BURUNDI'S 2015 CRISIS AND THE ETHNICIZATION OF MEMORY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Introduction

On 25 April 2015, Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza officially presented his candidacy for a third, controversial presidential term. His candidacy was not allowed by the 2005 Constitution,[2] and caused impressive protests in the streets of Bujumbura. Clashes with police and security forces took place during the protests, and a violent repression was carried out in the following months that led to hundreds of deaths.[3]

During what is commonly referred to as the '2015 crisis', ethnic references sneaked into the political discourse. In addition to the repression of the protests on the streets, the persecution of political opponents was carried out in the so-called '*quartiers contestataires*', the 'protesting quarters', which happened to be mainly populated by Tutsi.[4] Arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings[5] were perpetrated against those opposing (or suspected to oppose) Nkurunziza's third term, either for political or ethnic reasons. In a context of mounting tensions, memories of past violence surfaced, evoking the fear of a revival of ethnic tensions. Less than ten years after the end of the last cycle of ethnic violence in Burundi, the fear of a new ethnic genocide became more concrete.[6]

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[2] Two presidential terms are allowed by Burundi's Constitution. Nkurunziza's party, the CNDD FDD, defended his candidacy by arguing that his first term (2005-2010) could not be considered the first under the constitution, since the President was elected by the Parliament in 2005, not by the population (as required by the Arusha Peace Agreement). Therefore, the 2015-2020 term would have been his second one, and thus legitimate.

[3] Sources do not agree on the number of casualties. This varies between 720 (according to government figures: IRIN 2017: 22 June) and more than 1,000 as of June 2017 (FIDH/Ligue Iteka 2017). The crisis provoked the flight of more than 400,000 people to neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2017) and more than 200,000 IDPs (OCHA 2017).

[4] Nkurunziza's CNDD FDD is predominantly Hutu.

[5] Human Rights Council 2017; Amnesty International 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017.

[6] Cyclic episodes of ethnic violence have marked the history of Burundi since its independence (1962). The most important massacres took place in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1988, 1991 and 1993. In 1993, the Hutu candidate of the FRODEBU Melchior Ndadaye

Given the context of insecurity, most Burundian political opponents, activists and journalists left the country and continued their activities from abroad through Twitter, Facebook, and other online platforms. In a more protected and secure context, they could express their opinions much more openly. Social media thus became one of the most relevant political battlefields in Burundi.[7] Accusations, defences, allegations, and expressions of support on social media represented an integral part of the official political debate in the country. Verbal violence and ethnic accusations that would have hardly been possible offline were very freely expressed online.

On social media, ethnicity gained an increasingly predominant role in the political debate related to the 2015 crisis.[8] This seemed to confirm the suspicion of many that the crisis was motivated by reasons that were more ethnic than political. An analysis of the way in which ethnicity regained its relevance was thus necessary. Narratives circulating online, in fact, could reflect perceptions, opinions, rumours that circulated offline. At the same time, online narratives could have an impact on the way in which the contemporary crisis was perceived offline.

The following text focuses on the process of ethnicization of the memory of President Cyprien Ntaryamira on Twitter. It will show that the commemoration of the late President, an event that was not related to the 2015 crisis *per se*, was affected by the contemporary political situation, especially by the attempts to ethnicize the crisis. Between 2014 and 2017, the memory of Ntaryamira on Twitter was progressively associated with a specific group that increasingly characterized itself in ethnic terms.

1. Online research

The virtual world is not less worth being studied than the physical one. Online, real communities emerge which 'share social interaction, social ties, and a common interactional format, location or "space" – albeit, in this case, a computer-mediated or virtual "cyberspace"' (Postill & Pink 2012: 126). This does not come as a surprise, if the virtual world is considered a product and extension of the physical one (Whitehead & Wesch 2012: 35). The case of Burundi is a perfect example of this. Journalists, activists, and political opponents fled the country because of security concerns and continued their activities in exile. The increased use of social media was motivated by

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won the presidential elections, interrupting the decades-long Tutsi rule. His assassination three months after he took office led to an ethnic civil war that officially ended in 2000 with the signature of the Arusha Peace Agreement. The most important rebel groups, the CNDD FDD (today Burundi's ruling party) and the FNL (today in the CNDD FDD government), signed the peace agreement in 2003 and 2006 respectively.

[7]   International Crisis Group 2016.
[8]   IRIN 2017: 21 August.

real, physical events that were taking place in the offline world.[9] The use of online platforms for the Burundian diaspora was a means to be connected and to continue to interact with a distant, offline context (Kadende-Kaiser 2000). Online and offline were thus never separated.

The online world does not simply reflect the offline realm, however. Some limitations must be kept in mind in the study of social media. People who are active on Twitter are not representative of the larger 'offline' society (Daniels 2016: 115) because of the possible different levels of access to the Internet. This can be especially valid for the so-called underdeveloped countries. There is usually an attempt to project an 'online persona' on social networks (Whitehead & Wesch 2012: 39), whose behaviours do not always correspond to those of the 'offline' person. Also, online activity can be produced by robot accounts. Finally, special attention must be paid to information provided by journalists in exile (Skjerdal 2010), who may be especially prone to making biased statements to the advantage of one party in periods of political tensions. Although this is not limited to social media, 'people on Twitter easily get outraged or excited – and in 140 characters – that snowballs into a "trend"' (Daniels 2016: 118).

The present chapter does not build on the assumption that the online context is the simple transposition of the offline landscape. Dynamics observed in the virtual realm may correspond or not with those taking place in the physical world. Evaluating to what extent such insights correspond to the offline reality is impossible when the analysis of the online realm is not accompanied and completed by a more traditional, 'physical' ethnographic research. A process of ethnicization cannot be properly understood without an analysis of its 'implementations' (Holst 2011: 105) – both online and offline.

