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Streaming Hate: Exploring the Harm of Anti-Banyamulenge and Anti-Tutsi Hate Speech on Congolese Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Mediatized hate speech fuelled the genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda nearly three decades ago, yet anti-Tutsi rhetoric is still circulating in the Great Lakes region, albeit under a radically changed media and political landscape. Social media and online platforms facilitate the proliferation of inflammatory and discriminatory discourses whose impact on violent conflict remains uncertain. This study examines the phenomenon by focusing on anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech in the context of resurgent violent armed conflict in the highlands of Eastern South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It first explores the history of the Banyamulenge in the DRC, highlighting contestations of their identity and belonging as well as their experiences and positionality in the current cycle of atrocious conflicts. It then documents and analyzes the content of hate speech and conspiracy theories circulating in audio, video, and text messages in multiple languages, and identifies the actors involved in their dissemination. The analysis unpacks how social media platforms facilitate interactions between diverse actors, including leaders of armed groups, public officials, and diaspora communities. It argues that novel transboundary networks of identity are emerging where hateful narratives and conspiracy theories are created, refined, and disseminated to larger audiences. These self-reinforcing networks diffuse incendiary nativist discourses, anti-Tutsi sentiments, dehumanizing language, and calls for genocide reaching from global to local terrains.

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Introduction

The present study analyzes the dynamics of anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech and conspiracy theories on social media within a context of violent armed conflict in the *hauts plateaux*¹ of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Existing literature has examined the impact of the internet and digital technologies on the processes of creation, access, distribution, and consumption of

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¹ Highland Plateaus in English. We use *hauts plateaux* in French descriptively but also as the generic name for this area stretching from Rurambo/Uvira, through Itombwe/Mwenga to Ngandja/Fizi territories. A minority of Banyamulenge live in the *Moyens* (middle) Plateaux (e.g. Bibokoboko) and elsewhere in the DRC.

information.² In addition to mediating “an increasing array of social, political and economic practices” and facilitating access to the “public sphere,”³ these technologies empower interested users to spread disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech.⁴ Digital platforms facilitate the formation of transboundary networks,⁵ connecting actors into ecosystems that foster the emergence of shared identities through a set of constructed beliefs and narratives.⁶ Connected communities construct “fantasies”⁷ reinforcing pro-ingroup sentiments and anti-outgroup attitudes or behaviours,⁸ within environments enabling them to “publicly express shared grievances and coordinate collective action.”⁹

The analysis focuses on materials collected from online platforms, mainly social media, conveying anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech content. Building on analyzed data and relevant studies,¹⁰ we argue that the internet and social media facilitate the emergence of transboundary radical networks and spaces where hateful conspiracy narratives are created, refined, and disseminated. These networks connect militia leaders, their followers, and their supporters, to public figures (including local and national public authorities, members of customary institutions, and civil society organizations) and diaspora communities. Interactions produce increasingly scripted hateful and conspiratorial narratives proposing simplified explanations for dynamics of violence and designating culprits. The normalization and amplification of such narratives within social media strengthen political networks, and embolden actors, with the potential to reflexively impact the violent dynamics of conflicts.

While the study focuses on hate speech and conspiracy theories targeting the Banyamulenge in relation to the conflict in the *hauts plateaux* of South Kivu, the substantive analysis of collected materials shows that this community is frequently associated with the broader Tutsi population of the DRC and the wider region. Moreover, the analysis shows a thematic continuity in hate speech and conspiracy theories circulating on Congolese social media today and anti-Tutsi rhetoric in Rwanda in the 1990s, despite the difference in media and political landscape between the two contexts.

The study contributes to the existing literature on the complex interaction between hate speech, social media, and violent conflict within a context marked by ethnic polarization, nativist discourses, and grievances rooted in colonial and postcolonial history. It further interrogates responses to hate speech, from often politicized state legislations¹¹

² See Devan Rosen, *The Social Media Debate: Unpacking the Social, Psychological, and Cultural Effects of Social Media* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Vincent Miller, *Understanding Digital Culture* (London: Sage, 2020).

³ Adam Klein, *Fanaticism, Racism, and Rage Online Corrupting the Digital Sphere* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 4.

⁴ See Shakuntala Banaji and Ramnath Bhat, *Social Media and Hate* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Teo Keipi et al., *Online Hate and Harmful Content: Cross-national Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁵ Alexander Brown, “What is So Special About Online (As Compared to Offline) Hate Speech?,” *Ethnicities* 18, no. 3 (2018): 301.

⁶ Keipi et al., *Online Hate and Harmful Content*, 112.

⁷ Margaret E. Duffy, “Web of Hate: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Rhetorical Vision of Hate Groups Online,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 27, no. 3 (2003): 293.

⁸ Michael S. Waltman and Ashely A. Mattheis, “Understanding Hate Speech,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Alexandra A. Siegel and Vivienne Badaan, “#No2Sectarianism: Experimental Approaches to Reducing Sectarian Hate Speech Online,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 3 (2020): 837–55.

⁹ Siegel and Badaan, “#No2Sectarianism,” 837.

¹⁰ Such as Thomas Zeitoff, “How Social Media Is Changing Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 9 (2017): 1970–91.

¹¹ See Alexander Brown and Adriana Sinclair, *The Politics of Hate Speech Laws* (London: Routledge, 2020).

to digital platforms' regulations and practices¹² intended to mediate online content disseminated in "peripheral languages."¹³ The article unpacks the dynamics of conflict and contestation of Banyamulenge and Tutsi identity and belonging in the DRC before examining the influence of social media on hate speech and conspiracy theories. A subsequent section on methodology precedes an examination of the contours of hate speech and conspiracy theories – namely actors involved, key themes, and potential harms – followed by a conclusion.

Resurgent Nativism and Violent Contestation of Banyamulenge Identity in Eastern DRC

The Congolese eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri have experienced devastating conflicts and violence since the 1990s with domestic, sub-regional, and global ramifications. Local struggles for political power, control over land, and mineral resources have been exacerbated, at times shaped, by external factors linked to the overflow of conflicts in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda, with a continuous presence of armed groups and regular incursions or regular armed forces from those countries. It is often claimed that hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of lives from different communities, particularly in the eastern provinces, have been lost as a result of violence or precarious livelihoods occasioned by conflicts and insecurity over the years.¹⁴

Like many other eastern DRC areas, the *hauts plateaux* of South Kivu have not been spared by waves of violence since the 1990s. Since 2017, the *hauts plateaux* of South Kivu have witnessed an escalation of violence with devastating consequences on peace, stability, and livelihoods of people from different ethnic communities living in the area.¹⁵ Violence is primarily committed by diverse actors, including the Congolese armed forces, and a loose coalition of domestic Mai Mai armed militias affiliated with the Babembe, Bafuliiru, and Banyindu ethnic communities. These actors – namely Yakutumba, Ebuela, Biloze Bishambuke, René, Ilunga, Mulumba, Nyerere – have developed fluctuating alliances with foreign armed groups over the years, depending on shifting interests or circumstances. The Burundian rebel groups *Résistance pour un Etat de Droit au Burundi* (RED Tabara) and the *Forces Nationales de Libération* (FNL) have established bases in the *hauts* and *moyens* plateaux and concluded operational alliances with Mai Mai groups, launching regular attacks on Banyamulenge settlements and herds of cattle. The presence of these foreign armed groups has attracted regular incursions by the *Forces de Défense Nationale du Burundi* (Burundian regular army) and the

¹² Sarah T. Roberts, *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

¹³ Ana Tankosić and Sender Dovchin, "The Impact of Social Media in the Sociolinguistic Practices of the Peripheral Post-Socialist Contexts," *International Journal of Multilingualism* (2021), doi:10.1080/14790718.2021.1917582, defines these as "languages spoken in politically, financially, and geographically marginalized countries, which have been equally affected by social media."

¹⁴ Figures discussed in, Felix Mukwiza Ndahinda, "Collective Victimization and Subjectivity in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Why Do Lasting Peace and Justice Remain Elusive?," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 23, no. 2 (2016): 167–71.

¹⁵ See Judith Verweijen et al., *Mayhem in the Mountains: How Violent Conflict on the Hauts Plateaux of South Kivu Escalated*, Conflict Research Group, Report, April 2021, https://www.gicnetwork.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/05_GIC_Mayhem-in-the-mountains_WEB-2.pdf (accessed 20 October 2021).

Imbonerakure militia of the ruling *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces de Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD).¹⁶

Banyamulenge resistance against armed Mai Mai groups shaped into an armed group known as *Twirwaneho* (let's defend ourselves) that has become more organized once army deserters from the community joined it.¹⁷ A second Banyamulenge-affiliated group operating in the area known as *Gumino* (let's remain here) is composed of soldiers who fell through the cracks of the country's chaotic army integration processes over the last two decades.¹⁸ Both groups have also been accused of violations against civilians.

Mai Mai groups active in the *hauts* and *moyens plateaux* and their supporters openly profess their goal to cleanse Banyamulenge from the area and the rest of the DRC,¹⁹ with several documented calls for genocide.²⁰ Inciteful calls encouraging murder and "cleansing" of Banyamulenge from the *hauts plateaux* were "strongly denounced" by the head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in an October 2021 report to the UN Security Council.²¹

Existing literature on conflicts in the DRC has extensively examined the genesis of Banyamulenge identity, their settlement in eastern DRC, and contestations of their Congolese citizenship.²² As subsequent sections will show, the Banyamulenge's and Banyarwanda's political exclusion and lack of customary land rights as well as the positionality of members of these communities, as actors and victims, during the last three decades of conflicts in the DRC and region establish a context for our analysis of the toxic anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi rhetoric in contemporary Congolese social media.

¹⁶ United Nations, *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2019/469, 7 June 2019. South Kivu also harbours the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebel group and once hosted members of the Rwanda National Congress (RNC) mainly composed of dissidents from the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), as detailed in "Movements of Rwandan rebels in South Kivu raise fears," KST, 21 June 2019, <https://blog.kivusecurity.org/movements-of-rwandan-rebels-in-south-kivu-raise-fears/> (accessed 14 December 2021).

¹⁷ On the genesis of the group, see ADEPAE, Arche d'Alliance, RIO and Life & Peace Institute, *Au-delà des "groupes armés". Conflits locaux et connexions sous-régionales. L'exemple de Fizi et Uvira (Sud-Kivu, RDC)* (Uppsala: Life & Peace Institute, 2011), 79, <https://life-peace.org/resource/au-dela-des-groupes-armes/> (accessed 15 October 2021).

¹⁸ Justine Brabant and Jean-Louis K. Nzweve, *La houe, la vache et le fusil. Conflits liés à la transhumance en territoires de Fizi et Uvira (Sud-Kivu, RDC)* (Uppsala: Life & Peace Institute, 2013), <https://life-peace.org/resource/la-houe-la-vache-et-le-fusil-analyse-realisee/> (accessed 15 October 2021).

