

# The Role of Radio-Télévision Libre Des Mille Collines in the Rwandan Genocide: An Analysis from the Theoretical Perspectives of Intergroup Threat and Aggression

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## ABSTRACT

*This research focuses on the role of Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) in the Rwandan genocide. It analyzes the radio broadcasts through the prism of theories of intergroup threat and aggression. In this perspective, this medium is conceived as a manipulative and propagandist agent which participated in the perpetration of mass killings constituting the Rwandan genocide, through the dissemination of the ideology of hatred before and during the genocide and the logistical assistance provided to those involved in the killings. Indeed, RTLM broadcasts were structured in such a way as to present the Hutu as victims (intergroup threat), with the aim of justifying the use of violent actions against Tutsi (intergroup aggression). The corpus to be analyzed consists of extracts from RTLM broadcasts selected from transcripts stored at the Montreal Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) and at the International Monitor Institute (IMI). These extracts were analyzed with the method of discourse analysis. They reveal that RTLM's discourse was based on the victimization and glorification of Hutus, as well as the devaluation and demonization of Tutsis. Concretely, the radio broadcasts were structured in such a way as to incite Hutu (past and present victims of injustice) to exterminate Tutsi (the enemies, the "cockroaches" (inyenzi)) and to eradicate them from Rwandan society. They were built around two main themes, including the threat, which includes elements like propaganda and hatred, homogenization, categorization and victimization ; and aggressiveness which includes the revolutionary vision of Rwanda, the dehumanization of Tutsi, their designation as enemies, the search for a just and homogeneous society.*

## INTRODUCTION

Genocide consists of the elimination of a gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, culture or group identity (Bilsky & Klagsbrun, 2018; Finnegan, 2020; O'Brien & Hoffstaedter, 2020; Suedfeld, 2020). It can be understood as the extermination of groups defined by their hierarchical position, political opposition to the genocidal regime or common characteristics. The Rwandan genocide, which concerns two ethnic groups (Hutus and Tutsis), is seen as the

consequence of a society plagued by hatred, discrimination, prejudice and ethnic divisions (Mutabazi, 2011; Prunier, 1995a). As in all genocides, the authorities gave instructions to the populations to exterminate the individuals they considered to be enemies. However, the peculiarity of the Rwandan genocide lies in the role played by the media in general and Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) in particular (Gragg, 2012). Considered as the voice of central power and a credible media outlet among the population, because it benefited from the support of the governing authorities, it incited Hutu to mass violence (Asad, 2014). Former studies have further analyzed its role from a media perspective, as a medium of hatred, a propaganda tool aimed at persuading the masses, and a logistical instrument. They did not abound in the sense of incitement to threat and intergroup aggression, especially by emphasizing that this radio station aroused intra-ethnic coercion and intimidation, obedience, fear of war, desire for revenge, anger, desire to plunder or gain land, as well as interpersonal and intergroup rivalries. These elements presented Hutu as the victims of the system (intergroup threat) and justified the violence against Tutsi (intergroup aggression). This is what this research is about.

## **METHODS**

The method used in this research is discourse analysis. It is a transdisciplinary method that is part of a qualitative methodological approach responding to trends in pragmatics, linguistics, anthropology, intercultural or social linguistics, ethnology and sociology. It is a research technique that allows to question what people say when speaking, beyond what they say. It aims to interpret and analyze speeches according to the speaker's identity. It analyzes the articulation of the text and the social place in which it is produced (Maingueneau, 1984). It consists of inserting this into an overall problematic attempting to link language facts to certain psychological and social phenomena: action and influence. It is in this perspective that the present study is situated. It analyzes RTLM broadcasts, placing them in the perspective of the elements that led to mass killings in the Rwandan genocide.