This was beyond the purposes of this text, which is focused on the ethnicization of memory on social media. The present analysis is nonetheless relevant because dynamics observed online 'build' on the offline context and provide additional insights on it (Daniels 2016: 114). This is all the more valuable in contexts such as contemporary Burundi, where researchers must face the difficulty of collecting sensitive data because of existing tensions. Cyberspace, in fact, is a 'liminal, diasporic space, outside the constrictions of real politics, where one can express the in-expressible' (Turner 2008: 1177). Online, information can be gained that would otherwise not be possible to collect offline. Assessing the 'veracity' of what is being stated on social platforms, then, requires a different approach that includes physical interactions. Building on studies such as the present one, such assessments are certainly worth being carried out in future research.

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[9] Steers 2016.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a diachronic approach in order to observe the way in which the relevance of ethnicity increased in the last four years. Two periods of activity on Twitter before the start of the 2015 crisis were taken into consideration, and two periods after the outburst of violence in Bujumbura. A recurring event was chosen, which was independent from the contemporary events and involved the memory of the past. In this way, the increased relevance of ethnicity could be observed in relation to the outbreak of the 2015 crisis.

Choosing a 'neutral' object of analysis is a hard task in a context such as Burundi, where a shared history is not established yet, and any object of analysis may be perceived as 'Hutu' or 'Tutsi' according to one's own ethnic belonging. In the aim to avoid an explicitly ethnically-oriented object of analysis, emphasis was put on the national belonging, which is supposed to bypass other types of belonging such as the clan, the region, and ethnicity. The focus was put on one of the persons for whom a national holiday is celebrated in Burundi, President Cyprien Ntaryamira.

It is true that Ntaryamira, a Hutu, could represent a hero for this ethnic group in particular, since he died on the same airplane as the Hutu President of Rwanda Juvenal Habyarimana on 06 April 1994. This event is commonly perceived as the trigger for the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.[10] The other two persons for whom a national holiday is observed in Burundi, however, could be even more strongly associated with one ethnic group. Prince Louis Rwagasore, Burundi's Independence hero, was a Ganwa (the princely class that together with the Tutsi was privileged during the Belgian rule) and founder of the UPRONA party (Tutsi).[11] President Melchior Ndadaye was the first democratically elected Hutu President of Burundi, killed three months after he took office by a coup led by the Tutsi military (Chrétien 2002: 21, Lemarchand 1996: 179). The author will verify in future research if the memory of such figures also went through an analogous process of ethnicization, and to what extent that was different from the process under

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[10] Many moderate Hutu too were killed during the genocide, but the Rwandan genocide is widely known, and officially referred to, as the genocide against the Tutsi.

[11] At its foundation, the UPRONA (Union pour le Progrès national) was motivated by anticolonial purposes. Shortly after its foundation, the party became mono-ethnic and representative of the Tutsi group and its interests. In 1993, the political competition between the Tutsi UPRONA and the Hutu FRODEBU (Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi) for the presidential elections was particularly ethnically polarized (Reyntjens 2015: 31). Today, the Arusha Peace Agreement constrains every party to have an ethnically mixed composition. The UPRONA, as well as the rest of the political parties, is no longer mono-ethnic, but it is still predominantly Tutsi.

scrutiny here. This will definitely contribute to a better understanding of the ethnicization of memory on social media in periods of political crisis.

Twitter presents some advantages in terms of researching. Not only does this platform provide access to a huge quantity of publicly accessible data (Mejova, Weber, & Macy 2015: 37), but this access can remain unnoticed. On Twitter, it is possible to follow the activity of an account without reciprocating the friendship tie (Postill & Pink 2012: 128), therefore remaining inconspicuous and observing the development of the conversations without participating in them. Thanks to this position of invisibility, the factor of disturbance represented by participation is avoided. Normally, 'researcher-induced desirability bias makes it difficult to observe normatively inappropriate behaviours (e.g. expressions of racial and ethnic prejudice), which participants may self-censor' (Mejova, Weber & Macy 2015: 5) in the presence of the researcher. Furthermore, the 140-character limit of a tweet obliges the users to go straight to the point in their messages. A great deal of texts can be thus collected where not much room for interpretation is left. Nevertheless, messages can be squeezed precisely because of the length limit, which sometimes poses a problem of interpretation. In addition to this, in the tweets concerning the commemoration of Ntaryamira the use of the 'untold', a typical trait of the Burundian culture (Rodegem 1983: 383), was often made. Moreover, many tweets were written in Kirundi. To respond to these concerns, two Kirundi-speaking translators, who were not in contact with each other, contributed to this study with both translations and interpretations when needed.[12]

Data was collected through the publicly accessible Twitter Search tool (https://twitter.com/search-advanced). This tool retrieves a sample of the tweets that have been produced during a selected period (at most 1%, Mejova, Weber, & Macy 2015: 40). A search was launched for the tweets containing the word 'Ntaryamira' that have been written worldwide and in all languages between 6 March and 6 May (i.e. during the month preceding and the month following the commemoration of the late President) in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. When recurring relevant hashtags containing the name Ntaryamira were found among the displayed results, such as

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[12] Their interpretation was kept into account as an integration of the analysis of the rest of the tweets. The translators were personally chosen by the author according to their education level and their familiarity with Kirundi. Both translators belonged to the same ethnic group, but this did not affect the neutrality of their translations. The author's basic knowledge of Kirundi allowed her to verify that the translations referred to the tweets in question. Tweets that were not in Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, English or French were translated with Google Translate.