¹⁹ As articulated in several videos on <https://www.youtube.com/c/LAVOIXDUKIVU>, including https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5NTb8uV_O4. See also Enoch David (Aluta), "RDC: Détérioration irréversible des rapports entre Banyamulenge et ethnies autochtone dans le territoire de Fizi," Fizi Media, 24 Octobre 2019, <https://fizimedia.com/2019/10/rdcdeterioration-irreversible-des-rapports-entre-banyamulenge-et-ethnies-autochtone-dans-le-territoire-de-fizi/> (accessed 20 October 2021).

²⁰ Rukumbuzi Delphin Ntanyoma and Helen Hintjens, "Expressive Violence and the Slow Genocide of the Banyamulenge of South Kivu," *Ethnicities* (2021), doi:10.1177/14687968211009895; Genocide Watch, *Genocide Emergency: The Banyamulenge of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, September 2021, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/genocide-emergency-the-banyamulenge-of-the-drc> (accessed 21 October 2021).

²¹ UN Security Council, *The Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Seventy-Sixth year*, 8873rd meeting, S/PV.8873, 5 October 2021, 3.

²² Joseph J. Mutambo, *Les Banyamulenge: Qui sont-ils? D'où viennent-ils? Quel rôle ont-ils joué (et pourquoi) dans le processus de libération du Zaïre?* (Kinshasa: Imprimerie Saint Paul, 1997); Koen Vlassenroot, "Citizenship, Identity Formation and Conflict in South Kivu: The Case of the Banyamulenge," *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 93–94 (2002): 499; Lazare S. Rukundwa, "Justice and Righteousness in Matthean Theology and its Relevance to the Banyamulenge Community: A Postcolonial Reading" (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2006); Bosco Muchukiwa, *Territoires ethniques et territoires étatiques: Pouvoirs locaux et conflits interethniques au Sud Kivu (R.D. Congo)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); Jason Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge: Insurgency and Exclusion in the Mountains of South Kivu* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013); Judith Verweijen and Koen Vlassenroot, "Armed Mobilisation and the Nexus of Territory, Identity, and Authority: the Contested Territorial Aspirations of the Banyamulenge in Eastern DR Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 33, no. 2 (2015): 191.

Oral and written sources situate the Banyamulenge settlement in today's South Kivu province of the DRC between the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.²³ The colonial enterprise profoundly shaped identity formation processes and the relations between various communities, with legacies for contemporary conflicts across the Great Lakes Region.²⁴ Initially included in local indirect rule governance structures, the population known then as Banyarwanda or Tutsi were subsequently excluded as colonial policies shifted from small local governance units to larger native entities.²⁵ This exclusion of the Banyarwanda from local customary governance institutions, their historical and cultural ties to Rwanda and Burundi, and post-independence identity politics are partially responsible for the protracted conflicts and violence in this area.

In the first post-independence conflict in South Kivu, the Simba-Mulele uprising, most Uvira, Fizi, and Mwenga communities supported the rebels, while many Banyarwanda (*Abagiriye* or warriors) fought alongside the Congolese army.²⁶ From the end 1960s, they adopted the name "Banyamulenge," amidst contestation of their citizenship, to demarcate themselves from relatively recent Rwandan immigrants who settled in the country during the colonial rule or from refugees fleeing violence that accompanied Rwanda's decolonization between 1959 and 1964.²⁷ Despite these attempts to cement local legitimacy, the Banyamulenge but also the Banyarwanda of North Kivu faced a rising contestation of their citizenship and belonging. They were omitted from the official census in 1984; denied voting rights during the 1987 legislative elections marred by violence in the Kivus,²⁸ and fully (Banyamulenge) or partially (Banyarwanda) excluded from a national consultation, *Conférence Nationale Souveraine* (CNS), of August 1991 to December 1992.²⁹

Anti-Banyamulenge campaigns led by Anzuluni Bembe in the 1980s intensified once he became Speaker of the Zairian transitional Parliament (1989–1993), leading to the establishment of a commission, led by Vangu Mambueni, tasked with investigating insecurity in the Kivus in 1995. The conclusions of the ensuing report embodied an "ethnic cleansing" spirit targeting the Tutsi, accusing them of "preparing for a 'Hamitic Kingdom.'" ³⁰ Following up on the report, the parliament adopted a resolution excluding the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda from domestic citizenship.³¹ In implementing these measures, the Uvira District Commissioner ordered the confiscation of Banyamulenge property in October 1995,³² and South Kivu deputy governor Lwasi Ngabo

²³ Mutambo, *Les Banyamulenge*; Manassé (Müller) Ruhimbika, *Les Banyamulenge (Congo-Zaïre) entre deux guerres* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001). Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge*.

²⁴ M. Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁵ Jean Claude Willame, *Les Banyamulenge et Banyarwanda, gestion de l'identitaire dans le Kivu* (Brussels: Institut Africain-CEDAF/L'Harmattan, 1997).

²⁶ Vlassenroot, "Citizenship, Identity Formation," 503; Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

²⁷ Willame, *Banyarwanda et Banyamulenge*, 83.

²⁸ Erik Kennes, "Du Zaïre à la R.D. du Congo: La vieille termitière terrassée par le vent de la savane," *Afrika Focus* 13, no. 1–4 (1997): 31.

²⁹ Stephen Jackson, "Of 'Doubtful Nationality': Political Manipulation of Citizenship in the D. R. Congo," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 5 (2007): 487.

³⁰ ECOSOC, *Report on the situation of human rights in Zaïre, prepared by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Roberto Garretón, in accordance with Commission resolution 1996/77, E/CN.4/1997/6 of 28 January 1997*, para. 135.

³¹ Willame, *les Banyarwanda et Banyamulenge*; Ruhimbika, *Les Banyamulenge*.

³² Ruhimbika, *Les Banyamulenge*, 32.

Lwabanji issued a one-week ultimatum to the community to leave the country by 8 October 1996.³³

Armed mobilization during the Congo wars, violence, killings, and other atrocities involving members of different communities as victims and perpetrators are widely documented.³⁴ More recent studies revisiting the complex micro-dynamics of conflict, violence, and victimization in the *hauts plateaux* have generally focused on the nexus between identity, land rights, autochthony, and conflicts.³⁵ Others, such as Verweijen and Brabant, have used agropastoral conflict lenses to capture the alliance of self-styled *wazalendo* (patriots or autochthons) Babembe, Bafuliiru, Banyindu, Bavira, and, to some extent, other South Kivu communities, against the Banyamulenge.³⁶ While using this traditional livelihood activities-based dichotomy, the authors recognized the absence of a “linear causal relationship between local conflicts and violence,”³⁷ as they go on to focus their study on “interests and visions of politico-military entrepreneurs, who are connected to and draw upon supra-local networks and discourses.”³⁸ This recognition of connections between local dynamics and supra-local agency shows the narrowness of the agriculturalists versus pastoralists narratives often used to understand conflicts and violence in the area. By examining ways in which anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech builds on, and reinforces, a history of their socio-political exclusion over the years, the present analysis complements these analytical lenses on conflict and violence in the Great Lakes region.

The study examines anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech as a local, regional and global phenomenon. Existing studies have underscored how the spillover of genocide in Rwanda and conflicts in neighbouring Burundi and Uganda tremendously impacted domestic and regional dynamics of conflicts and violence.³⁹ Accordingly, hate speech and conspiracy theories’ themes discussed in the present study reflect the regionalization of conflicts, violence, and the dynamics of exclusion.

Various communities of the DRC, particularly in the country’s eastern provinces, have been affected by large-scale victimization across the last three decades. However, the politics of exclusion targeting the Banyamulenge and Banyarwanda have permeated Congolese society and are used to legitimize violence against them. Since 1995, massacres and summary executions of members of the Banyamulenge community across the *hauts plateaux* area and in such other places as Abela (Kabela), Baraka, Gatumba (Burundi), Kalemie, Kamanyola, Kamina, Kinshasa, Lubonja, Lubumbashi, Minembwe, Nyamugali, Vyura/Moba, have often been motivated by, or justified as, responding to a necessity to unburden the DRC from people who do not belong.⁴⁰

³³ Despite this loaded background, he remained active in politics and served as South Kivu provincial minister for interior and security until August 2021.

³⁴ Ruhimbika, *Les Banyamulenge*; Verweijen et al., *Mayhem in the Mountains*.

³⁵ As in, Judith Verweijen and Justine Brabant “Cows and Guns: Cattle-Related Conflict and Armed Violence in Fizi and Itombwe, Eastern DR Congo,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 55, no. 1 (2017): 1–27.

³⁶ Verweijen and Brabant, “Cows and Guns,” 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁹ Turner, *The Congo Wars*; G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo, From Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Gérard Prunier, *Africa’s World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (Oxford: University Press, 2008); Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge*.

⁴⁰ See: UNOHCHR, *Report of the Mapping Exercise documenting the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March*

Given this history of conflict, the contemporary hate speech landscape is not a new phenomenon in the DRC. Socio-political dynamics since the end of the 1980s have been accompanied by anti-Banyamulenge, anti-Tutsi and anti-Rwandan rhetoric.⁴¹ On 11 April 2000, Belgium issued a contentious arrest warrant against former DRC foreign affairs minister Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombasi, for his incitement to kill Tutsi “vermin.”⁴² Likewise in 2008, International Alert published “Words that Kill,” a study analyzing “rumours, prejudice, stereotypes and myths” in the Great Lakes region.⁴³ The study noted that “prejudice and stereotyping between Kivu ethnic communities” were not generally “heavily loaded with hatred,” with the notable exception of those that targeted the Banyamulenge.⁴⁴ Conspiracy theories claiming President Joseph Kabila (2001–2018) was Rwandan, rather than the son of his predecessor, Laurent-Désiré Kabila; were exploited by Jean-Pierre Bemba’s 2006 presidential campaign with slogans such as “*Mwana Mboka*” (a son of our land) or “100% Congolese.”⁴⁵ They also influenced Etienne Tshisekedi’s 2011 presidential campaign theme song “*Ya Tshitshi, zongisa ye na Rwanda*” (elder Tshitshi, send him [Kabila] back to Rwanda).⁴⁶ This long history of hate speech and conspiracy theories underscores the need to comprehend its pervasive role in the protracted violent conflicts in the DRC.

Social Media, Disinformation, and the Harm in Hate Speech

Hate speech is diversely defined in literature and practice: it essentially “expresses, encourages, stirs up, or incites hatred against a group of individuals distinguished by a particular feature or set of features such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, and sexual orientation.”⁴⁷ This study focus on hate speech disseminate on “social media,” understood as “internet applications that enable the sharing of content: status updates, graphics, blogs, voice, games, photos, and audio and video files.”⁴⁸ In the studied context, hate speech is nurtured by conspiracy theories consisting of “explanation[s] of past, ongoing, or future events or circumstances that cite[s] as a main causal factor a small group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit and against the common good.”⁴⁹

1993 and June 2003 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/CD/DRC_MAPPING_REPORT_FINAL_EN.pdf (visited on 20 June 2020 (The Mapping Report); UN, Joint report of the MONUC, ONUB and OHCHR into the Gatumba Massacre, S/2004/821, 18 October 2004; Ndahinda, “Collective Victimization.”

⁴¹ Marie-Soleil Frère, *The Media and Conflicts in Central Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Renner Publishers, 2007), 41.

