11. The meaning of violence and the violence of meaning: the politics of knowledge in Burundi

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INTRODUCTION: RESEARCH, KNOWLEDGE AND VIOLENCE IN BURUNDI

This chapter starts from the premise that 'scientific' research is a process of discourse formation. In doing so it draws on the work of Lonergan (1957) which asserts that the process of human knowing is unified but comprises four operations, namely experiencing, understanding, judging (choosing, deciding), and acting. This conceptual insight is applied here to the case of Burundi in the Central African Great Lakes region in order to illuminate how and why the politics of knowledge is relevant both to the phenomenon of violence and its supposed solutions.

Burundi completed its third election cycle in 2020. It is the first time in Burundi's history that an elected leader has lasted more than three months. Burundi achieved independence on 1 July 1962. The newly independent state suffered instability from 1961 to 1966. In 1961, Prince Louis Rwagasore of the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) was elected on 18 September and was assassinated on 13 October. The period until 1966 was characterized by political pluralism as different groups from the 'new' Western-educated elite formed political parties and competed for power and votes within the context of a constitutional monarchy. This period left scars on the Burundian political imagination, reflecting the tension between the mythical foundation of a traditional monarchy of divine right and an emerging Western type democratic model aimed at abolishing inborn privileges and instituting an electoral system. In January 1965, Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe was assassinated before even forming his cabinet. From 1966 to 1993 Burundi was under military dictatorships[1] until the 'democratic winds' of the 1990s pushed Burundi to experiment again with multi-party democracy.[2] The democratic process of the 1990s led to the electoral victory of Melchior Ndadaye

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of the Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) on 1 June 1993. History repeated itself when Ndadaye was assassinated on 21 October. These two periods, from 1961 to 1966 and 1966 to 1993, have become paradigmatic in the post-colonial history of Burundi as they raise questions about the sustained role of violence in access to power and social mobility. Not only have they led to unprecedented periods of instability and violence, but they also epitomize the historical opposition of the power of the ballot to the power of the bullet.

The death of Ndadaye in 1993 provoked unprecedented acts of violence and led to a civil war. Moreover, it inaugurated a long period of transition where politicians and warring parties blamed each other, while Burundians, with the support of the international community, tried to find a lasting solution to the crisis that had paralysed their country for almost half a century. The long negotiations between political parties culminated in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement that was signed on 28 August 2000. It created a political and constitutional framework aimed at ending the cycle of political inter-ethnic violence that had culminated in the 1965, 1972, 1988, and 1993 massacres/genocides. In 2003 a ceasefire agreement was signed with the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) which had not participated in the Arusha process. I use the concept of 'massacres/genocides' because in Burundi the characterization of violence remains controversial. While the report of the Burundian TRC can only be expected to provide an official, albeit not neutral, narrative of the violence of the past once the commission completes its work, both official publications and people's narratives offer different readings and labelling of the events of the past. For example, the Arusha Agreement speaks of 'political violence with ethnic dimensions' highlighting the prominence of social, political and economic interests over ethnic identity itself. This view portrays ethnicity as a pretext used by politicians to access power and the privileges it brings by mobilizing the ethnic sentiment of their community origins, especially during election times. However, this view is not shared by all Burundians.

An international example of how the violence in Burundi is debated and characterized is the Whitaker Report on the prevention and punishment of genocide, submitted by Special Rapporteur Benjamin Whitaker to the 38th session of the Human Rights Council in 1985 which noted that:

> The Nazi aberration has unfortunately not been the only case of genocide in the twentieth century. Among other examples which can be cited as qualifying are the German massacre of Hereros in 1904, the Ottoman massacre of Armenians in 1915–1916, the Ukrainian pogrom of Jews in 1919, the Tutsi massacre of Hutu in Burundi in 1965 and 1972, the Paraguayan massacre of Ache Indians prior to 1974, the Khmer Rouge massacre in Kampuchea between 1975 and 1978, and the contemporary [1985] Iranian killings of Baha'is.[3]

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However, while the report is publicly available and other sources exist that classify the events in Burundi in 1965 and 1972 as genocide, several researchers on Burundi (Lemarchand, 1998, 2004; Weissman, 1998; Khadiagala, 2003) point to a rather complex situation in which labelling third-party violent activities has specific effects, both domestically and internationally as I will discuss in further detail below. The problem remains as to which episodes of violence should be labelled as genocide.