#JusticeForNtaryamira, a new search was launched to include all the tweets containing such hashtag in the dataset.[13]

For time and space constraints, data about retweets, likes and replies was not analysed in a systematic way. The analysis of such elements could have added valuable information to the present study because the meaning of a statement 'depends on where and against what the statement was made' (Daniels 2016: 111). Given that retweets, likes and replies need to be examined through a different approach (such as discourse and network analysis), and given the considerable amount of tweets of the dataset, the analysis of such elements could not find place in the present text. Nonetheless, this is among the author's priorities in future research.

3. Findings

1,349 tweets in total[14] were retrieved through the Twitter Search tool (126 tweets for the year 2014, 98 for 2015, 688 for 2016, and 437 for 2017). The production of tweets impressively increased in 2016 and 2017, i.e. after the outbreak of the 2015 crisis.[15]

Figure 1: number of tweets containing the name 'Ntaryamira'
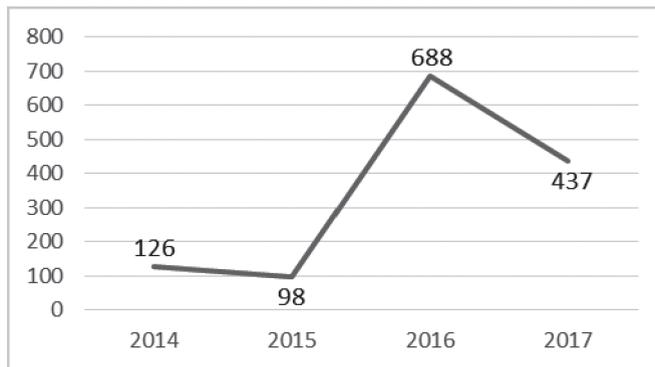
Source: Dataset.

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[13] In the initial search, such hashtags only appeared when the tweet also contained the name 'Ntaryamira' separated from other words.

[14] Excluding retweets, which repeat exactly the same information (10 in 2016 and 1 in 2017).

[15] This is not likely related to broader access to the Internet in Burundi. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimated that the percentage of individuals using the Internet in Burundi rapidly increased (+3.5%) between 2014 and 2015, not between 2015 and 2016 (ITU 2016. See also CIA's World Factbook 2017). However, many tweets were very likely written from abroad, therefore the increase cannot be explained through statistics concerning Burundi only.

In the following sections, five strategies will be explored that allowed the emergence and definition of different groups in relation to the commemoration of Ntaryamira. Such strategies were detected in an inductive way, through the systematic reading and analysis of the tweets. These five stratagems can be seen as parts of a process of boundary making that separated an in-group, built around Ntaryamira, from an out-group perceived as his opponent. Between 2014 and 2017, the group of Ntaryamira became increasingly defined in ethnic and political terms. Section 3.1 will show how through accusations, distance from the out-group was demarcated. Section 3.2 explores the appellatives used to make reference to the late President, in order to point out the figures Ntaryamira was associated with. Section 3.3 focuses on the expression of praise that allowed the in-group to reinforce its internal ties. Publicity for the activities of commemoration carried out by politicians and political parties (section 3.4) served the same purpose. The use of ethnic references in relation to the commemoration of Ntaryamira will be finally analysed in section 3.5.
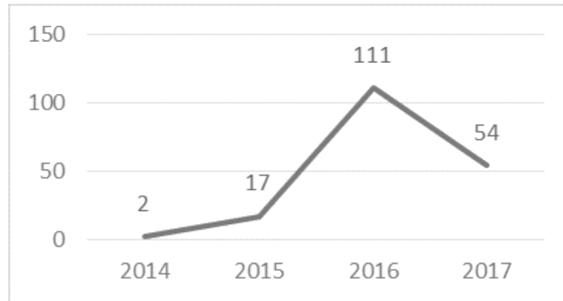
3.1. Accusations

Accusations represent one of the most immediate ways to establish a boundary between the Self and the Other. To accuse someone is to take distance from their person and behaviour, and to establish a clear line of demarcation between those who accuse and those who are accused.

The only message conveyed by several tweets related to the commemoration of Ntaryamira was an explicit accusation against the President of Rwanda or against his party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, seen as responsible for the murder of the late President of Burundi. The number of such accusations significantly increased after the outbreak of the 2015 crisis. 2 accusations were found in 2014, 17 in 2015, 111 in 2016[16] and 54 in 2017.[17]

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[16] In one of these, Kagame is not mentioned but the accusation is most likely addressed to him: 'The man who killed Ntaryamira is arming #burundi-an refugees, UN & several Organizations documented it. #rwanda'. According to a UN report, Burundian refugees in Rwanda were trained by Rwandan military personnel with the goal of ousting President Nkurunziza (Reuters 2016).

[17] One of which refers to 'the most celebrated mass murderer in the world', who most likely is Kagame. C. Kabanda [bandepac]. (06 April 2017). B[urun]di remembers their presi[dent] Ntaryamira who was assassinated in K[i]g[a]l[i] on 06.04.94 by the most celebrated mass murderer in the world @UKinRwanda [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/bandepac/status/850013912301002756

Figure 2: number of open accusations against Kagame

Such numbers refer to tweets that explicitly mention Kagame, Rwanda, or the Rwandan Patriotic Front as responsible for Ntaryamira's murder. Additional accusations were addressed to Kagame in more indirect ways, either by making reference to the country in which Ntaryamira found his death, or by asking Rwanda to clarify the circumstances of the tragic event.

Specifying that Ntaryamira died in an attack while landing in Kigali could be a simple provision of information about the event. In many cases, however, the authors cared about adding a geographical reference in messages that were complete and understandable *per se*.

Ikiriho [Ikiriho]. (18 March 2017). *Le #Burundi a notamment rappelé qu'il commémore à cette date l'assassinat de feu président Cyprien Ntaryamira, tué au #Rwanda* [('Specifically, #Burundi reminded that it commemorates on this day the assassination of late President Cyprien Ntaryamira, killed in #Rwanda') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Ikiriho/status/843151901084532739

On the other hand, the requests for clarifications and justice addressed to Rwanda could also convey accusations. According to the authors of these tweets, Rwanda never gave sufficient explanations on the event.