⁴² *Arrest Warrant of 11 April 2000 (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Belgium)*, Judgment of 14 February 2002, para 67, <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/121/121-20020214-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf> (accessed 30 October 2020). See also, Elongaezali, “RDC: LA GUERRE SERA LONGUE ET POPULAIRE AVEC LES ENNEMIES DU PEUPLE,” 12 July 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONkNOsvyTuY&t=0s> (accessed 31 October 2020).

⁴³ Christophe Sebudandi, “Synthesis of the Study,” in *Words that Kill: Rumours, Prejudice, Stereotypes and Myths Amongst the People of the Great Lakes Region of Africa* (Nairobi: International Alert, 2008), 14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis ours.

⁴⁵ Karen Büscher, Sigurd D’hondt, and Michael Meeuwis, “Recruiting a Nonlocal Language for Performing Local Identity: Indexical Appropriations of Lingala in the Congolese Border Town Goma,” *Language in Society* 42, no. 5 (2013): 532.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Norbert Mbu-Mputu and Joe Trapido, “Les Combattants – Ideologies of Exile, Return and Nationalism in the DRC,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 4 (2020), 741. Tshitshi was elder Tshisekedi’s endearing nickname.

⁴⁷ Bhikhu Parekh, “Is There a Case for Banning Hate Speech?,” in *The Content and Context of Hate Speech: Rethinking Regulation and Responses*, ed. Michael E. Herz and Péter Molnár (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37.

⁴⁸ Raphael Cohen-Almagor, *Confronting the Internet’s Dark Side: Moral and Social Responsibility on the Free Highway* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 29.

⁴⁹ Joseph E. Uscinski, “What Is A Conspiracy Theory?,” in *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them*, ed. Joseph E. Uscinski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 48.

Zeitsoff argues that social media lowers the barriers to entry for individuals and groups seeking to communicate; increases the speed and spread of information; facilitates strategic interaction and adaptation of different categories of users as well as the generation of new data and information.⁵⁰ By enabling users to “receive or create and share public messages at low costs and ubiquitously,”⁵¹ social media act as a powerful tool for propaganda aimed at framing narratives and shaping the behaviour of participants.⁵² In African contexts, “social media warfare” was used to capture “a war over information online” in the conflict opposing Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) to Al Shabaab in Somalia, as parties attempted to frame narratives over the broad situation or specific incidents.⁵³ In South Africa, a study on “fake news” on social media found that while the phenomenon was not the actual cause of xenophobia in South Africa, it acted as a vehicle “to spread tension between South Africans and foreigners within and outside the country thereby escalating the crisis.”⁵⁴

Studies have extensively debated whether and how hate speech constitutes or causes harm to targeted individuals or groups. Constitutive arguments identify the inherent harm arising from the very expression of hate speech while a consequentialist approach focuses on whether harm occurs as a result of hate speech.⁵⁵ Waldron argues that hate speech associates “ascriptive characteristics like ethnicity, or race, or religion with conduct or attributes that should disqualify someone from being treated as a member of society in good standing.”⁵⁶ It represents a “calculated affront to the dignity of vulnerable members of society and a calculated assault on the public good of inclusiveness.”⁵⁷ He argues that some expressions of hate speech “can become a world-defining activity, and those who promulgate it know very well – this is part of their intention – that the visible world they create is a much harder world for the targets of their hatred to live in.”⁵⁸

Empirical inquiries into the impact of hate speech mostly focus on causal harms. According to Gelber, hate speech contributes to “shaping the preferences of hearers so that they come to be persuaded of negative stereotypes” and conditions the environment to the extent that “expressing negative stereotypes and carrying out further discrimination become ... normalized.”⁵⁹ Increasingly accessible new information technologies have amplified this phenomenon. These tools are used by individuals and organized groups as vectors of hate speech,⁶⁰ mainly targeting vulnerable

⁵⁰ Zeitsoff, “How Social Media is Changing Conflict, 1980–1982.”

⁵¹ Stefan Stieglitz et al., “Social Media Analytics: Challenges in Topic Discovery, Data Collection, and Data Preparation,” *International Journal of Information Management* 39 (2018): 156.

⁵² Thomas Zeitsoff, “Does Social Media Influence Conflict? Evidence from the 2012 Gaza Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 1 (2018): 29–63.

⁵³ Thomas Molony, “Social Media Warfare and Kenya’s Conflict with Al Shabaab in Somalia: A Right to Know?,” *African Affairs* 118, no. 471 (2018): 328.

⁵⁴ Vincent Chenzi, “Fake News, Social Media and Xenophobia in South Africa,” *African Identities* 19, no. 4, (2021): 517. See also Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales, “An Exploratory Study of ‘Fake News’ and Media Trust in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa,” *African Journalism Studies* (2019), doi:10.1080/23743670.2019.1627230.

⁵⁵ Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan, “Introduction and Overview,” in *Speech and Harm: Controversies Over Free Speech Democracy*, ed. Ishani Maitra and Mary Kate McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6. See also Katharine Gelber and Luke McNamara, “Evidencing the Harms of Hate Speech,” *Social Identities* 22, no. 3 (2016): 324–41.

⁵⁶ Thomas Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4–6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Gelber and McNamara, “Evidencing the Harms,” 325.

⁶⁰ Keipi et al., *Online Hate and Harmful*, 56. See also Danielle Keats Citron, *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Cohen-Almagor *Confronting the Internet’s Dark Side*.

groups.⁶¹ Studies have found that exposure to online hate materials expressing “hatred of some collective,”⁶² can cause direct and indirect harm to individuals and groups.⁶³ These insights are the basis for our analysis of the harmful nature of anti-Banyamulenge and Tutsi hate speech.

Methodological Approach

This article examines the content of text, audio, and video materials shared on the internet and social media platforms, as well as related comments, Twitter feeds, and diverse categories of articles posted online. The aim is not to quantify hate speech propagated through social media but to document and analyze the phenomenon, actors involved, and explore links to conflicts and violence in the *hauts plateaux* area of South Kivu. The materials gathered were in Lingala, Kiswahili, French, Kibembe, Kifuliiru, and English.⁶⁴ They were analyzed, translated, textually quoted, or contextually interpreted to capture express and subtle hate speech content.

Based on the diversity of social media platforms covered, and the multiplicity of languages used, including translanguaging, data collection was conducted manually through a combination of diverse techniques. An initial step consisted of identifying extremist networks and actors usually known for anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi rhetoric. Most analyzed materials were generated by organized networks operating within the DRC or in the Congolese diaspora. They consisted of public figures, activists, armed groups, or their supporters. Materials produced by lone individuals were only included where the content carried very expressive forms of hate speech, the author held a position of influence in society, and/or based on a relatively high level of engagement generated by the material on social media (e.g. circulation, comments, and replies). The indicative table below shows popular YouTube channels with materials carrying hate speech or conspiracy theories targeting the Banyamulenge and Tutsi (Table 1):

Considerations such as the number of subscribers, views, comments, and opinions in the margins of materials are indications of their relative popularity. Several of the listed channels are associated with websites carrying similar hateful content. These used indicators only partially account for the level of engagement with the content since the materials are further shared in different formats on social media. In practical terms, materials included in the analysis were identified using a combination of keywords such as Banyamulenge, Tutsi, Minembwe, Rwandans, balkanization, kill, snake, viper, in the above-listed languages. Sources of data covered publicly accessible and private social media platforms the authors could access either directly or through their professional and social networks.

Using this approach, over 163 videos, ninety audio files, and several articles, including from thirty-four issues of the *Ingeta Journal*,⁶⁵ were identified and analyzed. The authors further regularly visited online and social media platforms to identify dynamics and trends

⁶¹ Banaji and Bhat, *Social Media and Hate*.

⁶² James Hawdon, Atte Oksanen, and Pekka Räsänen, “Exposure to Online Hate in Four Nations: A Cross-National Consideration,” *Deviant Behavior* 38, no. 3 (2017): 254.

⁶³ Keipi et al., *Online Hate*, 75.

⁶⁴ The authors can navigate these languages.

⁶⁵ Ingeta (so be it in Kikongo) serves as a rallying cry for the *combattants*. Two Ingeta websites: <http://ingeta.org/>, <http://www.ingeta.com/> and Ingeta Journal published since 2013 specialise in conspiracy theories and anti-Banyamulenge

Table 1. Indicative list of Youtube Channels with Anti-Banyamulenge and Anti-Tutsi Hate Speech Materials.

Platform	Subscribers	Hate speech materials	Date	Views	Comments
APARECO	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NceCQ99PCQw	22 January 2020	80,583	787
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjuQH-P6j6c	6 November 2020	71,594	610
Bobo Koyangbwa	49,900	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jowh91CdIYg	13 October 2016	23,747	55
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tboTmPAnBYY	19 October 2020	4,073	69
Bokoto TV	40,600	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9-27pFGWg4	20 January 2020	32,331	187
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZVuA-6PqFA	8 January 2020	15,176	25
Congofrance	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kTmEyEPYI8	11 October 2020	36,105	96
Congonews24 Television	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YQyyhb16As	12 October 2020	24,295	130
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g50YFvBCfKg	27 July 2021	12,496	57
Congosynthese	63,000	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WK-qaDNk-U	19 February 2020	6,122	49
Dr. Bill Mlongetcha Jackson	2,090	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPwcng0ODUw	5 February 2020	861	22
FiziMedia	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye30r0fBit0	30 December 2019	7,691	26
Kibenge TV	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5p7smiNpuk	25 October 2021	436	12
La voix du Kivu TV	18,100	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LP62txkFKul	3 May 2021	3,350	65
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hz16jIMmUc	7 July 2020	8,367	173
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aicag-ZKqFE	29 February 2020	28,418	152
Le Congo Est A Nous	93,900	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJvplHISpY8	29 October 2020	13,969	198
Liandja TV	8,210	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5McZdsrXA4	25 November 2019	13,654	214
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xW4JUSHzdks	22 January 2020	22,187	292
Plus Claire TV	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfnYdQHgPCs	2 November 2019	17,872	80
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhPk8k-qfl4	7 August 2021	20,699	146
Réaco news	N.A*	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh5H9rHRQ-Q	7 August 2019	7,409	19
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcoVxy1HoTY	7 August 2019	15,289	31
Star NetTV	32,400	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El_kUQ3kjul	15 July 2019	56,750	452
TELE TSHANGU	87,900	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVTvc_aBUts	28 January 2020	26,600	244
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1MTb3IR5lw	2 March 2021	62,514	450
		https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZAdhJJdwkQ	1 October 2020	44,305	189

Note: Data as of 25 October 2021; * Data not accessible.

in the dissemination of hate speech materials. The content analysis of the materials consisted of identifying “patterns, themes, assumptions, and meanings.”⁶⁶ It entailed reading, watching, and listening to the content of the materials to identify express or subtle forms of hate speech. The thematic coding of the data was informed by the frequency of appearance of specific claims or narratives in the materials as well as the diversity of actors making them.

