcast by each side does not hide it.

Keywords: Radio- Information- Impact- Identity-based conflicts-Burundi

1. Introduction

Identity-based conflicts, referred to as community or ethno-political conflicts [1] are a concern in all societies of the world. They are observed differently from one environment to another, from one country to another; but they share in common the recurrent [2] and deadly [3] sometimes spanning several countries [4]. Moreover, they remain engraved in the memory of the survivors [5].

Faced with this phenomenon, the United Nations system feels the need to build a world free of racism and discrimination, where everyone can exercise all their fundamental rights, considering that wherever it is found, racism is to be condemned without hesitation, detour, and reservation [6]. In this context, a convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination was adopted in 1965 by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In Africa, from 1990 to 2004, there were 19 localized conflicts in 17 countries [7]. The wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan/Darfur, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Congo-Brazzaville, DRC/Kivu, Kenya, Burundi, and Rwanda, to name but a few, were ethno-political and deadly [8]. In the Great Lakes countries, the loss of human life is estimated at 3.5 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1.5 million in Rwanda, 300,000 in Burundi[9] 300,000 dead in Sudan[10], and deadly wars in the Tigra region of Ethiopia[11]. These ethno-political conflicts remain one of the major challenges to the stability and development of these countries, which have been, or still are, plagued by identity-based conflicts and inherent violence [12].

In the face of such a situation, some scholars argue that the media namely mass radio has always played an important role during periods of crisis or conflict around the world, hence the control of information at such times proves to be a crucial issue [13]. Others argue that the media has not always played a positive role in some countries, such as Rwanda [14] where the international press covered the war that raged in the country between 1990 and 1994 with little fanfare[15] and the local media, including RTLM on top of everything else, exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions and incited the genocide [16]. Media blunders have also been observed in Ivory Coast [17] and Colombia [18]. However, several other sources argue that the media has some power to aggravate or appease the scale of a war [19]. In times of violent conflict, information becomes a formidable weapon capable of generating more or less devastating effects [20]. Nevertheless, the media can also prepare minds for peace, despite their unpredictability of appearing as arsonists or peacemakers [21]. In Burundi, at the time of the crisis from April 2015 to June 2016, journalists were accused of being among the voice bearers, namely civil society and opponents, in cahoots with the perpetrators of the aborted putsch of 13 May 2015[22]. The authorities in Bujumbura believed that the media had become agents of the insurrection by spreading the most alarmist rumors in the country [23]. As a result, Radio Rema FM and Radio Publique Africaine (RPA) were burnt down; while Bonesha FM, Isanganiro, and Radio-Télévision Renaissance were targets of shootings from where journalists fled to neighboring countries and elsewhere. Most of them work in radio stations (Humura Burundi, Inzamba, Igicaniro...) broad-

casting online from exile. The media in crisis communication in Burundi appears to be a weapon [24].

This study aims to evaluate and assess the Burundian population's appreciation of the role of radio stations during the period of recurrent identity-based conflicts in Burundi.

2. Materials and Methods

The instrument used for data collection was the survey questionnaire, composed of closed and open questions addressed to the inhabitants of the Bujumbura town hall, which includes Burundians from all regions and belonging to all social and professional categories.

Our survey population is made up of individuals aged 45 and over in 2021, living in the three urban communes (Muha, Mukaza, and Ntahangwa). For the administration of the questionnaire, "hetero-assessment" was used insofar as the respondent answers directly to the questions asked in the presence of the interviewer, with the possibility of asking for clarification on certain points to reassure him/herself of the adequacy between the question and the answer he/she gives.

The method used is qualitative-quantitative. To determine the survey population, we referred to the 2008 general census, which established the population of Burundi at 8,053,574 inhabitants, including 811,866 for the country's 18 cities and 497,166 for the city of Bujumbura. Based on the component method that takes into account fertility, mortality, and net migration, the projection estimated the population of Bujumbura at 722,498 inhabitants in 2021, of which 72,912 are aged 45 and over (ISTEEBU, 2008). Our sample is random and is made up of people who were at least 17 years old in 1993, the date of the elections followed by interethnic massacres and civil war. At the time of the survey in December 2021, they are 45 years old and are assumed to have experienced at least the ethno-political crises of 1993 and 2015. The sample taken followed the logic of the formula to arrive at the minimum size:
$$Deft * (Z^2 * x * p * (1-p) / e^2) / \{1 + [Z^2 * x * p * (1-p) / e^2] / e^2 * N\} = 384.$$
 Anticipating a non-response rate of 10%, the final sample size becomes $384.16 * 1.1 = 422.576$, which is rounded up to 423 individuals. The data was entered using the CSPRO tool and the results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and STATA software.