Magneto@ [nduwamariyaN]. (05 April 2016). 22 years after th[e] fuck death of #Burundi-an President Ntaryamira. Want #JusticeForNtaryamira in order to ask Rwanda about his death [*sic*. Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/nduwamariyaN/status/717569264811655168

In addition to the responsibility for Ntaryamira's death, Kagame was also accused of hosting and training the Sindumuja[18] activists, who oppose Nkurunziza's third term.

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[18] 'I am not a slave' in Kirundi. This slogan was used by those protesting in the streets against Nkurunziza's third term in 2015. It rapidly became a label through which protesters and political opponents were referred to on social media.

Gakiza Fierté [gakizafierte]. (05 April 2016). *SE. NTARYAMIRA Cyprien : Homme d'#Etat #Burundi -ais assassiné par le parrain des #TerroristesSindumuja (#Kagame) [*('H.E. Ntaryamira Cyprien: Burundian Statesman killed by the godfather of the #SindumujaTerrorists (#Kagame)') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/gakizafierte/status/717495908682829824

By linking a crime of the past with a crime of the present, such tweets create an implicit connection between the late Ntaryamira and the incumbent Nkurunziza. According to such tweets, as Ntaryamira was victim of Kagame's past crime, Nkurunziza is nowadays victim of the attacks of the Sindumuja, whose godfather is still Kagame. Such linkages are political, since the opposition of the Sindumuja to Nkurunziza is motivated by political reasons.

In some cases, the Sindumuja are very clearly put in opposition to Ntaryamira. A couple of tweets describe them as directly accountable for Ntaryamira's death.

Niné [bugarama124]. (27 March 2017). *V[ou]s avez oublié Ngendandumwe et Ntaryamira. Ils ont en commun d'avoir été abattus par la Belgique ou par ses suppôts #Sindumuja* [('You forgot Ngendandumwe and Ntaryamira. They were also killed by Belgium or its accomplices #Sindumuja') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/bugarama124/status/846344589715877889

macedoine [macedoinewanje1]. (25 April 2016). @souleymane1211 I think CPI will have a huge task from all crime committed by sindumuja, the death of Ndadaye, Ntaryamira and etc [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/macedoinewanje1/status/724544172284350464

Clearly enough, the Sindumuja activists cannot be responsible for crimes of the past such as the murder of Ntaryamira or Ndadaye, since their movement came into being in 2015. For the authors of these tweets, the name 'Sindumuja' is in place of 'those who are supported by Kagame'. However, the fact that Ndadaye is associated with Ntaryamira, in opposition to Kagame and the Sindumuja, underscores that the boundary between these two groups is not only political, but ethnic. This is a fundamental step in the process of ethnicization of memory. While Ntaryamira could have been the victim of an accident, the ethnic motivation behind the death of Ndadaye is more evident.[19] The association with Ndadaye, therefore, gave an ethnic connotation to the group of Ntaryamira.

The following tweets best confirm this interpretation. The deaths of Ntaryamira and Ndadaye are associated with the 1972 genocide against

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[19] See footnote 6.

the Hutu, the murder of the Hutu Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe, and the assassination of Remy Gahutu, the founder of the PALIPEHUTU (*Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu*). All of these tragic events were motivated by ethnic reasons.

> Jan ruhere [JanRuhere]. (18 March 2016). @A_Bucumi Rwandans've have always interfered: Ngendandumwe, Rwandans participated 1972 & Ndadaye, Ntaryamira, sans echecs @AShingiro @US_SEGL [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/JanRuhere/status/711059554688040962

> menyimana philotaire [philotaire]. (08 April 2016). *Et pour les autres ([N] dadaye, Ntaryamira, [G]ahutu Remy, genocide de 72...). [Ç]a sera quand? Quelle cynisme!!! [...]*[20] [('And for the others (Ndadaye, Ntaryamira, Remy Gahutu, 1972 genocide…) when will that be? What cynicism!') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/philotaire/status/718572925255860224

> Diana Nsamirizi [diana_samirizi]. (06 April 2017). *À l'époque j'avais 20 ans et mature, je n'ai jamais vu les Tutsi[s] condamner l'assassinat de Ndadaye ni celle de Ntaryamira. Personne* [('At the time, I was 20 years old and mature, I never saw any Tutsi condemning the murder of Ndadaye nor that of Ntaryamira, No one') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/diana_samirizi/status/849963477699633152

> Niné [bugarama124]. (07 April 2017). *Ubugome bwanyu banyarwanda burarusha: mwatwiciye Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. Muri jenoside yo mu 72 nimwe mwakubita agafuni abahutu* [('Too many bad things from you Rwandans: you killed Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. During the 1972 genocide, you used an axe to kill all the Hutu') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/bugarama124/status/850389879213182977

These associations were much more frequent in 2016 and 2017 than before the outbreak of the 2015 crisis. In 2014 and 2015, Ndadaye was mentioned 1 time in tweets containing the name 'Ntaryamira'; in 2016, he was mentioned 31 times, and in 2017 28 times. The ethnicization of the memory of Ntaryamira, then, started to be effective after the outbreak of the 2015 crisis.

More interestingly, in 2016 to this group of Hutu Presidents and Prime Ministers was added Nkurunziza. Several tweets contested the arguments of the Sindumuja, insinuating that the real reason of their opposition to Nkurunziza was ethnic, not political.

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[20] The tweet https://twitter.com/philotaire/status/718572925255860224 (consulted on 30 August 2017) is a reply to Burundian activist Pacifique Nininahazwe's claim for justice for Ernest Manirumva, the Vice President of the anticorruption observatory OLUCOME (Observatoire de la Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations économiques) who was murdered in April 2009.