This study takes place in the perspective of the psychological analysis of genocide and victimization in the context of mass killings (McDoom, 2012; Staub, 2002, 2013; Staub et al., 2005; Suedfeld, 2020; Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). Its empirical basis consists of extracts from RTLM broadcasts, used in the context of legal proceedings at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). These are soundtracks stored at the Montreal Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS) and at the International Monitor Institute (IMI), a non-profit organization, mandated by the ICTR to translate Kinyarwanda broadcasts into English and French languages. They were used as evidence to support the involvement of political leaders and journalists in the genocide (Kellow & Steeves, 1998).

The excerpts from the radio broadcasts come from two periods: before the assassination of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana on April 6, 1994, and after this assassination until the end of the genocide in July 1994. From the point of view of the analysis, this breakdown is justified by the fact that it makes it possible to identify the object of the present research, since before this assassination, the RTLM presented Tutsi as a threat to Hutu, thus spreading a feeling of fear and hatred within this ethnic community (intergroup threat). In the period following this assassination, RTLM broadcasts not only tried to persuade all Hutu to participate in mass killings, but also played a logistical role in their planning (intergroup aggression).

According to the director of the MIGS (Chalk, 1999), the transcripts could be incomplete, since RTLM broadcasted propaganda in the period from October 1993 to July 1994. However, the translated transcripts cover only 55 days, or 15.3% of the 361 days of RTLM broadcasting (McDoom, 2012). They are available in English, French and one of Rwanda's two national languages, Kinyarwanda. For the purposes of this research, only transcripts available in English and French were examined. In addition, most of the transcripts available in these two languages are those which have been translated for the ICTR. It could also skew the analysis of the content

of RTLM's broadcasts, as most of them were used to substantiate the charges against the radio officials and journalists. We would therefore risk exaggerating their role in the commission of the genocide. To remedy this problem, this study also draws on secondary sources providing a more in-depth analysis of the content of this radio station in order to understand the persuasion techniques and logistics used by its journalists to incite violence.

## RESULTS

### Corpus Analysis

The analysis of the corpus retained in this study will be done in two stages. First, we are interested in the theme relating to intergroup threat that RTLM broadcasts made Hutus feel. Second, we dwell on the incitement to intergroup aggression caused by these broadcasts.

### Intergroup threat in RTLM broadcasts

Intergroup threat theory postulates that threat emerges when the actions, beliefs or characteristics of one group or individual compete with or oppose the achievement of the goals or well-being of another group or individual. It distinguishes between individual threat and group threat. In both cases, the individual or group feels the threat according to their membership in a particular collective entity (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). At the group or individual level, the threat can be realistic or symbolic. The first endangers physical and material well-being, while the second attacks an individual's value system, beliefs or identity. In this study, the feeling of intergroup threat aroused by RTLM broadcasts is addressed on the basis of the following sub-themes : the dangerousness of Tutsi, incitement to ethnic hatred, victimization of Hutu and intergroup categorization.

### The designation of Tutsi as a danger to society : an oppressive and violent people

The crash of President Habyarimana's plane on April 6, 1994, made the Tutsi, a people considered oppressive and violent (Monasebian, 2007), a danger to Rwandan society made up mainly of Hutu. Faced with this danger, RTLM journalist Bemeriki, relying on the ninth Hutu commandment, paragraph 1, urges the Bahutu, wherever they are, to be united, in solidarity and to be concerned about the fate of their Hutu brothers. On June 4, 1994, he declared on RTLM antennas : « I am greeting the Rwandan Armed Forces... We know how useful you are for us... the population must defend itself ? Harassed by the enemy ». In RTLM broadcasts, Tutsis are described by terms such as : malicious, liars, or enemies ; hence the call for solidarity between Hutu to fight them.