Presentation of the respondents

The sample is made up of people aged 45 and over. The [45-49] age group is the most represented with 33.29%. We note a decreasing representation as to the age group increases. Of the 423 people surveyed, 60.80% were male and 39.20% were female.

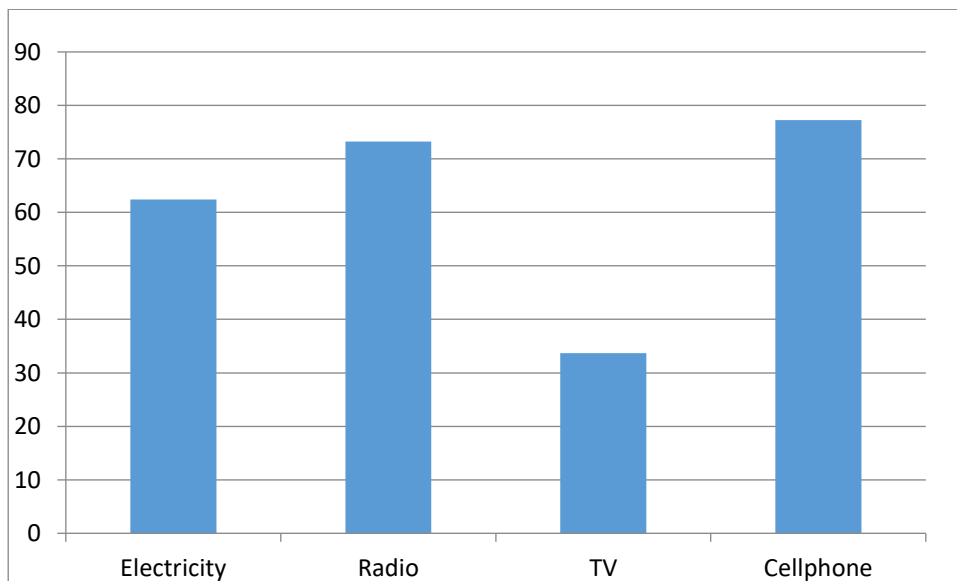
According to the level of education, 12.91% of the respondents have not been to school, 45.61% are at the primary level, 34.57% at the secondary level, and 6.91% at a higher level [university].

Several socio-professional categories participated in this survey. They were shopkeepers (24.75%), farmers (19.56%), civil servants (15.86%), workers (14.52%), and unemployed (12.88%). According to the religious beliefs of the respondents, Catholics are more numerous with 69.11%, followed by Protestants (22.54%) and finally Muslims (6.57%). Concerning the ethnic identities of the 423 respondents, 56.85% were Hutu, 32.74% Tutsi, and 10.04% Twa.

3. Results of the study

Access to information

Regarding access to information, 77.28% of respondents have a mobile phone with radio, 73.27% have a radio, 33.70% have a television set in their households and 62.43% have a fixed telephone. In addition, 62.43% have electricity in their households which allows them to connect their television sets, as indicated by the following figure.