Umuvuga Kuri [Umuvugakuri]. (02 May 2016). *#Burundi @pnkurunziza & 3. Mandat s[on]t des prétextes. Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. Ils avaient combien de mandats ?* [(#Burundi Nkurunziza and third term are pretexts. Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. How many terms did they have?') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Umuvugakuri/status/727068656547586048

Since unwanted Presidents and Prime Ministers were wiped out through physical elimination in the past, suspicions emerged that the Sindumuja actually aimed to eliminate Nkurunziza as well. As the reason of such killings in the past was ethnic, so must be the case of Nkurunziza.

macedoine [macedoinewanje1]. (27 March 2016). @Manirakiza @ThierryU @grufyikiri Stop your jokes. Those [a]re old schemes. NGENDANDUMWE, NDADAYE, @ntibasy, NTARYAMIRA etc served how many terms? [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/macedoinewanje1/status/714058849414680576

mizero racine [RacineMizero]. (08 April 2017). *Au #Burundi on n[e] change plus le président élu en l[']assassinant, nous ne somme[s] plus en [19]93. #ndadaye #ntaryamira #StrongerTogether @fidh_fr* [('In Burundi we do not change the elected President by killing him anymore, we are no longer in 1993. #Ndadaye #Ntaryamira #StrongerTogether @fidh_fr') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/RacineMizero/status/850569079584894976

The process of ethnicization of memory, then, started with accusations. A group of victims and a group of criminals started to be delineated. The association with names and dates that represent central figures in the ethnic collective memory, such as Ndadaye or 1972, gave ethnic connotations to the group of victims. The insinuation that the opposition of the Sindumuja to Nkurunziza was actually motivated by ethnic reasons reinforced the ethnic character of the boundary. Such a process started to be evident after the outbreak of the 2015 crisis. Other strategies, aimed at the reinforcement of the internal ties of the in-group, contributed to the same process.

3.2. *The use of specific appellatives*

The analysis of the appellatives used to make reference to Ntaryamira permits a better understanding of his position within the group of victims and his relation to the other members of the group.

In 2014 and 2015, reference was simply made to Ntaryamira through his name '(Cyprien) Ntaryamira', through the appellative 'President Ntaryamira', or through his title 'Head of State'. One tweet emphasized the bond between Ntaryamira and Africa in 2014, referring to the late President

as 'one of Africa's gallant sons'.[21] In 2015, one only tweet highlighted the relation between Ntaryamira, a 'great man of discipline', and Burundi.[22]

In 2016, some appellatives appeared that were never employed before. The use of the title 'His Excellence' is part of a larger attempt to celebrate the person of Ntaryamira, that was not remarked in 2014 and 2015. Most of the time, this title was attributed to the late President in tweets that aimed to either commemorate him (6 out of 16), or to accuse the Rwandan President Kagame and ask for justice (6 out of 16). By adding the honorific title 'His Excellence' to the name of Ntaryamira, the crime committed by Kagame became even more tragic, and his condemnation even stronger.

Another important appellative that appeared in 2016 was the possessive 'our'. Ntaryamira was referred to as 'our (beloved) President', and was associated with Burundi, as a consequence of the accusations against Kagame or against Rwanda (in 12 out of 18 tweets using the possessive 'our').[23]

> Kwizera Jean de Dieu [Kwizera68]. (05 April 2016). #askToKagame, #Burundi, *qui a tué notre cher président Cyprien NTARYAMIRA* [('who killed our beloved President Cyprien Ntaryamira') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Kwizera68/status/717571353893806081

In one case, the mention of Ntaryamira's ethnic belonging emphasized the link between the late President and the Hutu ethnic group.

> Irakoze prosper [Irakozeprosper3]. (31 March 2016). @pierreboisselet *quant [à] moi je d[e]m[a]nd[e] la clarification d[e] la mort d[e] notre pr[é]sid[ent] hutu du B[urun]di #Ntaryamira C* [('myself, I require the clarification of the death of our Hutu President of Burundi #Ntaryamira C') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Irakozeprosper3/status/715525963027755009

The association of Ntaryamira with Burundi in opposition to Kagame's Rwanda was restated in 2017, but in a lower number of tweets (4 out of 6 in 2017). On the other hand, while the title 'His Excellence' was used to elevate the person of Ntaryamira in 2016 in opposition to Kagame, it was principally employed to commemorate the late President in 2017 (12 out of 16 tweets).

Nevertheless, more tweets in 2017 than in the previous years aimed to celebrate Ntaryamira (7 tweets were found in 2017, 4 in 2016 and 1 in 2015)

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[21] https://twitter.com/BwireJudith/status/452731250399539200 (consulted on 24/08/2017).

[22] https://twitter.com/sinrenovat/status/585297530134626304 (consulted on 03/11/2017). *Discipline munzego* ('discipline in the institutions') was Ntaryamira's leitmotiv.

[23] This interpretation builds on the words used in the tweets themselves. Building on these tweets uniquely, the interpretation that 'our' Ntaryamira is related to the region of origin of the late President is not likely. This is because in the majority of such tweets, an accusation against Kagame or against Rwanda is expressed.

through descriptions of him as a charismatic dreamer, a respectable leader concerned by the need for discipline in every institution of the country.