### Propaganda and ethnic hatred

Propaganda is the dissemination of information for the purpose of influencing the opinions of others. It is a control and compliance instrument used by the dominant group (Fitzmaurice, 2018 ; Malhan & Dewani, 2020 ; Sanz, 2018). RTLM relied on this strategy to encourage Hutus to believe in the threat represented by Tutsis. The words of journalist Karamira, made on April 22, 1994, illustrate the concern to influence opinions. He emphasized the role played by the CDR militia in managing the conflict with the Tutsi rebel movement of the RPF. He declares :

CDR has long contributed to correct what was not perfect because it was not seeking its personal interest but Rwanda's interest. CDR could not make any harm to the agreements since they seemed able to bring peace...Unfortunately, RPF on its part was against and CDR did everything to show it. RPF impinged on their application until it sought to prevent CDR from being part of the transitional institutions whereas our participation was specified by the agreements.

In the same vein, Kantano, another RTLM journalist, launched a strong appeal for resistance on May 23, 1994, declaring : « The fathers of Inyenzi fled away in the 59's. However,

Gustave Adolphe Messanga, Marios Yannick Duclair Tajeugueu the fathers told their children: "It's high time to take weapons and fight for the recovery of the power encroached upon us by Hutus. So, stand up ! » The purpose of these messages is to draw the attention of Hutu to the danger that reigns. The following statements, made on RTLM on April 15 by Barahinyura and June 22, 1994 by Bemeriki respectively, also reveal how effective the propaganda campaign was : « However, our war does not use bullets. It uses papers and words »; « your weapon RTLM is there, it will fight against them...». In the same vein, on June 2, 1994, Bemeriki states :

Now, we seem to have forgotten political parties and it is understandable since the enemy who harasses us is unique ... In the meantime, we have put aside matters of political parties even if the international community is shouting: 'Interahamwe! Interahamwe!' ... But for us, we apply that word to all of us, to all Rwandans who stood up together, at the same time, who got united in order to beat the Inyenzi Inkotanyi

These excerpts reflect the importance of supporting the creation of militias within the Hutu group in order to resist the RPF. They report on the propaganda and hatred broadcast by this radio in order to arouse in the Hutu a feeling of threat likely to push them to oppose the Tutsi.

### **The victimization of Hutus**

Victimization consists of the consideration of Hutus as victims of the genocide. The following excerpts evoke this feeling of victimization. On June 22, 1994, Gahigi declared on RTLM antennas that :

French troops are coming to Rwanda saying that they are coming to stop killings in Rwanda... The Rwandan government says: French troops, you are welcome. The Inkotanyi say: All our supporters who are in the country or outside the country stand up against the bad initiative of France. So, who is the killer? The killers are obviously the Inkotanyi as we have always been telling you.

He adds : «...the objective of the Tutsi is obviously to exterminate the Hutu, the majority mass ». In the same perspective, on May 20, 1994, Bemeriki, a regular journalist for RTLM, declared : « Aussi longtemps que nous nous lèverons tous ensemble pour combattre les Inkotanyi, Dieu sera à nos côtés et Jésus nous prêtera main-forte pour les vaincre. Vous qui êtes au front, tenez fort, la Sainte Vierge est avec nous, elle n'ignore pas que nous sommes des victimes. » On March 30, 1994, Gahigi follows the same logic :

« The problem is that, in fact, the Arusha agreements have dealt with two main issues, the first issue was to stop the war launched by RPF and the second issue which is in my opinion the main issue was to share the power. And it is obvious that RPF does not want to share the power that they want to keep totally as they wished it when they launched the war in 1990. »

The victimization of Hutu implicitly suggests their extermination by Tutsi (for example : « So, who is the killer ? The killers are obviously the Inkotanyi, to exterminate the Hutu »). The Hutu are then represented, since the assassination of President Habyarimana, as the victims of the violence perpetrated by Tutsi. This is why these journalists talk about territorial threat (we can fight for our city, our country) and victimization (we are victims). In short, the Hutu victimize themselves by attributing the responsibility for the political and socioeconomic crises with which the country is confronted to the Tutsis.