The present study is limited in substance and scope. It focuses on hate speech targeting the Banyamulenge and Tutsi and, as such, does not cover similar messages targeting other communities in the DRC such as the Luba and Hema, or reverse hate messages from Banyamulenge individuals. The research orientation was mainly motivated by the increased virulence of hate messages and conspiracy theories in recent years, with a co-related rejection of Banyamulenge and Tutsi identity and national belonging in the DRC. The study does not also cover other expressive forms of speech, including peace messages within the examined context.⁶⁷ Other studies focusing on these phenomena may complement the present inquiry.

Hate Speech and Agency

Social media abolish the geographic distance between actors, enabling users to reach wider audiences in ways that mitigate “social, legal, and political ramifications of participating in hate.”⁶⁸ In the studied context, anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate messages are propagated by a diverse network of actors within the DRC and abroad. First, they are shared by persons belonging to neighbouring Babembe, Bafuliiru, Banyindu, and Bavira communities, with a prominent role played by the elite from these communities. Diverse statements issued in the name of the Babembe on the conflict in the *hauts plateaux*, rehearse familiar anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech narratives. They frequently portray the “Banyarwanda so-called Banyamulenge” as Rwandan refugees installed by the UNHCR in the area around the 1950s or the 1960s, with a strong exhortation not to meddle in domestic politics.⁶⁹ Next to claims over the Banyamulenge as representing a threat to Babembe’s “vital space” – a concept evocative of Nazi ideology⁷⁰ – the list of grievances includes accusations of fraudulent acquisition of Congolese citizenship, a purported anarchical creation of the Minembwe Commune, and an alleged fraudulent acquisition of customary authority prerogatives by members of the Banyamulenge

and anti-Tutsi rhetoric, as in Jean-Pierre Mbelu, “L’occupation des terres congolaises fut planifiée. Il faut planifier le ‘demain, après Kabil!’,” *Ingeta* 5, no. 21 (2018): 2–3.

⁶⁶ Howard Lune and Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 9th ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2017), 182.

⁶⁷ See Felix Mukwiza Ndahinda, “Hauts plateaux du Sud-Kivu: Amplifier les appels à la paix des voix locales,” *La Libre Afrique*, 14 August 2020, <https://afrique.lalibre.be/53261/opinion-hauts-plateaux-du-sud-kivu-amplifier-les-appels-a-la-paix-des-voix-locales/> (accessed 14 December 2021).

⁶⁸ Waltman and Mattheis, “Understanding Hate Speech.”

⁶⁹ *Déclaration des Babembe à l’Issu(sic) du Forum Intracommunautaire Tenu à Uvira du 02 au 04 mars 2020* (file with the authors). The claim features in a *Letter dated 31 August 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1998/827*, 2 September 1998, paras. 15–16.

⁷⁰ See *La Voix du Kivu TV*, “Déclaration de Babembe Sur les conflits de Fizi-itombwe,” 24 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE1EG6NWJt4>; Congo Lisanga TV, “Déclaration de la Mutualité Emo ‘ya M-mbondo des Babembe Kinshasa. Accompagnée par l’honorable yrene,” 19 July 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8Eq1wXyTyg> (accessed 19 October 2021). On “vital space,” see Christian Baechler, *Guerre et exterminations à l’Est: Hitler et la conquête de l’espace vital 1933–1945* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

community.⁷¹ The relatively recent adoption of similar narratives by members of the Bafuliuru and Bavira communities, especially since early 2021,⁷² illustrates the pervasive power of social media as echo chambers of hate.⁷³ In March 2021, the Uvira-based *Lubunga Lwa Bafuliuru* – a neotraditional representative body – urged community members to stop using the name Banyamulenge,⁷⁴ and, subsequently, convened gatherings in Mulenge to “reclaim the name and land.”⁷⁵

Second, leaders of armed groups operating in the *moyens* and *hauts plateaux* area are increasingly active on social media where they disseminate hateful content. The YouTube Channel *La Voix du Kivu TV* carries several recordings and images of Ebuela Mtetezi,⁷⁶ William Yakutumba,⁷⁷ Rene Itongwa,⁷⁸ and, Makanaki Kasimbira.⁷⁹ In a video shared on 12 April 2021, the latter stated:

I am General Makanaki Kasimbira John operational commandant for the Uvira area. I want to tell you that every Congolese should open his eyes and sacrifice himself to defend the country. Anyone still siding with the Tutsi or Rwandans will be decisively crushed, like corn in the mill ... We will eventually reach Minembwe. I know the whole area very well, it is only a matter of time, we will clean it. And it does not depend on me. It is the will of God. God is on our side ... Once we are done, we will head to the city of Uvira and clean the Banyarwanda from the city. We know where they are! Then the whole Ruzizi plain will follow ... Let the Congolese unite for a patriotic cause ... Nyerere, Kashumba, Ilunga, Mushombe, and all other [Mai Mai] leaders including René, Yakutumba, Kibukila: let us all unite and stick together to fight for the country.⁸⁰

The video circulated on social media days before Mai Mai groups led by Makanaki, Ilunga Rusesema, and Mushombe, in collaboration with Red-Tabara, conducted operations that effectively cleansed the Banyamulenge from the area between Kahololo, Bibangwa, Kitoga, Bijojwe, and Rurambo, reportedly destroying over 70 villages and looting cattle.⁸¹

⁷¹ *Déclaration des Babembe*.

⁷² La Voix du Kivu TV, “LES BAFULIURU ECLATENT TOUTE LA VÉRITÉ SUR LES SOI-DISANT BANYAMULENGE,” 12 April 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs1vgfovumg>; La Voix du Kivu TV, “DISCOUR DE MWAMI DE BAVIRA ECLATE LES MENSOGES DE BANYARWANDA ET POLITICIEN CORROMPU,” 9 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHS1ZUj2SNk>; La Voix du Kivu TV, “COUP SUR COUP ENTRE LES BAVIRA ET LES RWANDAIS SUR LE CONTROLE DE GROUPEMENT DE BIJOMBO,” 11 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AiMrDVTmJo> (all accessed 19 October 2021)

⁷³ Matteo Cinelli et al. “The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media,” *PNAS* 118, no. 9 (2021), e2023301118.

⁷⁴ Kibenge TV, “Président wa Lubunga ya Wafuluru Uvira, atowa onyo kwa Wanyarwanda wanao ji ita wanyamulenge,” 25 October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5p7smiNpuk> (accessed 19 October 2021).

⁷⁵ La Voix du Kivu TV, “RENCONTRE DE LA TRIBU BAFULIURU À MULENGE DONNE PEUR AUX TUTSI RWANDAIS,” 4 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsFD7gSgndg>; La Voix du Kivu TV, “LA CONFERENCE DE MULENGE ECLATE TOUTE LA VERITÉ SUR L'ARRIVÉ DES BANYARWANDA AU PAYS BAFULIURU/SK,” 5 September 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msfdmzh5HRA>; (all accessed 19 October 2021).

⁷⁶ La Voix du Kivu TV, “Le 08/02/2021 MESSAGE YA GENERAL EBUELA MTETEZI WA MAÏ-MAÏ KWA WANYARWANDA,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgY3GAEYfVA> (accessed 19 October 2021). Audio and video materials on La Voix du Kivu TV often introduce the platform as “the Voice of the Voiceless always at the service of the People.” The description replicates Rwanda’s RTLM hate radio’s motto https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/7449/unict_r_tlm_0342_kin.pdf;sequence=1 (accessed 20 October 2021).

⁷⁷ La Voix du Kivu TV, “Discour à la nation du General William AMURI YAKUTUMBA,” 29 February 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aicag-ZKqFE> (accessed 20 October 2021).

⁷⁸ La Voix du Kivu TV, “Gen REINE ITONGWA (Maï-maï) ASEMA WAKONGOMANI TUWE PAMOJA ILI TUSHINDE VITA,” 15 August 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUMjNBWsc5M> (accessed 20 October 2021).

⁷⁹ La Voix du Kivu TV, “GEN MAKANAKI DE MAÏ MAÏ: POURQUOI L'ONU NE FAIT QUE CONSIDERER LA SOUFFRANCE DES RWANDAIS?,” 3 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2Tu13jUzJA> (accessed 20 October 2021).

⁸⁰ Buyora TV, “Général makanaki kasimbiri,” 12 April 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5NTb8uV_04 (accessed 20 October 2021).

⁸¹ Exchanges with survivors of the attacks, including a former captive of the armed groups.

Survivors of the attacks were forced to flee in thousands and most sought refuge in the Ruzizi Plain (Bwegera-Kamanyola).⁸² Makanaki's inciteful message referencing ongoing and imminent "cleaning" operations illustrates a link between hate speech and physical violence.⁸³ Similarly, coordinated operations preceded and accompanied by inciteful messages were conducted between October 2021 and February 2022 by Mai Mai Yakutumba and Biloze Bishambuke in the Bibokoboko area.⁸⁴ They destroyed a dozen of mainly Banyamulenge villages whose survivors, deprived of their livestock and other possessions, took refuge in Baraka amidst insecurity.⁸⁵

The third category of hate speech actors consists of Congolese public figures from Sud-Kivu and other parts of the country. During a campaign for governor of South Kivu in March 2019, Bitakwira, a former Minister under President Kabila from the Bafuliiru community, promised that if elected, "his stubborn boys," namely "Rai Mutomboki and all other Mai Mai" would be his bodyguards.⁸⁶ Two years later, he shared an audio message in which he stated:

The war we are currently waging against the Tutsi is getting in high gear! You should know that our struggle has already weakened the forces of the Rwandans who were welcomed by our ancestors. They befriended us in the same way a snake befriends a partridge, until they turned against us, pretending that they are no longer Rwandans ... if you are on the side of those who want to solve our problem, we will collaborate. But if you say no, if you have Tutsi blood but hide among the Bafuliiru, you will then take your own path and follow those people ... the days of anyone who goes against our struggle are numbered on the land of the Bafuliiru.⁸⁷

In a similar January 2022 message, reflecting a Bafuliiru elite competition for leadership of the community, Claude Misare, a national member of parliament representing Uvira, urged religious leaders (pastors) from his community to take up "guns" (Kalashnikovs) against the Banyamulenge. He sensitized the diaspora to action in "defending the country"; publicly endorsed Mai Mai armed groups and bragged about his links to the leaders of these armed groups, saying:

I previously came to this area, together with others, in a peace mission: I came together with Bitakwira and the personal representative of the Head of State, and other presidential advisors. I took them to the bush and they met (Mai Mai leader) René! I took them to Kashatu and they met Nyerere! They also met Kashumba in Kahwizi! And they met Ilunga. I facilitated their meeting with all important Mai Mai leaders. And they said: well if we take care of them well, they can rescue our country tomorrow.⁸⁸

⁸² *An SOS Letter of the Banyamulenge Community to The Secretary-General of the United Nations Denouncing an Ethnic Cleansing in Final Stages*, 26 April 2021, <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/almdel/uru/bilag/203/2386044.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2022).

⁸³ Many similar messages are posted on <https://www.youtube.com/c/LAVOIXDUKIVU/search?query=Makanaki> (accessed 9 October 2021).

⁸⁴ La Voix du Kivu TV, "LES AFFRONTMENTS ENTRE MAÏ MAÏ ET TWIRWANEHO BIBOKOBOKO, MARCHÉ DE SOUTIEN À BITAKWIRA AU SUD KIVU," 14 October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RA5LY4ptEh0> (accessed 14 October 2021).