> Fridolin Nzambimana [Fridolinandres]. (06 April 2017). *#Burundi Rendons hommage aujourd'hui, tout comme notre héros de la démocratie, à Ntaryamira Cyprien, un homme visionnaire et charismatique* [('#Burundi Let's pay homage today, just like our hero of democracy, to Ntaryamira Cyprien, dreamer and charismatic man') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Fridolinandres/status/849866437929959425

> Guy Auriane [guy_auriane]. (06 April 2017). *Cyprien NTARYAMIRA était un homme de conviction, très fidèle en amitié, grand travailleur, un véritable « bulldozer » au boulot* ('Cyprien Ntaryamira was a determined man, very loyal in friendship, great worker, a real "bulldozer" at work')[24] Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/guy_auriane/status/849898024843313152

Such tweets do not express any nostalgia or desire for better leaders than the actual ones, since their authors manifestly support the CNDD FDD on Twitter.[25] By glorifying the person of Ntaryamira, all those who cared about commemorating him were put in the same good light. It is remarkable, however, that the reaction of the Twitter community to such tweets was almost nonexistent: only one of these tweets[26] was retweeted 12 times and received 7 likes.

3.3. Praise

Expressing praise for members of the same group also tightened the bond between such members and consolidated the internal solidarity of the in-group. In 2017, in tweets concerning the commemoration of Ntaryamira, praise was expressed for Nkurunziza, depicted as the direct heir of the late President's prestige. Although not very widespread, and put in place in 2017 only, this strategy established a clear and direct link between the two Presidents.

> Understand Burundi [QCbdi]. (06 April 2017). #Burundi 'Ntaryamira (and his comrades)'s philosophy is what is currently being implemented

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[24] Building on this tweet only, it is not possible to establish if the appellative 'bulldozer' is an implicit reference to the nickname of Tanzanian President John Magufuli (BBC 2015). This appellative was used in this only tweet out of 1,349 under scrutiny, and it did not receive any retweet, like or reply.

[25] https://twitter.com/Fridolinandres & https://twitter.com/guy_auriane (consulted on 3/11/2017).

[26] https://twitter.com/Fridolinandres/status/849866437929959425 (consulted on 24/08/2017). In 2016, one tweet was retweeted 4 times and received 2 likes (https://twitter.com/BURUNDIPATRIOTE/status/717635145579302912 consulted on 24/08/2017), and another one was retweeted once (https://twitter.com/Kwizera68/status/717584147175370752 consulted on 24/08/2017).

by @CnddFdd' [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/QCbdi/
status/849851905404583936

Landry Sibomana [landrysibo]. (06 April 2017). #StrongerTogether Pic
of the day: This day we remember Pres. CYPRIEN NTARYAMIRA @
pnkurunziza lead by example & show peace with [Ntibantunganya] [Tweet].
Retrieved from https://twitter.com/landrysibo/status/850064987708157952

In a couple of cases, Ndadaye and Rwagasore were added to the group.
Nkurunziza was described as the person who best personified their ideas.

Fridolin Nzambimana [Fridolinandres]. (06 April 2017). *#Burundi Le
"Gusabikanya" cet idéal socialiste qui animait Ndadaye et Ntaryamira
puis concrétisé par Nkurunziza* [('#Burundi The "Gusabikanya" ('sharing'),
this socialist ideal that animated Ndadaye and Ntaryamira and has been
then realized by Nkurunziza') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/
Fridolinandres/status/849865886680961025

J.C Karerwa Ndenzako [KarerwaNdenzako]. (06 April 2017). #Burundi:
When you listen carefully to @pnkurunziza, you feel like his discourse
echoes those by #Rwagasore, #Ndadaye and #Ntaryamira [Tweet]. Retrieved
from https://twitter.com/KarerwaNdenzako/status/849946511706386433

These associations aimed more to elevate the figure of Nkurunziza than
to underline an ethnic commonality with Ntaryamira. Expressions of praise,
therefore, underlined the political character of the boundary between the
group of Ntaryamira and his opposite. The same result was achieved through
the provision of information about the tribute paid by political parties and
figures.

3.4. Politics and commemorations

Not only Nkurunziza and the CNDD FDD were associated with Ntaryamira
through the publicization of their activities of commemoration. A cor-
respondence of political views was highlighted with the political parties
FRODEBU and FNL, and with the politicians Sylvestre Ntibantunganya[27]
and Jean de Dieu Mutabazi.[28]

Activities of commemoration were publicized in 2017 especially, when
33 tweets mentioned political parties engaged in activities of commemora-
tion, claims for justice for Ntaryamira, or accusations against Kagame (see
Fig 3). Before 2017, only 2, 4 and 1 tweet (in 2014, 2015 and 2016 respec-
tively) mentioned political parties.

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[27] One of the founding figures of the FRODEBU, as was Ntaryamira.
[28] A former FRODEBU member, he founded the RADEBU (Rassemblement des Démocrates
pour le Développement au Burundi) in 2008.

Figure 3: political parties' participation in the commemoration of Ntaryamira

Nr. Of tweets

Year	Party	Bar label(s)
2014	CNDDFDD	comm (1)
2014	FRODEBU	claim (1)
2015	CNDDFDD	comm (1)
2015	UPRONA	comm (3)
2016	FRODEBU	claim (1)
	CNDDFDD	comm (4); claim (17)
2017	FRODEBU	claim (5)
	FNL	claim (2); accusation (5)

Y-axis scale: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
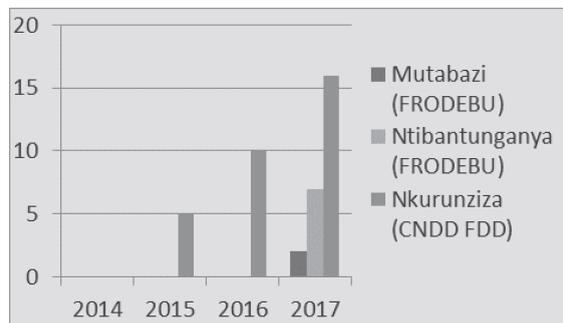
Source: Dataset.
'comm': commemoration; 'claim': claim for justice; 'accusation' is addressed against Kagame.