### **Intergroup categorization**

Categorization refers to the group memberships of individuals. It can be based on identity or social class. In Rwanda on the basis of identity, Tutsi are categorized as Hamites (upper race, herders) and Hutu (lower class, farmers) are categorized as Bantu. The excerpt below, broadcast on RTLM on December 2, 1993, evokes this ethnic categorization :

Les Tutsi sont des nomades et des envahisseurs qui sont venus au Rwanda à la recherche de pâturages, mais parce qu'ils sont si rusés et méchants, les Tutsi ont réussi à rester et à

gouverner. Si vous autorisez le retour des Tutsi ? Hamites, ils ne vous dirigeront pas seulement au Rwanda, mais étendront également leur pouvoir dans la région des Grands Lacs.

In short, by emphasizing the dangerousness of Tutsi, propaganda and ethnic hatred, victimization of Hutu and intergroup categorization, RTLM broadcasts contributed to making Hutu feel intergroup threat inspired by Tutsi. This feeling of threat materialized in intergroup aggression.

### **Incitement to intergroup aggression in RTLM programs**

Aggression is an act consisting of intentionally harm others (Akçay & Akçay, 2020 ; Estévez et al., 2018). There are two main strategies for acts of human aggression : hostile and instrumental. Hostile aggression is characterized as impulsive, thoughtless, unforeseen and anger-driven, which has the ultimate goal of harming the target and occurs in reaction to a perceived provocation. This is sometimes called emotional, impulsive or reaction aggression. Instrumental aggression, on the other hand, is a premeditated means to achieve a goal other than harming the victim. It is proactive rather than reactive (Berkowitz, 1993 ; Geen, 2001). The literature distinguishes between different types of aggression and various functions that aggression fulfills (Krahé, 2013 ; Parrott & Giancola, 2007). These authors distinguish between various forms of assault which include : (1) physically injuring a person (physical assault : hitting, biting, kicking or stabbing, shooting) ; (2) hurting a person with words (verbal aggression: yelling ; shouting); and (3) engaging in relationship aggression, which involves damaging reputation or friendship through what is said verbally or electronically. The assault can also be direct (with victims physically present) or indirect (in the absence of the victim : breaking someone's property or spreading false information about him) (Allen & Anderson, 2017).

Assaults also differ in their function. Anderson and Huesmann (2003), propose that to understand the function of aggression, it is necessary to situate it on three dimensions, namely the degree of nuisance of the victim in relation to the perpetrator ; the level of hostile or agitated emotions presented and the degree of thinking about the aggression. On the one hand, this may be a pure intention to punish or injure the targeted person, for example by reacting aggressively to a provocation (reactive, affective, hostile, aggressively repulsive or retaliatory). On the other hand, it may be a thoughtful or deliberate plan to hurt others to achieve the desired result (proactive, planned or cold aggression) (Wrangham, 2018). An assault can be an automatic response motivated by self-protection mechanisms.

As part of the present analysis of the role played by RTLM broadcasts in the Rwandan genocide, we are interested in the revolutionary vision of Rwanda, the designation of Tutsi as enemies of Rwanda, the search for social justice and homogenization of society, and dehumanization of Tutsi.

### **The revolutionary vision of Rwanda and the extermination of Tutsi**

In an RTLM program broadcast on July 2, 1994, journalist Kantano Habimana incites the Hutus to revolt as in the past, at the time of Tutsi' monarchy : « we have to see the similarity of things, during the 1959 revolution. » In Rwanda, the social revolution that broke out in November 1959 almost spawned a civil war. It killed several hundred people and drove nearly one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) Tutsis on the paths of exile. This revolution led by Hutus against Tutsis could appear, at first glance, like the social revolution of the small against the large. However, it quickly took the shape of a racial revolution, the contours of which raised fears of genocide. This is evidenced by this extract from a leaflet published in 1961 by a party opposed to the racial ideology promoted by the Parmehutu party, a torchbearer of the Hutu cause: « [Pour le Parmehutu,] le progrès d'un Hutu, c'est la destruction des Tutsi au Rwanda [...]. C'est bouffer les vaches, incendier les huttes des voisins, tuer les Banyarwanda, nos frères.