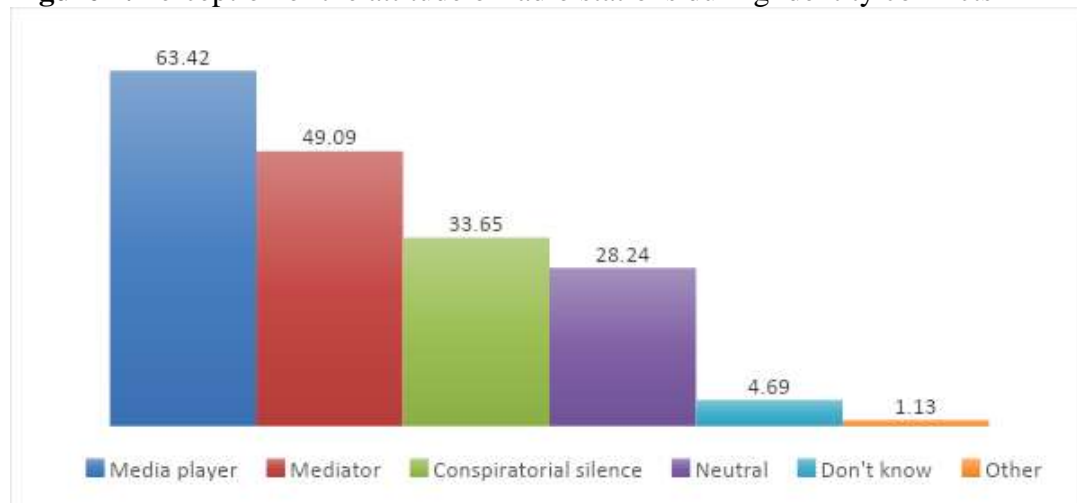


Respondents listen to radio stations broadcasting from Burundi (Radio Nationale with 84.87% of respondents, Radio Isanganiro (53.62%), Radio Maria (33.88%), Radio Bonesha-FM (28.80%), Voix d'espoir (18.59%) and Radio scolaire Nderagakura (10.52%). In addition, 39.95% of respondents listen to radio stations broadcasting from abroad, namely BBC (69.79% of them), VOA (42.20% of them), RFI (27.56% of them); the radio stations of Burundian journalists working in exile such as Humura (30% of them) and finally Inzamba (16.09% of them).

Impact of radio on identity conflicts

The following graph shows the population's perception of the work of radio stations during periods of conflict. It shows that the perceived image of the work of the radio stations is mainly that of the media actor, however, the pacifying position was noted on some radio stations. The proportion test reveals that there is a significant statistical difference in the assessment of the work of the media as pyromaniac or mediation ($z = 2.3856$, $Pr[Z > z] = 0.0085$)

Figure 1. Perception of the attitude of radio stations during identity conflicts



The attitude that radios reflect varies by radio. Indeed, 63.42% of the respondents affirmed that most of the radios acted as mediators while 49.09% found that the radios took the role of mediators. The proportion test reveals that there is a significant statistical difference in the assessment of the work of the media as an arsonist or a conflict amplifier ($z=2.3856$, $Pr [Z > z] = 0.0085$); the finding is therefore that the perceived image is mainly that of a mediator.

The other perceived attitude is that of complicit silence (33.65%). The attitude of neutrality was also mentioned to have characterized the radios by 28.24% of the respondents.

Using the Chi-square test, we find that there is no significant statistical relationship between the perception of the work of radio stations and ethnicity and that respondents of different ethnicities perceive the partisan attitude of the media towards identity conflicts in the same way.

From the multinomial regression results, we deduce that this perception is statistically the same for all ethnicities and religions. To elucidate the relationship between the perception of radios regarding the behavior of mediator or media star with factors such as ethnicity, level of education, religion, and frequency of listening to the radio; we conducted a multinomial regression. We find that none of these variables influence the perception of radio stations on how they work. Thus, the mediatized attitude adopted by radio stations during periods of conflict is generally shared. In other words, Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas have the same perception of the attitude of radio stations during identity crises. Catholics, Protestants, and

Muslims make the same observation. Finally, this observation remains the same for all respondents regardless of whether they have been to school or not.

Compared to foreign radio stations, 50% of the respondents said that foreign radio stations feel compassion for the victims compared to local radio stations. In addition, 38.96% felt that they had easy access to information. Nevertheless, 39.34% of the respondents felt that foreign radio stations distorted information and favored sensationalism.

4. Discussion of the results

The results confirm the diversification of media contents thought as solutions to identity problems whose aims and causes were mentioned in their respective answers and this is in decreasing order.

The proportion test reveals a statistically significant difference in the assessment of the media's work calling them an arsonist, an amplifier, and a mediator ($Z=2.36$ Pr ($Z > z$)=0,0085). This attitude is explained by 65.37% of the respondents who believe that the media is subservient to the government, which creates a handicap of independence. This assertion is in line with the results across the African continent [25] which states that most of the so-called public media in Central Africa are struggling to free themselves from the grip of governments. This research adds to the assertion by saying that even though some of these media outlets are attempting to have financial autonomy, they are clashing with the tradition of control of the state media by government authorities who are inclined to directly influence the role of the media. Previous findings also affirm that in Burundi and Rwanda, press freedom seems to follow political trends and can thus be seen as an instrument to measure the degree of democracy [26]. The same results confirm that the state radio and television, then in the service of the political parties, contribute to the propagation of partisan and radical speech, reinforcing ethnic tensions [27]. These results are in contrast to the view that the media should act as a church in the middle of the village [28] with a guiding and mirroring function in a society [29].

Conclusion

Burundi has been plagued by recurrent and deadly identity conflicts and information about them reached the population through the radio, the most listened-to medium in a society characterized by orality. Using the questionnaire and analyzing the responses of a sample of 423 stakeholders by Excel and STATA, the results show that the attitude of radio stations during periods of identity conflicts is that of a media actor or arsonist instead of a mediator.