⁸⁵ "Sud-Kivu: Des villages de Bibokoboko occupés par des Mai-Mai Biloze Bishambuke et Yakutumba," Radio Okapi, 15 October 2021, <https://www.radiookapi.net/2021/10/19/actualite/securite/sud-kivu-des-villages-de-bibokoboko-occupes-par-des-mai-mai-biloze> (accessed 21 October 2021). Some survivors eventually returned to Bibokoboko with promises security by MONUSCO and the Congolese army.

⁸⁶ MOLOTO Jean-M NSHOKANO officiel, "Point De Presse BITAKWIRA sur sa campagne électorale au poste de Gouverneur au Sud Kivu," 11 March 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_khufVJlIk (accessed 21 October 2021).

⁸⁷ Audio message shared by Bitakwira on a WhatsApp Group called "Groupement Lamera," 19 September 2021.

⁸⁸ Audio Message of Claude Misare speech in Uvira dated 4 January 2022 with the authors.

The agentic boundaries of hate speech stretch beyond the South Kivu province. Martin Fayulu – who is generally believed to have received the most votes in the December 2018 presidential election that brought Felix Tshisekedi to power⁸⁹ – has frequently trafficked in hate speech. In a highly politicized event in the French Senate held on 9 March 2020, he stated:

Today, there are 300 Tutsi officers in the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC). In the Public Force, the Congolese army before independence, there was no single Tutsi. In the Congolese National Army (ANC), after independence, there were no Tutsi. In the Zairian Armed Forces (FAZ), under Mobutu, no single Tutsi! Today, more than 300 officers and more than 100 Tutsi Generals! ... Everything is controlled by Kagame!⁹⁰

Beyond this factually inaccurate statement, Fayulu has made several similar communications endorsing conspiracy theories over the Balkanisation of the DRC and foreign occupation of the country, including in Minembwe, an area predominantly inhabited by the Banyamulenge.⁹¹ Moreover, diverse sources, including the UN, have also denounced the collusion of elements of the Congolese army – among whom Generals Dieudonné Muhima and Muhindo Akili Mundos, respectively former field and provincial commanders – with Mai Mai militias but also the complicit inaction of civilian authorities.⁹²

A growing number of actors in the DRC and Congolese diaspora from the Kivu and beyond have also frequently trafficked in inflammatory language, including incitement to violence against the Banyamulenge. In an audio message in Kifuliuru, the speaker stated, about the Banyamulenge fleeing from Bibokoboko in October 2021: “they will find no way to escape. We will show them that we are the real sons of this land. Let them get in the net, like fish. We are going to slaughter them.”⁹³

Some members of the South Kivu diaspora organize periodic anti-Banyamulenge and Tutsi demonstrations, live-streamed or recorded in videos disseminated on digital platforms. During a march held in Des Moines, Iowa in the USA, participants carried signs proclaiming that: “so-called Banyamulenge are Rwandese and their language is Kinyarwanda”; “Minembwe will never be Tutsi”; or “peace in Congo will only be possible once the Tutsi invaders from Rwanda have returned to their country.”⁹⁴ Demonstrators in Phoenix, Arizona carried signs proclaiming: “Banyamulenge are Rwandan Tutsi. Rwandan Tutsi assassins. They claim to be victims;” “Minembwe belongs to the Congolese”; “stop the creation of Rwandan colonies in the DRC (So-called Banyamulenge).” The group’s spokesperson stated: “We are victims of our hospitality ... akin to hosting a snake in the house: it ends up biting you!”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Congo Research Group (CRG), “Who Really Won the Congolese Elections?,” 16 January 2019, <https://cic.nyu.edu/blog/who-really-won-congolese-elections> (accessed 19 January 2022).

⁹⁰ Afrique des Grands Lacs, 60 ans de tragique instabilité, “13/15 _ Martin Fayulu,” 23 March 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFp_FvkOMU4 (accessed 10 August 2020).

⁹¹ CONGO INFOS FOOT LIVE, “SUIVEZ LA CONFERENCE DE PRESSE DE MARTIN FAYULU DE CE VENDREDI 09 OCT.2020,” 9 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RpkZvPdGvI> (accessed 19 October 2021).

⁹² UN, *Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2021/560*, Annex 107, 10 June 2021, para.144; *Letter of the Banyamulenge Community to the Secretary-General of the United Nations*, 29 June 2020, copy with the authors.

⁹³ Message shared on Sud-Kivu (RDC) WhatsApp Group by Patrick Machuda on 19 October 2021.

⁹⁴ Don TV, “RDC & MINEMBWE IS NOT A TUTSI LAND,” 14 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21fWo4vONZc> (accessed 3 November 2020).

⁹⁵ Pac Info, “GÉNÉRAL YAKUTUMBA AYE LISUSU NA MESSAGE TRES IMPORTANT OYO CONGOLAIS NIONSON ESENGELI AYOKA,” 4 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNw0jkb1IYU> (accessed 10 July 2020), reference to a snake at 27:50.

Across the Atlantic, demonstrators in Manchester, UK, carried signs stating: “it is time to stop the lies of the Tutsi extremists over the DRC,” and: “Minembwe and Mulenge belong to the Congolese not Tutsi Rwandese so-called Banyamulenge.”⁹⁶ Speeches during this event summed up the dominant narratives about the Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandans’ perceived hegemonic aspirations in the DRC.⁹⁷

In addition to collective agency, individual members of the Kivu diaspora such as Billy Mlongecha Jackson, and Pierre Matate frequently share incendiary audio and video messages against the *Banyarwanda* “so-called Banyamulenge,” advocating their expulsion from the DRC. These actors within the Congolese diaspora are a powerful source of mobilization of support for Mai Mai groups operating in the *plateaux* area.⁹⁸

Diasporic actors not connected to the Kivu provinces are mostly regrouped under the *combattants*, a network of radical, often violent, Congolese activists operating in diverse countries across continents (Belgium, France, UK, USA, Canada, Southern Africa). They frame their struggle as aimed at liberating the DRC from foreign (Tutsi) occupation.⁹⁹ They regularly hold public events including conferences and demonstrations, and post numerous hate speech materials on social media platforms. Until his death in March 2021, Honoré Ngbanda Nzambo Ko Atumba, a former Security Advisor to President Mobutu was the chief theorist of the network.¹⁰⁰ The YouTube channel of his Alliance of Patriots for the Refoundation of the Congo (APARECO) regularly posts hateful materials. Similarly, Belgium-based musician Boketshu’s Bokoto TV records daily videos with hate speech content. In one largely viewed video posted on YouTube on 20 January 2020 addressed to President Tshisekedi, Boketshu states:

You are taking our land and giving it to the Banyamulenge. In Congo, there is no such a thing/ name as the Banyamulenge ... Brothers in Kinshasa, you should target Rwandans, all Tutsi who are in Kinshasa ... you are turning God’s land into a Tutsiland!¹⁰¹

In another video dated 26 December 2019, he states: “judgment day is coming, God will march on all Tutsis in Kinshasa city, all those Tutsis occupying important positions in [our] country, watch out, we will kill you!”¹⁰² Belgium-based Kwebe Kimpele is another figure that makes regular statements on the Tutsi occupation of the DRC and the inexistence of Congolese Tutsi; arguing that “once 545 Tutsi Rwandan officers are taken out of the Congolese army, the country will be crisis-free.”¹⁰³ Virtually all issues of *Ingeta Journal* carry derogatory references, conspiracy theories, or hate messages relating to Banyamulenge, Tutsi or Rwandans, or Kagame. Issue No. 26 features an article by Canada-based Patrick

⁹⁶ UNITED KINGDOM M’MBONDO COMMUNITY, “CONGOLESE, MANCHESTER MANIFESTATION (MINEMBWE,” 17 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu7pb-jO9xk> (accessed 10 July 2020).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* A statement is read in English from 8:25.

⁹⁸ Jason Stearns et al., *Mai-Mai Yakutumba: Resistance and Racketeering in Fizi, South Kivu* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013), 32.

⁹⁹ Mbu-Mputu and Trapido, “Les Combattants.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, on links between Ngbanda and the “*combattants*.”

¹⁰¹ BOKOTO TV, “URGENT BOKETSHU TRES FACHE BANYAMULENGE BAKOMI BA CONGOLAIS?” 20 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9-27pFGWg4> (accessed 27 August 2020).

¹⁰² BOKOTO TV, “BOKETSHU CONFIRME BA PROPOS YA MUZITU. GUERRE RWANDA,” 26 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HjKmWTxldI> (accessed 29 October 2020).

¹⁰³ Makolo Muswaswa TV, “Kwebe Kimpele alobi lisusu ... Tutsi congolais azalaka te,” 31 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVAC4pZg15U> and, BOBO KOYANGBWA, “RDC-Kwebe Kimpele Propose de Renvoyez Kabila et les Officiers Tutsi au Rwanda -3Questions sur Mobutu,” 13 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jowh91CdIYg> (all accessed 20 August 2020).

Mbeko rehashing narratives on the Banyamulenge as Rwandan immigrants from the 1960s whose presence in the DRC represents a step in the establishment of a Tutsi-Hima empire in the Great Lakes region.¹⁰⁴

Dominant Themes in Hate Speech

A substantive analysis of materials containing hate speech and conspiracy theories targeting the Banyamulenge shows a thematic convergence with Rwanda's pre-genocide "media of genocide,"¹⁰⁵ subject to contextual differences. Narratives recycle colonial myths and policies defining subjugated identities into native versus alien groups and institutionalizing administrative homelands "privileging the ethnic native while discriminating against the ethnic migrant."¹⁰⁶ They consist of a mix of conspiracy theories, rumours, stereotypes, and a re-writing of history where the boundaries between fiction and reality are blurred.¹⁰⁷ Key themes emerging from the materials are summarized as follows:

The Banyamulenge are Not Congolese

"The Banyamulenge do not exist" proclaimed Martin Fayulu, a central figure of Congolese opposition.¹⁰⁸ This recurrent claim, found in nearly all analyzed materials, presents the Banyamulenge as recent Rwandan immigrants who settled on DRC territory after the establishment of the country's boundaries and, therefore, not entitled to Congolese citizenship. The history of settlement and migrations on Congolese soil before, during, and after colonization is rewritten and a twisted reading of successive Congolese Constitutions and nationality laws is proposed to back the exclusion of the Banyamulenge from citizenship. As evidenced by the previously-referenced Babembe community declaration of 4 March 2020, the Banyamulenge are presented as Rwandan refugees settled in South Kivu by the UNHCR in the 1950s/1960s.¹⁰⁹ The narrative was echoed in an applauded parliamentary speech by then MP, now Minister, Muhindo Nzangi on 27 October 2020.¹¹⁰ His colleague, Eve Bazaiba, made a similar point in the debates stating: "yesterday's issue was nationality, today's issue is land, and tomorrow it will be about autonomy."¹¹¹ Nzangi used a document – presented days earlier in a Ngbanda/

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Mbeko, "Les 'Banyamulenge'. Qui sont-ils réellement?," *Ingeta* 7, no. 26 (2020): 18. For related content by the author, see Patrick Mbeko and Honoré Ngbanda-Nzambo, *Stratégie du chaos et du mensonge: Poker menteur en Afrique des Grands Lacs* (Québec: Editions de l'Erablière, 2014); Patrick Mbeko, *Le Canada et le pouvoir Tutsi du Rwanda: Deux décennies de complicité criminelle en Afrique Centrale* (Québec: Editions de l'Erablière, 2014).

