

Digital disconnections during and after the 2015 political crisis in Burundi

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In this contribution I reflect on the digital *disconnections* I witnessed during my research projects during and the 2015 political crisis in Burundi.

In April and May 2015, almost ten years after the civil war ended, a new political crisis started when a protest by young people supported by civil society leaders and the political opposition was violently repressed by government security forces and affiliated youth militia. The events plunged the country into a spiral of violence, with a failed coup d'état in early May paving the way for widespread political persecution of alleged opponents.

Like with the Arab Spring and the 2014 demonstrations and riots in Burkina Faso, and much like the Gen-Z protesters in Kenya, Tanzania and Mexico currently spotlighted in the media, social media played a pivotal role in the organisation of the demonstrations. Yet while the start and organisation of the protests relied much on digital connections, I ask attention for the digital disconnections instead.

In my encounters, I have seen at least three important forms of disconnections: forged by governments to curb the protests during the crisis, self-enforced by citizens and refugee and migrant connections for a variety of reasons, and in the aftermath of the crisis, resulting from grave economic decline and international abandonment of the country following the crisis.

Looking at these disconnections, I call for research that calls into digital disconnections during and after conflict. I particularly wonder if these mirror the social fractures scholars have documented in societies affected by war. Do we also see torn social fabrics digitally? Or are digital fabrics more resilient, and if so, could we build on their resiliency to foster stronger and more just societies?