One common interpretation of the conflict believes that it is an ethnic conflict manifested through three decades of Tutsi hegemony and repressive politics by the army which was in majority composed of Tutsi.[4] The International Commission of Inquiry for Burundi, which had been mandated to investigate the assassination of Ndadaye in 1993 (with a focus on the question of who had ordered the assassination and whether it was pre-planned)[5] and 'the massacres and other related serious acts of violence that followed the assassination of President Ndadaye',[6] submitted its report in 1996. The report has been presented often by Tutsi commentators as proof that the Hutu committed genocide against the Tutsi in 1993.[7] This is the case even though the report recognizes several of its shortcomings, especially in terms of gathering evidence and knowledge about the events and in accessing Hutu respondents for its information gathering. For example, the inquiry took place more than two years after the events, when narratives have been told and retold. By that time the 1994 genocide in Rwanda had made the phrase 'genocide against the Tutsi' familiar in international media to the extent that Burundian politicians tried to gain political mileage by superimposing the Rwandese narrative onto the Burundian situation. Furthermore, the commission lacked both human and financial resources and conducted its inquiry when 'most Hutu residents had been forced out of the city by Tutsi militants and the security forces'.[8] Given the structure of security forces at the time, the commission acknowledged that apart from the personal risks involved, the security situation made contact with rural Hutu witnesses particularly difficult, since they were extremely wary of the indispensable Gendarmerie escort accompanying Commission teams.[9]

The report elaborates that in the capital city

> [b]oth the hotel and the offices were guarded by a detachment of the Burundian Gendarmerie, which is a militarized corps under Army command. While the conduct and cooperation of these Gendarmes was at all times beyond reproach, their mere armed and uniformed presence constituted in itself a deterrent to the access of Hutu witnesses.[10]

Moreover, the prevailing violence had radicalized individual positions to the extent that informants and media 'professionals' showed ethnic allegiance.[11]

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Considering these different, often contradictory, narratives there is still a need to clarify the nature of the different acts of violence that have affected Burundi's history. Meanwhile, there are risks of political instrumentalization, as some politicians use indiscriminately the term 'genocide' as a way of ridiculing their political opponents or as a means of attracting international support given the resonance that the term 'genocide' has in international media following the tragedies in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.[12]

Lastly, in addition to domestic tensions around the narratives of the past, several structural and technical challenges can be identified facing truth-seeking in Burundi and the Great Lakes region, which have the potential to exacerbate the tensions outlined above. Firstly, truth-telling or evidence gathering often takes place in remote areas with limited oversight from national or international observers or the media. Secondly, the media has proven to be a powerful tool in the construction of a meta-narrative that is difficult to deconstruct by other actors. Powerful international media have defined truth and reality in the Central African Great Lakes Region and have thus influenced the mobilization of resources and decision-making, and the circulation of information at the international level. For instance, it has become a cliché in international media to portray the Burundian crisis as a phenomenon that started in 2015.[13] Thirdly, much of the information on violence and responses to it has been either filtered or censored in varied ways. For example, media professionals have been assassinated throughout the region leading to significant self-censorship by actors holding different forms of knowledge about violence and its effects.[14]

This chapter seeks to trace the different perspectives that shape narratives about the past in Burundi. These perspectives are enforced not only through physical violence but also epistemic and other forms of violence and politics that shape the narrative space in Burundi and which are the focus of this chapter. These include: (1) political and racial stratification produced by colonial historiography, (2) restrictive temporal thresholds in the chronological identification of events owing to a one-sided process of narrative construction, (3) selectivity in the identification of victims, the construction of monuments and the holding of remembrance ceremonies, and (4) the characterizations of acts of violence themselves. The aim of the chapter is to assess how discourse formation in Burundi influences how Burundians perceive the past, assess the present and construct expectations of the future. Before proceeding into those four realms of the politics of the past, I will continue with a series of short, personal reflections on the nature of my journey as a researcher. I intend for these short vignettes to connect my own individual story to a larger and more collective one: the story of how knowledge is produced about a place and people where violent divisions have rendered knowledge particularly partial, divided and even risky.