¹⁰⁵ Borrowed from Jean-Pierre Chrétien, eds., *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide* (Paris: Karthala, 2002). See also *Kangura* no. 6 of December 1990, 6–8.

¹⁰⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁰⁷ On this, Stephen Jackson. "Sons of Which Soil? The Language and Politics of Autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo," *African Studies Review* 49, no. 2 (2006): 95.

¹⁰⁸ Congo Live TV. "EN DIRECT : RDC AFFAIRE MINEMBWE BANYAMULENGE MARTIN FAYULU DEVANT LA PRESSE CONGOLAISE," i, at 37.50 (accessed 9 October 2020).

¹⁰⁹ See also Mbeko, "Les 'Banyamulenge,'" Gauthier Tshitenge, "Notre réflexion: Réponses aux questions de quelques correspondants," http://www.congovision.com/forum/memo_italie1.html (accessed 12 August 2020).

¹¹⁰ MUNDOTV STUDIO-MUNDOFILS, "Le député Muhindo Nzangi a demandé la démission de Ruberwa Manywa du gouvernement," 27 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEera5Q2zkg> (accessed 27 October 2020).

¹¹¹ "EVE BAZAIBA: Hier c'était la nationalité, aujourd'hui la terre et demain ça sera l'autonomie!" 19 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPx9UZk94dg> (accessed 27 October 2020).

APARECO video – to back his claim that the Banyamulenge are recent migrants from Rwanda who settled in the Fizi area in 1953.¹¹²

A video produced in May 1964 by the League of Red Cross Societies documenting a joint action with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to settle Rwandan refugees, fleeing violence in their country, in the Kivu between 1962 and 1964 has widely been used, with different levels of manipulation, to back the narrative.¹¹³ The absence of a literal mention of “Banyamulenge” in the colonial library mapping Congolese “tribes” is used as further proof of the claim. The fallacious argument ignores the previously examined motivations behind the community’s change of name in the 1960–1970s amidst rising contestations about their belonging to the Congolese/Zairian state.

The Banyamulenge’s and Tutsi’s Greedy Ambition is to Control Congolese Land and Establish a Tutsi-Hima Empire

Portrayed as ungrateful immigrants who took advantage of the “generous/legendary hospitality” of the “natives,” the Banyamulenge and Tutsi are denounced for harbouring ambitions to conquer Congolese lands, control resources, replace autochthonous leaders, and rule over local communities. The establishment of Minembwe into a rural commune by a Decree of the Prime Minister in 2013 has become, years later, a rallying symbol used by diverse actors to support those claims on hidden hegemonic agendas. On 28 September 2020, a high-level delegation comprising several national and provincial authorities, including the then Minister of Defence and the Minister of Decentralisation, Azarias Ruberwa, a Munyamulenge participated in a ceremony of official installation of the Burgomaster of Minembwe Commune by provincial authorities. The event attracted a wave of denunciations by a diverse coalition of local, national, and diasporic actors portraying it as symptomatic of Banyamulenge and Tutsi territorial ambitions in the DRC and led to parliamentary hearings.¹¹⁴ The fact that the Minembwe Commune was established alongside 267 other rural and 239 urban communes across the country – including 15 new rural communes in South Kivu – is hardly taken into account. The Minembwe commune is amalgamated with a Minembwe territory previously established under the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD-Goma) between 1998 and 2002 but abolished after the implementation of the peace process 2002 Pretoria Peace Agreement.¹¹⁵

Internalized colonial historiography and racial anthropology classifying African populations into races with attributed separate origins are frequently invoked in conspiracy theories over the hegemonic ambitions of the Tutsi-Hima/Nilotics/Hamites.¹¹⁶ Tutsi are

¹¹² DOSTA tv, “Flash : Mr H. NGBANDA interpelle le gouvernement belge au sujet de Banyarwanda,” 11 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DC7u3MHj-3w> (accessed 14 October 2020). Both Nzangi and Bazaiba were subsequently appointed ministers under President Tshisekedi.

¹¹³ Red Cross Red Crescent historic film collection, “Opération Banyarwanda (1964, French),” 24 January 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST2msrOv3Qc> (accessed 12 August 2020).

¹¹⁴ Judith Verweijen, “RDC: le ‘Minembwegate’ ou l’antienne de la ‘Balkanisation,’” *Jeune Afrique*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1064421/politique/tribune-rdc-le-minembwegate-ou-lantienne-de-la-balkanisation/> (accessed 13 August 2021).

¹¹⁵ Verweijen et al., *Mayhem in the Mountains*, 24.

¹¹⁶ Edith R. Sanders, “The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969): 521; Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*.

presented as an alien Nilotic people without land, different from the native Bantu.¹¹⁷ Narratives on the foreign occupation of Congolese lands and balkanization of the DRC dating back to the early 1990s – with the Vangu Report as a prime illustration¹¹⁸ – have received a breath of life in recent years.¹¹⁹ Endorsed by high profile figures, such as Martin Fayulu and the powerful Catholic clergy – through statements by the episcopal conference (CENCO),¹²⁰ Uvira Diocese Bishop Sebastian Muyengo covering the *hauts-plateaux*¹²¹ and Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo¹²² – balkanization claims put the Banyamulenge and Tutsi at the centre of the “project.” They recycle decades-old conspiracy theories on Tutsi’s hegemonic ambition to control the Kivu and the region. A *Plan of Tutsi Colonisation of the Kivu and the Central Region of Africa* – likened to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* Jewish conspiracy – purportedly discovered in 1962 is often referenced in social media, just as it featured in pre-genocide Rwandan hate media, particularly in the incendiary *Kangura* magazine.¹²³

Tutsi-Hima hegemonic ambitions are presented as representing subordinate interests to the ultimate imperial masters, the Americans,¹²⁴ the Anglo-Saxons, or, more generally, the Bazungu (Whites/Westerners) in the mineral-rich DRC.¹²⁵ The theory was subtly invoked by former PM Adolphe Muzito in his call for war against, and annexation of, Rwanda.¹²⁶ As a YouTube commentator puts it: “The Banyamulenge are not interested in peaceful cohabitation ... [they] want to take control of our lands and use the coltan of the Kivu to build electric cars in the Volkswagen plant that their German partner has built in Rwanda.”¹²⁷

The DRC is Under Tutsi Occupation and Occupants Are Responsible for Insecurity and Violence

The hegemonic ambitions of the Tutsi in Congo are portrayed as not simply a future project but a contemporary reality. Central to the federating narratives carried by Ngbanda’s APARECO, Mbeko, Kimpele, Yakutumba, Bitakwira, Boketshu, the *Combattants*, and others

¹¹⁷ Congosynthese, “BANYARWANDA-BANYAMULENGE: RÔLE ET INFLUENCE EN RDC,” 19 February 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WK-qaDNk-U> (accessed 15 July 2020).

¹¹⁸ See note 31 above, para 135.

¹¹⁹ On this, see Lars-Christopher Huening “Making Use of the Past: The Rwandophone Question and the ‘Balkanisation of the Congo,’” *Review of African Political Economy* 40, no. 135 (2013): 13.

¹²⁰ “Peuple Congolais, ne nous laissons pas voler notre souveraineté!” 19 October 2020, para. 14, <http://www.cenco.org/peuple-congolais-ne-nous-laissons-pas-voler-notre-souverainete/> (30 October 2020).

¹²¹ APARECO, “FLASH/Déclaration choc de l’Evêque d’Uvira Joseph MUYENGO sur la commune de Minembwe,” 9 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmabqMdlbss> (30 October 2020).

¹²² Congo Live TV, “LE CARDINAL FRIDOLIN AMBONGO ALERTE SUR UN PLAN DE BALKANISATION DE LA RDC,” 1 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvzSk3SbXHU> (accessed 31 July 2020).

¹²³ On this, see Enoch David, “Fizi: des affrontements sont signalés à Kahwera,” <https://fizimedia.com/2020/01/fizi-des-affrontements-sont-signales-a-kahwera/> (accessed 3 August 2020). For a deeper historical analysis, see Chrétien, *Rwanda: Les médias*, 33–6; Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Marcel Kabanda, *Rwanda. Racisme et génocide: L’idéologie hamitique* (Paris: Editions Belin, 2016), discussing Ngeze Hassan, “Le plan de colonisation Tutsi au Kivu et région centrale de l’Afrique,” *Kangura* no. 4, November 1990.

¹²⁴ Réaco News, “BA TUTSIS NA BA AMERICAINS DETERMINER YA KOSILISA POPULATION YA CONGO NA KOBOMA,” 7 August 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh5H9rHRQ-Q> (accessed 31 July 2020). The title translates as “the Tutsi and Americans are determined to exterminate the Congolese population.”

¹²⁵ Boniface Musavuli, “RD Congo : Il faut mourir pour l’Amérique, sinon on est mort ...,” *Ingeta* 1, no. 2 (2014): 2; Mufoncol Tshiyoyo, “Rwanda, Ouganda, Angola et Congo, le temps de poser autrement des questions qui fâchent,” *Ingeta* 6, no. 24 (2019).

¹²⁶ MARIUS MUHUNGA MEDIA, “ADOLPHE MUZITO ‘NOUS DEVONS FAIRE LA GUERRE AU RWANDA,’” 23 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5kkmTikU-g&app=desktop> (accessed 31 July 2020).