Besides 3 tweets dedicated to the tribute observed by the predominantly Tutsi UPRONA party in 2015, the rest of the tweets reported on the activities of the CNDD FDD (1 tweet in 2014, 1 in 2015, 21 in 2017), the FRODEBU (1 in 2014, 1 in 2016, 5 in 2017), and the FNL (7 tweets in 2017), which are predominantly Hutu parties.

While the CNDD FDD was seen to be engaged in activities of commemoration (1 tweet in 2014, 1 in 2015, 4 in 2017) and claims for justice (17 in 2017), the FRODEBU was exclusively described in its efforts of claiming justice for Ntaryamira (1 tweet in 2014, 1 in 2016, 5 in 2017). The FNL finally appeared in 2017 in 2 tweets that claimed justice for Ntaryamira and 5 tweets that accused Kagame.

In addition to political parties, the tribute paid to Ntaryamira by single politicians also received attention. Again, more attention was given to politicians' activities of commemoration in 2017 than the years before. In 2017, 23 tweets in total reported on the participation of Nkurunziza and Ntibantunganya (respectively 16 and 7 tweets) in the commemoration of the late President of Burundi. In addition, 2 tweets reported on Mutabazi's claims for justice. All of these politicians come from predominantly Hutu parties (CNDD FDD and FRODEBU). Before 2017, only Nkurunziza was described in his activities of commemoration (5 tweets in 2015 and 10 in 2016).

Figure 4: politicians' participation in the commemoration of Ntaryamira

Source: Dataset.

It is interesting to note that Ntibantunganya was seen as against Nkurunziza in 2015 (and by some in 2016 too), since he stated that 'there would not have been any controversy about the third term if the heritage of Ntaryamira was respected'.[29] In 2017, however, the rapprochement with

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[29] https://twitter.com/IGIHE_Burundi/status/585047227124600832 (consulted on 25/08/2017).

Nkurunziza was celebrated on Twitter,[30] an event that allowed him to benefit from some publicity on the social platform and to join the group of Ntaryamira and Nkurunziza.

3.5. *The use of ethnic references*

The use of ethnic references may be the most evident and relevant strategy for a process of ethnicization, but this was not the case for the commemoration of Ntaryamira on Twitter. Out of 1,349 tweets, few make explicit use of ethnic references: 4 tweets in 2014, 5 in 2015, 25 in 2016 and 5 in 2017. An increase is nonetheless observed in 2016, i.e. after the outbreak of the crisis. To understand the meaning of such references, however, it is imperative to analyse the context in which they were used.

In 2014 and 2015, tweets mentioning ethnicity principally aimed to provide information on the event during which Ntaryamira died. It is true that by specifying the ethnic belonging, the author could be aiming to address a veiled accusation to the opposite ethnic group. Building on the single tweet, however, it is difficult to establish with a good degree of certainty if this was the case. Moreover, no reaction was provoked by these tweets (only one 'like' in 2017), which makes it impossible to detect the perception of such tweets by the rest of the Twitter community.

> George Costanza [FeatOfStrength]. (06 April 2017). Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira died with Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana, a fellow Hutu, after their plane was shot down [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/FeatOfStrength/status/849816876389613568

In 2016, on the other hand, 19 out of 20 tweets mentioning the Hutu aimed to depict them as a victim community. This was achieved in different ways.

Some tweets specified that Ntaryamira was a Hutu. The aim of such tweets was not to provide information, but to denounce the attack that was being conducted against the Hutu.

> Irakoze prosper [Irakozeprosper3]. (05 April 2016). @rwandabriefing @alinebarihenda *q[ue] la justice soit faite sur la mort d[e] #NTARYAMIRA UN HUTU* [('may justice be done to the death of #Ntaryamira a Hutu') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Irakozeprosper3/status/717417273603006465

> AnnGarrison [AnnGarrison]. (22 April 2016). Charles Onana on #ICTR failure to investigate Habyarimana/Ntaryamira murders, & indictment of Hutus only […] [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/AnnGarrison/status/723644338396229632

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[30] https://twitter.com/landrysibo/status/850064987708157952 (consulted on 25/08/2017).

Other tweets restated that Ntaryamira and many other Hutu were killed by Kagame, or by the Rwandans.[31]

muzuka [muzuka3]. (05 April 2016). #Burundi seeking #JusticeForNtaryamira savagely assassinated in #Rwanda. Plus thousands of hutu killed in [19]72 genocide [Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/muzuka3/status/717446722566426629

Psychologue Prosper [NiyonzimaProsp4]. (06 April 2016). @CimpayeJean @gahigip #JusticeForNtaryamira. We'll never forget #CyprienNtaryamira *victime de fameux génocidaire @PaulKagame tua n² hutus* [('victim of the famous genocidal Kagame killed n² Hutu') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/NiyonzimaProsp4/status/717633986651152384

A couple of tweets claimed that Hutu need to be commemorated on an equal footing with Tutsi.

Irakoze Prosper [Irakozeprosper3]. (08 April 2016). *#NTARYAMIRA e[t au]tre[s] Hutus bibukwe au m[ê]m[e] pied d[']égalit[é que] le[s] Tut[s]is* [('Ntaryamira and other Hutu must be commemorated on an equal footing with the Tutsi') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Irakozeprosper3/status/718417887560646656

On the other hand, it is worth noting the only[32] open accusation against the Tutsi was made in 2017. Before 2017, mentions of the Tutsi ethnic group simply aimed to provide information.