Une pareille méchanceté est dite "travailler". » (Unesco, n.d.: 5) During the genocide of 1994, these prescriptions were put into practice.

### **The designation of Tutsi as enemies of Rwanda**

In the speeches of RTLM journalists, the Tutsi are clearly seen as enemies of Rwanda. As evidenced by these remarks made by Bémériki, June 28, 1994 : « As a consequence, the enemy of our country, our common enemy, the Inyenzi-Inkotanyi, may take advantage and infiltrate among the population. » This perception fully justifies the call for the extermination of this ethnic component of Rwandan society which, in the space of a few decades, has gone from the status of an indigenous group to that of an invader to be slaughtered (Piton, 2018; Piton & Adjemian, 2018).

### **The search for a fair and equitable society**

In the vision of the genocidal Hutu, a just and equitable society is made up of equal individuals and treated according to their merits. However, to access it, they believe that it is necessary to go through the elimination of Tutsi from Rwandan society. On July 2, 1994, journalist Kantano Habimana rejoiced at the extermination of Tutsi :

Mais donc ! Ces Inkotanyi qui me téléphonaient à la radio, où sont-ils allés ? Ils doivent sûrement avoir été exterminés. Ils doivent sûrement avoir été exterminés...Chantons donc : Réjouissons-nous, amis ! Les Inkotanyi ont été exterminés ! Réjouissons-nous, amis ! Dieu ne peut jamais être injuste !

This extermination is celebrated because it is believed to lead to the restoration of peace, abolition of the Abuhake culture and elimination of the Hamitic (Tutsi) myth.

### **The homogenization of society**

Societies that experience social diversity typically face intergroup divisions. Indeed, the literature indicates that the level of diversity of a country, whether it is more ethnically homogeneous or heterogeneous, has a negative impact on intergroup tensions (Medeiros, 2014). To overcome these tensions, some individuals are inclined to resort to the solution consisting in the homogenization of populations by eliminating all contact between the parties in conflict. Two methods can be used to achieve this goal. The first is the complete assimilation of one of the groups by the other. The second, more macabre, refers to genocide. It proceeds by the extermination of members of one of the groups present ; that is, through ethnic cleansing (Messanga, 2018). This is the solution chosen by elites and Hutu populations. In this vein, an RTLM journalist declared on May 29, 1994 :

The one who does not have papers should remain there or even leave his [her] head there. However, in reality, I think that the check should be necessary because everybody should have his [her] papers with him [her] certifying that he [she] is really Rwandan and is really a son of "Sebahinzi" that he is not an enemy, or an accomplice or an Inkotanyi. I think that all those who remain in this country, we know each other; we are the sons of the same man.

On May 16-17, 1994, another said :

And you people, who live down there near Rugunga, even though it is raining, go out. You will see Inkotanyi's straw-huts in the marsh where horses are kept. It is clear then that this place shelters Inkotanyi [RPF soldiers]. I think that those who have guns should immediately go to these Inkotanyi before they listen to Radio RTLM and flee. Stand near this place and encircle them and kill them because they are there.

### **Dehumanization of Tutsis**

Dehumanization is the fourth out of ten steps in the stages of genocide model developed by Gregory Stanton (Luft, 2019). It consists, by using specific terms to designate undesirable groups, in removing all humanity from their members, in particular by assimilating them to

animals. In doing so, the majority group comes to perceive the other group as less than human, even alien to their society. Its members are brainwashed into believing that they would be better off without their presence, hence the fact that they can reflect on their deportation, even their extermination. This was the case in Nazi Germany where Jews were called rats and vermin. In Rwanda, the terms cockroaches and snakes were used to designate Tutsi. In this vein, between May 26 and May 28, 1994, Kantano Habimana gave the following speech on RTLM :

Je profite de l'occasion pour dire bonjour aux jeunes qui sont à la barrière, près de l'abattoir, sur la route de Kimisagara. Hier je les ai trouvés en train de danser le zouk... Gardez bien le caniveau, pour que demain aucun cafard ne passe !... Que vous soyez enragés et que nous puissions combattre pour notre ville, notre pays, chers frères... Bon courage, restez à l'écoute de la Radio RTLM, il est 12 h 02.