¹²⁷ Comment, @ Fondation Roi Leopold II Froleo, La Voix du Kivu TV, “Déclaration des babembe à l’issu du forum intra communautaire tenu à uvira du 02 au 04 mars 2020,” 6 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VklagtmaYk> (accessed 31 July 2020).

is the claim that Congo is currently under alien Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandan political and military occupation.¹²⁸ As the narrative goes, former President Joseph Kabila is a Rwandan heading Kagame's fifth column in the DRC. His successor, President Tshisekedi is portrayed as a puppet of the occupants, given his attempt to normalize relations between the DRC and Rwanda. The very essence of the *Combattants'* action is directed at "liberating" the country from that foreign occupation including through violent means. An inciteful audio message in Katangese Kiswahili shared between October and December 2019, epitomizes this ideology:

My brothers Babemba [sic]¹²⁹ in Fizi, Uvira, Kalemie, Moba, Rutshuru, ... Let's all stand firm behind General Yakutumba. The Banyamulenge are not Congolese. They are Tutsi from Rwanda ... the *Inkotanyi*. The Minembwe *hauts plateaux* are not a Tutsiland, they belong to the Congolese people! I call upon all Wabemba, Warega, Bashi to join forces and fight against the Tutsi from Rwanda. Don't show them any mercy! The *Inkotanyi* are devils! They are sorcerers! Hit them hard! Pick a machete and kill a Tutsi. Kill all Banyamulenge Tutsis! Use machetes and kill them all, so that we can claim the land of our ancestors back! No single Tutsi shall remain in Congo! Kill a Tutsi, kill a Tutsi!¹³⁰

Similar messages in Lingala, Kiswahili, and other local languages are widely circulated on social media platforms calling followers to eliminate the Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandans in the DRC.¹³¹ Homer Bulakali, a member of the South Kivu provincial parliament reportedly pronounced an incendiary speech on 30 November 2019 in Baraka, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, calling for attacks on the Banyamulenge and the looting of their cattle until they are driven out of the DRC.¹³² In a public meeting in the same city more than a month after Bulakali's exhortation, calls were made by the local youth to mobilize in a fight against the "Banyarwanda" until the last man standing.¹³³ The filmed lynching of Kaminzobe, a Munyamulenge officer (Major) in the Congolese army on 9 December 2021 in Lweba (a village in Fizi territory) and several similar attacks targeting the Banyamulenge or their "native collaborators" in the area are framed and rewarded as valiant acts of rightful retaliation, self-defence, and liberation.¹³⁴

The Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandans are Ruthless Killers

In the margins of a YouTube audio file on Ngbanda's APARECO channel, a commentator states: "Tutsi is synonymous with 'killer.'"¹³⁵ Proponents of the narrative claim that since the Congo wars in 1996, the Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandans, with Kagame at the helm,

¹²⁸ BOBO KOYANGBWA "RDC-Kwebe Kimpele Propose."

¹²⁹ A likely reference to Babembe.

¹³⁰ Inkotanyi is the *nom de guerre* of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). File with the authors.

¹³¹ Goma 24, "IL APPELLE A TUER LES BANYAMULENGES AU KIVU," 3 December 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/goma24/videos/818938502023668/> (accessed 30 October 2020). The video circulated on social media invited Congolese youth to rise and kick the Tutsi/Banyamulenge out of the DRC and, if they resisted, "each should have a Rwandan corpse in his hand."

¹³² Delphin R. NTANYOMA, "Baraka: Audio decrivant le discours du depute Homer Bulakali appellant aux massacres," 7 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGr8_KQ_92g; "Homer Bulakali à Baraka: Message de Kamerhe ou du CACH ?," 26 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TEMqMGIC-U> (both accessed 15 July 2020).

¹³³ A video file shared on social media with the authors.

¹³⁴ La Voix du Kivu TV, "APRÈS LES MASSACRES CONTRE LES CONGOLAIS, SILENCE RADIO DES AUTORITÉS ET ONU LA POPULATION EN COLÈRE," 10 December 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbHnDbWZuqM> (accessed 15 February 2022).

¹³⁵ Comment by @Yolande Yohali, APARECO, "Le véritable chef coutumier de Minembwe porté disparu après les menaces de Ruberwa & Bisengimana," 5 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifrX2VffY2o> (accessed 5 August 2020).

have killed 12 million Congolese,¹³⁶ a figure put forward already in 2014.¹³⁷ As the 4 March 2020 Babembe declaration puts it, the “Banyarwanda” have repeatedly victimized the “real” Congolese: killing their customary chiefs and opinion leaders as well as innocent civilians in Makobola, Abala, Wangulube, Lulinda, Akyumba, Asangyala, Mboko, Swima ...¹³⁸ These massacres are attributed to rebel groups including the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaire* (AFDL) and the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD) both backed by Rwandan (and Burundian/Ugandan forces in the former case); with involvement of Banyamulenge actors in both rebellions.¹³⁹ Some claim that the ultimate objective of the Banyamulenge/Tutsi is to exterminate the Bantu people.¹⁴⁰

The complex dynamics in the country over the last three decades and, the plurality of domestic and foreign actors are narrowed into an agentic binary whereby Congolese Bantu “autochthones” are portrayed as victims of the Hamitic Banyamulenge/Tutsi “immigrants.” Episodes of Banyamulenge victimization and mass killings across the DRC since 1995 are either unrecognized, minimized, or justified.

Purdeková argues that regional circulation of divisive and distorted historical narratives has a real impact on the ground and can directly contribute to violence.¹⁴¹ Narratives on the criminality of the Banyamulenge, echoing anti-Tutsi propaganda in Rwanda in the 1990s, carry justifications for violence against them. Multiple examined materials contained express calls to kill or physically harm the Banyamulenge/Tutsi as in: “people of South Kivu, if you cross Tutsi on your way, kill them, it is called self-defence;”¹⁴² “all Tutsi Rwandans in Congo must be killed;”¹⁴³ or, in a comment reminiscent of lynching episodes in Kinshasa in 1998, “you Tutsi, we will soon be setting you on fire.”¹⁴⁴ A South Africa-based prolific generator of hate speech materials claimed that he participated in the Gatumba Massacres of some 166 Congolese, mainly Banyamulenge, refugees in Burundi on 13 August 2004.¹⁴⁵

Other messages, evocative of the genocidal propaganda in Rwanda,¹⁴⁶ contain inflammatory, derogatory, or dehumanizing references to the Banyamulenge/Tutsi: “kicking you out of Congo is a cause we are ready to die for. You Tutsi Devils!”¹⁴⁷; “Tutsi vipers”¹⁴⁸;

¹³⁶ DOCILE TELEVISION, “12 MILLIONS DE CONGOLAIS DÉJÀ TUÉ PAR RUBERWA ET KAGAME LE KINOIS ON DIT TROP C’EST TROP,” 3 January 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_xrNU_3Dkw (accessed 5 August 2020).

¹³⁷ Freddy Mulongo, “Génocidaire au Congo, Paul Kagamé a fait du génocide rwandais son fonds de commerce,” 5 April 2014, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/freddy-mulongo/blog/050414/genocidaire-au-congo-paul-kagame-fait-du-genocide-rwandais-son-fonds-de-commerce> (accessed 5 August 2020).

¹³⁸ *Déclaration des Babembe*.

¹³⁹ See, the Mapping Report; Ndahinda, “Collective Victimization.”

¹⁴⁰ SOS Vérité Sur Le Rwanda, “Pourquoi croyons-nous qu’il a un plan d’extermination et/ou d’asservissement des peuples bantous en Afrique?” <http://jkanya.free.fr/Texte16/exterminationbantous140816.pdf> (accessed 7 August 2020).

¹⁴¹ Andrea Purdeková, “Itinerant Nationalisms and Fracturing Narratives: Incorporating Regional Dimensions of Memory into Peacebuilding,” *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (2020): 1187.

¹⁴² Comment, @Medard Nzaba, La Voix du Kivu TV, “Mwana ya Fizi Asemboli maloba ya Moïse Nyarugabo le Rwandais,” 10 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgZfNEsDzhk> (accessed 10 July 2020).

¹⁴³ Comment, @sanga Vuvu, APARECO, “Affaire ‘Banyamulenge’ : Honoré NGBANDA répond à Félix TSHISEKEDI,” 22 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NceCQ99PCQw> (accessed 10 July 2020).

¹⁴⁴ Comment, @Nisha Fibendua, APARECO, “Le véritable chef coutumier.”

¹⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/ruramira/status/1258638904082812928?lang=en> (accessed 23 October 2021).

¹⁴⁶ Lynne Tirrell, “Genocidal Language Games,” in Maitra and McGowan, eds. *Speech and Harm*, 174–221.

¹⁴⁷ Comment, @africa liboso, APARECO, “Le véritable chef coutumier.”

¹⁴⁸ Comment, @Pauline curieuse, Aigle De Kolwezi, “LA RWANDAISE ESTHER MUHIMPUNDU SE FAIT PASSER POUR UNE CONGOLAISE,” 14 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPE3URRCEWc> (accessed 12 July 2020).

"Tutsi Rwandans are the virus of Congo"¹⁴⁹; "these Tutsi vampires will never be forgiven"¹⁵⁰; "you Rwandans are the ancestors of snakes."¹⁵¹

The Banyamulenge/Tutsi/Rwandans are Manipulative and Deceitful

Narratives presenting the Banyamulenge/Tutsi as manipulative and deceitful rehearse familiar tropes propagated in Rwanda's pre-genocide context. Ngunzira and his followers have dug in the colonial library for the notion of *ubwenge* (Kinyarwanda/Kinyamulenge for intelligence) misconstrued as carrying an additional Tutsi hidden sub-text translating an innate propensity for deceit.¹⁵² Books such as *Lies of the Tutsi*,¹⁵³ or *Stratégie du chaos et du mensonge*¹⁵⁴ are evocative of Kangura's or Radio Télévision Libre de Mille collines (RTLM) anti-Tutsi propaganda in Rwanda. They are intended to provide an academic imprimatur to conspiracy theories on the inherent evilness of the Banyamulenge/Tutsi.

Kapapi vows to demonstrate "how lies, conspiracy, murder, extortion, expropriation, manipulation, abuse of power, and taking justice into their own hands are the fundamental cornerstones of the Tutsi in keeping local tribes in the state of colonization."¹⁵⁵ The content of these books is popularized in videos posted on digital platforms.¹⁵⁶

Debating the Impact of Hate Speech on Social Media

The preceding two sections on hate speech agency and content show that social media platforms increasingly act as safe spaces where narratives are framed, and networks mobilized for actions that impact dynamics of conflict on terrains of hostilities. Studies on the "effect of social media on ideology and recruitment" have mostly focused on radicalization within Salafi-jihadist groups, far-right groups,¹⁵⁷ or in contexts of religious (sectarian) polarization.¹⁵⁸ The present study examined a different context of protracted conflicts in which social media facilitate the mobilization of transboundary networks connecting leaders and followers of armed groups, to local and national leaders, members of civil society organizations, and the diaspora. They interact in spaces where individuals seek "a like-minded group or peers to bounce ideas off each

¹⁴⁹ Comment, @Théophile Gauthier Kouelo, APARECO, "Sous le Haut Patronage de Kagame et Felix Tshisekedi, Ruberwa « Négocie » la Commune de Minembwe !" 11 July 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM9Vrdcw8TU> (accessed 12 July 2020).

¹⁵⁰ Comment, @okito1994, La Voix du Kivu TV, "Mwana ya Fizi."

¹⁵¹ Comment, @Hasani Hasani, La Voix du Kivu TV, "Mwana ya Fizi."

¹⁵² APARECO, "H.NGBANDA abimisi lisusu lokuta ya ba banyamulenge:Uvira, Fizi ou Rwanda (Basambwe) 11,694," 5 December 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHhRSPW_ZJO (accessed 13 July 2020). Jean-Pierre Chrétien, "Les aventures de la conscience historique au Rwanda," *Esprit* 364, no. 5 (2010), 107 proposes a critical analysis.

¹⁵³ John Kapapi, *Lies of the Tutsi in Eastern Congo/Zaire: A Case Study: South Kivu (Pre-Colonial to 2018)* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2019).

¹⁵⁴ Mbeko and Ngunzira, *Stratégie du Chaos*.

¹⁵⁵ Kapapi, *Lies of the Tutsi*, xix.