Diana Nsamirizi [diana_samirizi]. (06 April 2017). *À l'époque j'avais 20 ans et mature, je n'ai jamais vu les Tutsi[s] condamner l'assassinat de Ndadaye ni celle de Ntaryamira. Personne* [('At the time, I was 20 years

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[31] Only one tweet was found in 2017: Niné [bugarama124]. (07 April 2017). *Ubugome bwanyu banyarwanda burarusha: mwatwiciye Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. Muri jenoside yo mu 72 nimwe mwakubita agafuni abahutu* [('Too many bad things from you Rwandans: you killed Ngendandumwe, Ndadaye, Ntaryamira. During the 1972 genocide, you used an axe to kill all the Hutu') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/bugarama124/status/850389879213182977.

[32] Another tweet in 2017 mentioned the Tutsi but it presented some translation difficulties: Jan ruhere [JanRuhere]. (06 April 2017). *Vuga imigambi yawe hama witoze! Ataruko ureke ubulofa nubwicanyi bwanyu! Ndadaye, Ntaryamira, Ntiba[ntunganya] bo bazira iki? Ubututsi?* [('Present your political program and run for the elections! Otherwise, stop your stupid jokes and killings! What did Ndadaye, Ntaryamira, Ntibantunganya deserve? Being Tutsi?') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/JanRuhere/status/849979677666095105. Given the conversation in which the tweet is found: https://twitter.com/JanRuhere/status/849979677666095105 (consulted on 22 August 2017), the author was probably insinuating that Ndadaye, Ntaryamira and Ntibantunganya were targeted because they were Hutu.

old and mature, I never saw any Tutsi condemning the murder of Ndadaye nor that of Ntaryamira, No one') Tweet]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/diana_samirizi/status/849963477699633152

Conclusions: the ethnicization of memory on social media

After the outbreak of violence in 2015, an attempt to ethnicize the crisis was put in place by political entrepreneurs in Burundi. On social media, memory was also affected by such an attempt. The commemoration of President Ntaryamira, an event that was not strictly related to the contemporary crisis, became increasingly ethnicized on Twitter thanks to specific communication strategies. The present text analysed such strategies in order to better understand the dynamics of such a process.

The ethnicization of memory basically started with accusations made against Kagame. Such accusations fostered the emergence of a group of criminals in opposition to (Ntaryamira's) group of victims. Ethnicity surfaced in two different ways in such accusations. On the one hand, Ntaryamira was associated with political figures of the past – especially Ndadaye – who were assassinated because of ethnic reasons. In addition, insinuations were made that the opposition of the Sindumuja, hosted and trained by Kagame, to Nkurunziza's third term was actually motivated by ethnic, not political reasons. As a consequence, Nkurunziza was added to the group of the Hutu Presidents and figures who were killed in the past by the Tutsi, among whom Ntaryamira. On the other hand, in 2016 and 2017 accusations were made against Kagame and Rwanda for slaughtering thousands of Hutu. Such accusations were never found before the outbreak of the 2015 crisis.

Parallel to accusations directed at the out-group, other strategies aimed at the reinforcement of the internal ties of the in-group. Such strategies (the expression of praise for members of the same group and the publicization of activities of commemoration) underlined the political bond between Ntaryamira and Nkurunziza. In addition, in 2016 the possessive 'our' started to be employed. Most of the time it linked Ntaryamira to Burundi, in opposition to his alleged murder, Kagame.

Explicit ethnic references in general were not very widespread. Two observations are nonetheless worth making, regarding both the use and the non-use of ethnic mentions. In most cases, the label 'Hutu' was used to depict this people as a victim community, who suffered from a lack of justice and from the attacks perpetrated by Kagame. This recalls the descriptions of the Hutu as a victim or martyr community analysed by Malkki (1995) and Lemarchand (1996) among others. Apparently, these narratives did not change over time. With regard to the low number of explicit ethnic references, on the other hand, it has to be noted that ethnicity could be evoked in indirect ways. Mentions of specific persons, places or dates that

occupy a central position in the ethnic collective memory recalled the ethnic belonging without needing to spell it out. This is also typical of the allusive character of the Kirundi language and culture. Keeping this in mind permits a better grasp of the extent of the process of ethnicization of memory.

The present analysis is limited to specific periods of activity on Twitter. It is not self-evident that dynamics observed online reproduce those existing offline. Nonetheless, if cyberspace is considered a space where the unspeakable can be spoken, the analysis of online narratives can represent an important added value for the understanding of the offline context – all the more when vivid tensions hinder data collection in the physical field. Statements on social media, however, do not simply explain the situation out there. Online research can offer relevant insights on present-day Burundi – since the online world is also part of present-day Burundi. However, it does not pretend to establish any equivalence between online and offline. Only through a traditional ethnographic research, based on face-to-face interactions and participant observation, can the overlap between these two spheres be identified.

It is beyond the purpose of this text to answer the question of the ethnic or political nature of the contemporary conflict in Burundi. The findings of the present study, however, seem to suggest that memory is still ethnic. Usually silent, in times of political crises it can be awaken, and inflamed. This recalls what Turner (2010: 125) wrote about ethnic conflict in Burundi: in the eyes of many Burundians, 'the conflict is always there, but at times it is latent under the surface, while at others it surfaces and becomes open'. Specifically, it becomes open in times of political crisis. In fact, the intertwining of ethnicity and politics became evident through the analysis of communication strategies employed in this process of ethnicization. Accusations against the out-group started to assume ethnic connotations after the outbreak of the 2015 political crisis. At the very same moment, the internal ties of the in-group started to be reinforced in both political and ethnic terms.

Additional research is needed to further analyse the dynamics of this phenomenon and investigate its extent, both online and offline. The commemoration of a national figure, online, started to be ethnicized after the outbreak of political tensions. In online perceptions and interactions, ethnicity still played an important role. Was this also the case offline? To what extent does this correspond to what was happening offline? Trying to answer such questions in future research will definitely contribute to assessing the relevance of ethnicity in the current political conflict in Burundi.

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