References

- [1] A.-D. N'Dimina-Mougala, Les conflits identitaires ou ethnopolitiques africains au xxe siècle: caractéristiques et manifestations, *Guerr. Mond. Confl. Contemp.*, **248** (4) (2012), 97. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.248.0097>

- [2] T. Snyder, *Black Earth*, Gallimard, 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.14375/NP.9782070149506>
- [3] G. Corm, Conflicts and Identities in the Middle East (1919-1991), *Polit. Étrangère*, **57** (2) (1992), 449-450.
- [4] T. Carneiro and M. Luiza, Citizens of the world: Brazil facing the Holocaust and Jewish refugees (1933-1948), *World Citizens*, (2017), 1-546.
- [5] K. Whigham, *Resonant Violence: Affect, Memory, and Activism in Post-Genocide Societies*, 2022. Accessed: June 4, 2022.
- [6] A. Guterres, NO to Racism | United Nations, *United Nations*, March 21, 2021.
- [7] P. Hugon, Conflits armés, insécurité et trappes à pauvreté en Afrique:, *Afr. Contemp.*, **218** (2) (2006), 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.218.47>
- [8] A.-D. N'Dimina-Mougala, Les conflits identitaires ou ethnopolitiques africains au xxe siècle : caractéristiques et manifestations, *Guerr. Mond. Confl. Contemp.*, 248 (4) (2012), 97. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.248.0097>
- [9] M.-S. Frère, F. Reyntjens, and S. Marysse, *Après les médias de la Haine: La régulation en RDC, au Burundi et au Rwanda*. L'Harmattan, 2006, pp. 85-118.
- [10] J. Tubiana, Le Darfour, un conflit identitaire?., *Afr. Contemp.*, 214 (2) (2005), 165-206. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.214.0165>
- [11] S. Le Gouriellec, Ethiopia: the crisis of ethnic federalism, *Rev. Def. Natl.*, **838** (3) (2021), 115-118. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rdna.838.0115>.
- [12] UNDP, National Human Development Report - 2019 Edition | United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP*, 2020.
- [13] C. Francœur, É. George, S. Lamoureux, and J.-H. Roy, Un demi-siècle de recherches uqamiennes sur le journalisme : état des lieux et perspectives d'avenir, *Commun. Rev. Commun. Soc. Publique*, n° La communication à l'UQAM, p. 23-45, March 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4000/communiquer.4904>
- [14] A. Lenoble-Bart and A.-J. Tudesq, *Connaître les médias d'Afrique subsaharienne: Problématiques, sources et ressources*, Paris, Pessac, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Karthala, 2008.
- [15] A. Laliberté, *Journalism between war and peace in Rwanda*, 2012.

- [16] K. Annan, *The Media, and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs550>
- [17] J.-B. Ouédraogo and E. Sall, Eds., *Frontiers of citizenship and political violence in Côte d'Ivoire*, Dakar, Codesria, 2008.
- [18] E. U. Carreño and Y. Serrano, Colombia, 2018. Accessed on: 11 June 2022.
- [19] M. Crettenand, The role of the press in peace-building: the case of the Basque conflict, *Rô Presse Dans Constr. Peace*, 2014, pp. 1-296.
- [20] M.-S. Frère, *Journalisms of Africa*, 2016.
- [21] P. Hamel and L. Guay, *Les aléas du débat public*, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2018.
- [22] L. Ndayisaba, Process of Democratization and Polarization of a Society. An Analysis of the Current Crisis in Burundi (April 2015-June 2016), *J. Afr. Confl. Peace Stud.*, **3** (2) (2017). <https://doi.org/10.5038/2325-484X.3.2.1100>
- [23] Human Rights Watch, April 2015-June 2020: A Chronology of Media and Civil Society Repression in Burundi, *Human Rights Watch*, May 26, 2021.
- [24] T. Vircoulon, The weapon of communication in the Burundian crisis, IFRI, 2018.
- [25] M.-S. Frère, *Elections and the Media in Central Africa: The Way of the Ballot Box, the Voice of Peace?*, Karthala Editions, 2010.
- [26] Palmans, La liberté de la presse au Rwanda et au Burundi, *L'Afrique des Grands-Lacs*, Yearbook, 2003.
- [27] É. Palmans, Les médias face au traumatisme électoral au Burundi, *Polit. Afr.* **97** (1) (2005) p. 66. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.097.0066>
- [28] A. D. Koffi-Kra, Le journalisme de paix, de la théorie à la pratique: le cas de la radio Okapi en République Démocratique du Congo (RDC), 2021.
- [29] W. K. Agee, P. H. Ault, and E. Emery, *Introduction aux communications de masse*, Brussels, Paris, De Boeck-Wesmael; Editions universitaires, 1989.

Received: June 17, 2022 ; Published: July 23, 2022