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THE RESEARCHER'S JOURNEY

The researcher is not a passive spectator of reality but an active creator of value and meaning through a fourfold process of experiencing, understanding, judging and acting. This came to my awareness as I undertook research for my Bachelor of Arts (Honours) philosophical 'synthesis' as it was called at Arrupe College, The Jesuit School of Philosophy and Humanities, in Harare, Zimbabwe. The choice of the topic itself – 'Sub-National Identities in Africa: The Case of Ethnic Consciousness in Burundi' – made me realize that the ideal of pursuing knowledge for its own sake was untenable while my country was ravaged by an ethnic/civil war. While reading Steve Biko's 1978 book entitled *I Write What I Like* (Biko, 2004) I realized that I was doing the opposite, I wrote *what I don't like*. Paradoxically, as a researcher, I found myself with the noble mission of applying rationality to find 'meaning' in an apparently messy or purposefully 'messed up' universe of discourses where hegemonic academic and political forces use formal and informal means to impose their 'truth'. While the scientific quest for truth and rationality implies objectivity, as a researcher I found myself in a situation where I had to make a crucial decision either to follow the crowd and live a Kafkaesque life of mental and emotional slavery in a political lie, or to claim my *droit de parole* at the risk of getting a low grade, putting my life at risk for criticizing 'prominent figures', or risking my career since researching conflict put me in a situation where I could easily be categorized either as 'taking a side' or as unfaithful to 'the sources'.

I passed 'with distinction' but questions remained. I did not agree with the dominant narrative but the examiners were of the view that my argument was coherent and met required academic standards. I was familiar with Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition* and asked myself how I could posit my discourse against the 'grand narratives' without writing another 'grand narrative'. The question seemed to me circular. I had read with passion Bernard Lonergan's 1957 *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* and his 1972 *Method in Theology* and these two books made me realize that the scientific search for truth and certainty was a much more complex issue than my suspicion that those who supported the status quo had acted, as Sartre would have said, 'in bad faith'. From Lonergan (1957) I learnt that the process of human knowing is unified but comprises four operations, namely, experiencing, understanding, judging (choosing, deciding) and acting, and that it occurs at four levels of consciousness namely the empirical, the intellectual, the rational and the responsible. My attention shifted from 'ethnic consciousness in Burundi' with its narratives and counter-narratives, to the formation of discourses in general including the discourses which claim to be 'scientific'.

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The word 'paradigm' had entered my vocabulary although I hadn't read Kuhn (1996) yet, but from Lonergan's influence I had realized that philosophy cannot be an armchair activity and that the researcher – myself in that case – is no longer just an information gatherer but an information processor, i.e. a gatherer of insights through enriching the immediate data of experience with value and meaning for the purpose of decision-making and problem-solving.