¹⁵⁶ As in, John Kapapi, "Lies of the Tutsi in Eastern Congo/Zaire," 7 March 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/Lies-of-the-Tutsi-in-Eastern-CongoZaire-110534540559689/>; EVEIL PATRIOTIQUE – USA Maître Djino Will, "Scandale sur le mensonges de TUTSI Rwandais en RDC par JOHN KAPAPI de FIZI," 18 September 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tatxRo0yyGQ>; DIAF-TV, "Patrick Mbeko sur Diaf TV: stratégie du chaos et du mensonge," 19 November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ub4RH6BgyfU>; "'Stratégie du chaos et du mensonge' séduit Bruxelles-Déjà en rupture de stock?" 27 November 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5h4Yj0GDpyo> (accessed 20 April 2022).

¹⁵⁷ Zeitzoff, "How Social Media is Changing Conflict," 1977.

¹⁵⁸ Siegel and Badaan "#No2Sectarianism."

other and build solidarity.”¹⁵⁹ Increased access to affordable tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube facilitates exchanges between actors: participants interactively frame, refine and amplify hateful discourses aimed at cementing the ingroup and outgroup identities using “decontextualized or overly simplified renderings of social analysis and opinion.”¹⁶⁰

Interactive dynamics on social media show that the contemporary *uzalendo* militancy – the concept carries the dual meaning of *nativism* and *patriotism*, contextually interpreted as a duty to defend ancestral lands from foreigners – is a by-product of *the local* meeting *the global*, using the medium of social media. Anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech and conspiracy theories, championed by Ngbanda and the *Combattants*, considered a marginal phenomenon until recent years, have expanded their reach and permeated Congolese mainstream politics. Analyzed materials display an ideological and thematic alignment between armed Mai Mai groups (e.g. Makanaki), local and national leaders (Bitakwira, Misare, Fayulu) as well as diasporic communities (Boketshu, *combattants*). Amplified by social media, narratives (re)produced by these networks are circulated by an increasingly connected and vociferous network of users across geographies and sectors of the population to the extent that wild claims formulated in distant diasporic communities in Belgium, France, the UK, South Africa or the USA are echoed in Kinshasa, Uvira, or the bushes of Fizi.

Deployed narratives aim at shaping minds on responsibilities in the tragic realities of protracted crises, conflicts, and violence in the (eastern) DRC. For individuals unfamiliar with the terrains of conflict, disinformation and conspiracy theory materials proclaiming “Minembwe under Rwandan occupation” are hardly subjected to critical reasoning or triangulation through other, more informed, sources. Some analyzed materials suggest that the diffusion of hate speech may potentially have an intergenerational impact.¹⁶¹ Belgium-based Michel Bwami stated that “their” children and grandchildren were taught about the evilness of the “Banyarwanda.”¹⁶²

Establishing a causal link between the use of social media and conflict or violence remains challenging. Studies on “revolutions” in the Arab world have shown that sectarian online hate speech plays a role in “recruitment efforts by extremist groups who seek to exacerbate intergroup tensions.”¹⁶³ The preceding analysis of collected data suggests that the phenomenon carries both constitutive and consequential harms. Stereotypical representations of the Banyamulenge/Tutsi as foreigners, snakes, cockroaches, vipers, Tutsi invaders, greedy, ruthless killers, manipulative, expansionists, and hegemonists deprive them of equal consideration and dignity in ways that render them legitimate targets of violence.

But beyond dehumanization, Waltman argues that hate speech is used to “construct someone as worthy of killing before actual hate crimes and ethnviolence take place”¹⁶⁴ Several analyzed materials contained explicit or subtle calls for violence,

¹⁵⁹ Zeitzoff, “How Social Media is Changing Conflict,” 1977.

¹⁶⁰ Waltman and Mattheis, “Understanding Hate Speech.”

¹⁶¹ In an audio message, Pierre Matate, a UK-based Mfulero, expresses gratitude to Ngbanda whom he calls an inspirational father figure.

¹⁶² Audio files with the authors.

¹⁶³ Siegel and Badaan “#No2Sectarianism,” 837.

¹⁶⁴ Michael S. Waltman, “The Normalizing of Hate Speech and How Communication Educators Should Respond,” *Communication Education* 67, no. 2 (2018), 259–65.

including killings of the Banyamulenge/Tutsi and their accomplices, in what is often characterized as self-defence. A YouTube video featuring Boketshu, “Commandant Esso” and “PDG Mayala” talking from Brussels to Yakutumba, a rebel leader active in South Kivu’s *hauts* and *moyens* plateaux, illustrates the connection between actors across geographies. It further reveals the active support of diasporic communities to lethal armed activities on the ground: the call ends with an appeal to the Congolese diaspora to send funds to Yakutumba.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, inciteful messages by actors such as Bitakwira, Misare, and others, defining the ingroup and the enemy, characteristically seek to mobilize the “natives” across geographic spaces against intrusive “foreigners.”¹⁶⁶

Members of the Bafuliuru and Bavira communities had largely resisted entering into open conflict with the Banyamulenge. However, a progressive radicalization of members of this community, documented on social media,¹⁶⁷ has coincided with increased militancy of armed groups recruiting from these communities, including violence against the Banyamulenge and the destruction of several villages in the Bijombo-Rurambo area.¹⁶⁸ Fayulu’s rhetoric on the inexistence of the Banyamulenge and foreign occupation of Minembwe was echoed by a crowd of his supporters in the streets of Kinshasa chanting: “*Ya Welo, yebisa Fayulu, apesa minduki, tokota Minembwe*” (elder [Serge] Welo, tell Fayulu to give us guns, so we may go and liberate Minembwe).¹⁶⁹ Banyamulenge individuals were attacked in Uvira in ensuing demonstrations organized by Fayulu’s Lamuka platform.¹⁷⁰ Evidence from analyzed materials suggests a close connection between hate speech actors and the terrains of violence.

Conclusion

Examinations of the protracted armed conflicts and violence in eastern DRC have often focused on inter-ethnic dimensions of conflicts; on the structural weaknesses of governance institutions as well as on the impact of foreign governments and armed groups on local dynamics.¹⁷¹ The present inquiry complements existing studies by uncovering how social media contribute to the emergence of transboundary networks of actors involved in the creation and dissemination of anti-Banyamulenge and anti-Tutsi hate speech and conspiracy theories that reflexively impact local dynamics of conflict and violence.

¹⁶⁵ Star NetTV, “URGENT: GEN WILLIAM AMURI YAKOTUMBA EN DIRECT DE MINEMBWE APESI MESSAGE NA PEUPLE CONGOLAIS,” 15 July 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El_kUQ3kjul (accessed 21 August 2020); “URGENT: Cmd ESSO A REAGIR PONA DISCOURS YA Pr FELIX NA LONDRES,” 22 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJriuHA8LkY> detailing Laurent Sococo’s plan to supply Yakutumba with a radio station to spread his message (at 47:05) (accessed 20 August 2020).

¹⁶⁶ Audio and text messages with the authors.

¹⁶⁷ Explored in the section on hate speech and agency.

¹⁶⁸ Several materials posted on channels such as La Voix du Kivu TV, (<https://www.youtube.com/c/LAVOIXDUKIVU/videos>); Kibenge TV (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFDpnEQZ8mCuMx0lJbJenJw/videos>) or Uvira News TV (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiaxVTejoFVeHeYmouh2v6A/videos>) (accessed 29 March 2022) document this destructive radicalization trend.

¹⁶⁹ La Voix du Kivu, “MINEMBWE:POPULATION ASENGI FAYULU MANDOKI.BALOBI JAMAIS KINSHASA SANS MINEMBWE, TSHILOMBO AKENDE,” 5 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1Hmt16Ni2w>, (accessed 31 October 2020).

¹⁷⁰ Kivu Times, “UVIRA: Président de la jeunesse Banyamulenge attaqué par des manifestants du LAMUKA&NSCC, temoignage,” 14 October 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-fMCPXH7LA> (accessed 31 October 2020).

¹⁷¹ Judith Verweijen, “Why Violence in the South Kivu Highlands Is Not ‘Ethnic’ (And Other Misconceptions About the Crisis),” KST, 31 August 2020, <https://blog.kivusecurity.org/why-violence-in-the-south-kivu-highlands-is-not-ethnic-and-other-misconceptions-about-the-crisis/> (accessed 20 October 2021) offers critical insights.

The mapping of actors showed a convergence between leaders and members of armed groups, local and national authorities, other public figures, as well as members of Congolese diaspora in the generation and dissemination of hate speech. Furthermore, the thematic analysis of hate speech materials uncovered dehumanizing content that denies equal dignity and consideration to members of the Banyamulenge community and legitimizes violence against them. The appropriation and normalization of hate speech and conspiracy theories by a large number of actors in and outside the DRC as well as open support to armed groups bolster their violent activities and further contribute to societal polarization. Documented uses of hate speech preceding documented acts of violence suggest a close link between the two phenomena that warrant further studies in this and similar contexts.

The article contributes to broad literature on the interaction between conspiracy theories-fuelled hate speech and social media within a context of violent armed conflicts. The study highlighted the reflexive impact social media interactions between actors across geographies play on local dynamics of conflict within an ethnically fragmented society. Since social media defy physical boundaries, responding to the phenomenon requires a comprehensive strategy that encompasses adequate regulations, sanctions, limiting access to social media platforms for identified offenders, and an agenda for inclusive peace incorporating peace messaging.¹⁷² Possible interventions cover “banning, punishing, or deleting hateful content online,” flagging inaccurate information as well as identifying appropriate tools for behavioural change where sectarian hate speech is replaced by a more inclusive peace messaging.¹⁷³ To be successful, such a strategy requires concerted action by public and private actors in the DRC and abroad, including foreign countries where Congolese radical networks operate and social media service providers.

It is challenging to police hate speech on social media in any context, but in this case, the problem is compounded by the inadequacy of existing tools to moderate content disseminated in Congolese vernacular languages. Non-inclusion of Kifuliiru, Kibembe in the pre-existing 108 languages supported by Google Translate’s neural machine translation service is indicative of digital companies’ limits in mediating content in those languages.¹⁷⁴ Lingala, the most dominant Congolese national language, is one of the 24 additional languages added to this pre-existing repertoire in May 2022.¹⁷⁵ Complementary studies are needed on the impact of hate speech and conspiracy theories on violence, the appropriate responses to the phenomenon, and on the commodification of hate speech, including financial incentives behind the proliferation of social media (mainly YouTube) channels of hate.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² On this, see Alexandra A. Siegel, “Online Hate Speech,” in *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*, ed. Nathaniel Persily and Joshua A. Tucker (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020), 71–6.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 838.

¹⁷⁴ Our query to YouTube remains unanswered.

¹⁷⁵ “Google Translate Adds 24 New Languages,” *BBC*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-61416757> (accessed 12 May 2022).

¹⁷⁶ In addition, advertisement revenues commensurate to relative influence, as described in James J.F. Forest, *Digital Influence Warfare in the Age of Social Media* (Santa Barbara, CA and Denver, CO: Praeger, 2021), 71, channels such as Bokoto TV and Plus Claire TV feature permanent advertisements of Zaire-themed nostalgic products for followers to buy.

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