On June 14, 1994, Bemeriki, another RTLM journalist, declared : « The worst kind of inyenzi, I don't mean just Tutsi who are all inyenzi, for me the worst kind of inyenzi is a Hutu inyenzi. A Hutu who plots with other Hutu telling them: "Get up, run away" when the inyenzi are not even there yet. »

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to analyze RTLM broadcasts in the context of Rwandan genocide, based on theories of threat and intergroup aggression. It starts from the idea that even if this medium cannot be considered as the instigator of the genocide, it participated in the events by spreading the genocidal ideology, amplifying the feeling of threat felt by Hutus and providing logistical assistance in planning the killings. The analysis of the audio tapes stored at the MIGS and the IMI not only made it possible to identify the constituent elements of the speeches of RTLM journalists who were used in the propaganda and ideology of Hutu Power (intergroup threat), but also those which were used in the planning of killings (intergroup aggression).

This research sheds light on the relevance of the strategy developed by RTLM in inciting threat and intergroup aggression before and during the Rwandan genocide. It confirms the fact that radio can have a very important influence on listeners. Indeed, RTLM presented different forms of information to attract the attention of the population (Mirondo, 2007). Music, speeches, announcements, interviews, and debates on the history of the enemies (Tutsi) and the future of Rwanda were frequently on air. The populations massively and quickly adhered to this logic by participating and obeying messages deemed legitimate and fair, because this medium was considered the voice of the central state. It therefore had the opportunity to spread the genocidal logic to its listeners, to whom it gave the opportunity to identify threats and act against the enemy. We can say that it helped to radicalize sections of the Hutu population.

Radicalization is a complex process and not a static situation subject to all kinds of influences (Mc Cauley & Moskalenko, 2008). It designates the process by which an individual or group adopts a violent form of action, directly linked to an extremist ideology with political, social or religious content, which challenges the established order (Malvaceda et al., 2018 ; Reidy, 2019; Rink & Sharma, 2018). In the individual, this process is accompanied by a growing acceptance of the extreme personal repercussions of his ideas and actions, ultimately leading to a general behavior of uncompromising and tendency to seek confrontation with those who stand on his way. It is perceived as a form of social and emotional compensation, which emerges in reaction to violence suffered or perceived as such. This definition allows a broad approach to the radical phenomenon. It places the radicalization observed in Rwanda before and during the genocide in the historical perspective of relations between Hutu and Tutsi. In this vein, Hutu extremism is considered to be behavior that derives from the Tutsi monarchy, the frustrations suffered during the colonial period, the revolution and the war for power between the RPF, made up of Tutsi refugees, and the pro-Hutu Rwandan government. For example, the interhamwe militias, made up of radical Hutu extremists who participated very actively in the

1994 genocide, were born after the 1959 revolution (Chrétien et al., 1995). During the genocide, RTLM made these events dating back more than three decades a source of motivation and incitement to mass violence with the aim of purging the social injustices of the past.

## **CONCLUSION**

The media discourse which presided over the Rwandan genocide targeted not only extremist groups, but also populations. The programs broadcast by RTLM aimed to indoctrinate the populations, by leading them to believe that Tutsi are criminals, enemies of Rwanda, and even people with no right to life, hence their dehumanization. The radio station's strategy consisted of increasing the number of programs and broadcasting the calls to action on a loop (Prunier, 1995b). The aim was to strengthen listeners' convictions, radicalize them and push them to participate in the killings without questioning their beliefs. So the radio was brainwashing. Indeed, the literature on the propaganda used in the Rwandan genocide reveals the important role of RTLM in the transformation of behavior (African Rights, 1995). Concretely, during the genocide, RTLM became what one listener referred to as « vampire radio », openly calling for more bloodshed and massacres (Prunier, 1995b).

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