I tried in vain to publish my philosophical synthesis and that taught me that the researcher is an information producer, an information processor and an information disseminator in a context where information can be packaged and sold. I reflected on the tension between 'sapiential' and commercial goals, the search for 'truth' and the search for publicity, the possible relationship between social research and political activism and concluded the following: (1) the researcher cannot be an Owl of Minerva[15] who wakes up when other people are sleeping but rather a cock who, like in African villages, crows at the dawn announcing a new day, (2) the researcher in this context is different from the Cartesian meditator who looks solely at his own mental processes. My interest had shifted from 'political philosophy' to epistemology and in my master's thesis on 'The Fate of Scientific Discourse in the Information Society' (2010), I situated 'science' in its context and realized that although Kuhn had focused on 'paradigm' shifts in science, 'science' itself was a paradigm and that the development and unprecedented diffusion of electronic computers called for a paradigm shift. In studying 'science' I realized that the researcher is involved in a community of practices or an economy of significations where words mean more than which they state, and silences say mountains. I agreed with Polanyi (1966) on the importance of *The Tacit Dimension* and my culture and upbringing had prepared me to pay attention to 'the unsaid'. In some cultures, some things are better left unsaid and expressed in other ways including silence, body language, metaphor or indirect allusion (Balbiani et al., 2012; Moore, 2012; Stone et al., 2012).

I had grown academically and had the opportunity to attend academic conferences. Several times, presenters would be reminded that they did not refer to so and so, etc. I asked myself: 'What constitutes an "authority"?' How can the researcher face the selective nature of the human mind – researchers are human after all – and the censorship processes of mainstream and hegemonic academic and political forces? I opted for 'paying attention' and remaining alert to what is being said and written to ensure that valuable but disturbing documents and testimonies are not forgotten or relegated to the margins. Starting my own private collection of books and documents was an option available to me despite my limited financial means. I came across overnight 'experts' like one German researcher who claimed at a conference in Sarajevo that she is a 'specialist' of the Central African Great Lakes region because she had done two weeks of field work in Kigali, Rwanda. I have also observed overt and

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covert strategies of silencing at international conferences ('can we have the last question please?') or the simple refusal to include abstracts in conference programmes especially when the conferences are funded. The researcher is then confronted with another reality: academia is not just an empire of rationality where discourses and counter-discourses strive for attention on the free market of reason. Funding, reputation and political patronage may determine who gets invited to a conference, who gets published, who moderates a session and whose article is published in the proceedings. This hegemony is then transmitted to the next generation through a careful selection of what is considered to be a 'researchable' and worthy topic for a PhD thesis.

My personal journey as a researcher touches upon the core themes of this chapter. Following the controversy around my study on 'Sub-national Identities in Post-Colonial Africa: The Case of Ethnic Consciousness in Burundi', I tried to run away from political philosophy to epistemology. However, with my work on *The Fate of the Scientific Discourse in the Information Society* (2010), I realized that the relief was temporary. Research – 'scientific' research to add some prestige – is a process of discourse formation and discourse formation starts with definitions and definitions cast in stone the power of words. My 'new' interest in the 'information society' brought to my awareness the limits of the scientific enterprise. This chapter takes these personal insights and assesses how discourse formation in Burundi influences how Burundians perceive the past, assess the present and construct expectations of the future. Colonial historiography is often blamed for creating discourses of social/racial stratification and profiling (Gahama et al., 1999) but ethnic consciousness is also expressed through 'the unsaid' (Goodrich, 2018). Selective memory is manifested in the temporal thresholds narrators choose to tell their stories or the way journalists report events (Smith, 1978) and commemoration ceremonies have a great element of erasure which makes invisible the suffering of some categories of victims as it has done for racial or sexual minorities (Namaste, 2000). All these themes are reflected in the complex politics of knowledge and discourse in Burundi.

INTERPRETING COLONIAL HISTORY: THE POLITICS OF POWER AND SOCIAL/RACIAL STRATIFICATION

The politics of knowledge with regards to the conflict(s) and their description and narration in Burundi starts with researchers' disagreement over their description of the pre-colonial society and on the nature of ethic identities and categories in current day Burundi. Underpinning these varied interpretations is a disagreement on the nature of Hutu and Tutsi identities (Uvin, 1999).

The voices seen as pro-Tutsi present the pre-colonial period as a perfect idyllic society which was interrupted when the 'colonizer' introduced ethic

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division through a strategy of '*divide et impera*', i.e. divide and rule (Gahama et al., 1999). However, for other scholars, the pre-colonial era was a time of exploitation of the Hutu by the Tutsi through land and pastoral clientelism (*ubugabire* and *ubugererwa*). Through these 'contracts' one could be born into servitude by virtue of the fact that one's family is living on land offered by a landlord in exchange for part of the produce and free services as a form of gratitude. Some authors argue that this system was deeply engrained in Burundi's pre-colonial history and part of social stratification which was bound to different clans.[16] The assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye in 1993 is perceived by some Hutu to be a sign of the Tutsi rejection of a democratic alternative and a manifestation of a superiority complex that would not allow them to submit to Hutu leadership. This accusation is linked to specific colonial historiographies which ascribe to the Tutsi superior intellectual, moral and aesthetic qualities which not only make them closer to the Caucasian race but also describe them as 'born to rule'.[17] This accusation of a refusal of democracy is also linked to the Tutsi's monopoly of the means of repression especially the army, the police, the judiciary and modern administration before the reforms brought by the Arusha Peace Agreement.

On the pre-colonial state, including social stratification, Mbonimpa (1993) puts forward a caste argument which states that whatever the economic and social relationships between the Hutu and the Tutsi, the caste mentality leads to the 'anthropological pauperization' (Kibangou, 2011) of the Hutu. For some authors being a Hutu or a Tutsi is a matter of social class (Hutu also means 'servant') or of economic activity, with the Tutsi described as cattle herders and the Hutu as agriculturists. However, this 'class' ideology is subject to political manipulation. Those who interpret the Hutu-Tutsi identities through 'social class' lenses interpret the relationships in the pre-colonial era as a master-serf relationship indirectly justifying the Hutu's violence in search of a 'social revolution'. This master-slave paradigm is exacerbated in politically militant Hutu circles where the Burundian situation is described using the medieval landlord-serf relation in feudal systems accusing the Tutsi of having exploited the Hutu for centuries (Gahama et al., 1999). On this feudal model, some Hutu activists superimpose a Marxist reading of the pre-colonial society and portray the Tutsi as an exploitative 'bourgeois' class and the Hutu as a 'working' but 'exploited' class (Weilenmann, 2000; Omari, 2017). Yet other perspectives argue that not only was there also mixed clans and inter-clan mobility implying that clan identification did not follow the current patterns of ethnic antagonism (e.g. Trouwborst, 1965; Newbury, 1998) but there was also competition among clans of the same ethnic group (Laely, 1997).

Moreover, although politicians, mainly Tutsi, portray a strong nationalism when they are addressing internal audiences (we are all Burundians) – portraying ethnicity as an aberration – to some international lobbies, they claim

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Jewish origins and solidarity with other Nilotic people in East Africa (Bwejeri, 2005). This strategy allows them to secure financial, military and diplomatic support from Jewish lobbies worldwide, especially in the United States of America. However, this claim is detrimental – and at times dangerous – when served to a domestic audience. It feeds into the prejudice that the Tutsi are ‘foreigners’ and ‘invaders’ (Eltringham, 2006) and that they should return to the Nile valley as was suggested by one of the people accused of perpetrating the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Mugesera, 2004). This statement was later used against that person in his bid to apply for asylum in Canada (Schabas, 1999; Rikhof, 2005).

THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY

The politics of ethnicity influences the politics of knowledge production in various ways. This is particularly the case where ethnicity is instrumentalized and narratives of conflict are ethnicized in public discourses. This section provides examples for the instrumentalization of ethnic identity in the service of specific narrative constructions of the past in the realm of gender and education discourses.

Illuminating examples of prejudices according to ethnic identity can be identified in social life and the politics of gender. Some have argued that Tutsi women are sometimes perceived to be more beautiful than their Hutu counterparts since the Tutsi are perceived to be tall, with a straight nose, in short ‘black Caucasians’ (Péan, 2005: 4). The side effect of this classification is the suspicion that during the time of military and political conflict the Tutsi resorted to the ‘Delilah strategy’ offering their women to Hutu leaders, leaders in international organizations and members of foreign governments either as spouses or concubines. This strategy is claimed to have influenced the decisions of international leaders in favour of the Tutsi, leading to the cover up of UN reports that incriminate Tutsi leaders in human rights violations or the illicit exploitation of minerals in the DRC (ibid.: 4). Moreover, Tutsi women are also perceived to be instruments in pre-empting the Hutu ascendance to leadership by controlling Hutu leadership through their Tutsi wives or concubines. There is also a perception that Tutsi spouses and women are used as ‘intelligence agents’ and that they extract secrets, influence the decisions of their partners or commit political assassinations – through poisoning – or put a halt to the sustainability of Hutu leadership demographics by infecting Hutu leaders with HIV/AIDS. Following these arguments to their logical conclusion, international actors would be affected by these politics of knowledge in the sense that international experts would never gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the conflict because most of their informants are Tutsi women and their relatives who feed them with (one-sided) information

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after sexual experiences. This would in turn affect their perceptions and decisions on transitional justice and peacebuilding modalities. Although these allegations may have no tangible evidence, they are part of 'negative ethnicity' (Wa Wamwere, 2003) and in times of crisis they can trigger blind acts of violence and repression.

They also allege discriminatory practices in the education system especially with the national examinations which give access to secondary schools. There are allegations that the assignments of Tutsi children were marked with the letter 'I' or 'V' while those of Hutu children were marked with the letter 'U' to influence the marking process. Symbolically, the letters 'I' and 'V' symbolizes the 'sharp nose' of the Tutsi while the letter 'U' (flat at the bottom) symbolizes the flat nose of the Hutu. At university level, there are also allegations of the Hutu being denied access to the military academy (ISCAM = Institut Supérieur des Cadres Militaires) and to faculties that teach disciplines with a high potential to access leadership positions such as economics and law or medicine. The allegation is that Hutu would be confined to 'sciences' and 'languages' to become schoolteachers subsequently. This system was abolished during the Third Republic (1987–93) when Pierre Buyoya attempted a policy of national reconciliation and the Ministry of Education introduced a system where national examinations would be written in triplicate and one copy sent for marking at a national centre, another to the teacher of the school where the pupil went and the third copy to the parents of the pupil. However, ethnic cleansing in Bujumbura (where the state university is located) and massacres at university campuses in 1995 'forced' many Hutu to join the armed struggle; fighters who later became members and leaders of the CNDD-FDD including the current President Evariste Ndayishimiye and his predecessor Pierre Nkurunziza.[18]

In some Hutu circles people call this denial of the right to education an 'intellectual genocide' (Ntibazonkiza, 1993). Access to education then becomes part of the politics of knowledge as it prevents the Hutu from producing credible leadership and voicing their version of the Burundian story. Moreover, key figures making political decisions or who are influential in the politics of knowledge in Burundi today have had formative social and educational experiences in a context of intense ethnic politics. Such ethnic politics have been addressed in the official position, after the Arusha Peace Accords, to focus on ethnic cohesion and not divisive identities. However, the rejection of ethnicity in official documents and in public discourses does not prevent ethnic discrimination in practice. One of the contributing factors is proximity: normally, neighbours know each other's ethnic identity (Uvin, 1999). Other authors go as far as finding proverbs and practices in the Burundian traditional society which aim at the humiliation of the Hutu. This portrayal of Hutu as 'less human' is normally reflected in traditional sayings portraying the Hutu

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as underachievers *(umuhutu ntashimwa kabiri*, i.e. a Hutu cannot be congratulated twice) or ungrateful (*umuhutu umuvura intonge bwaca ngo twiruke*, i.e. when you heal wounds on a Hutu's feet, the next thing he thinks about is having a race with you, meaning that after you have assisted a Hutu in getting out of trouble, all he will think about is doing better than you). These authors talk about genocide in culture, especially in songs.[19]

Burundians sometimes watch with 'envy' the massive international attention that Rwanda is getting, especially at moments of commemoration. In Burundi, literature on the various periods of mass violence is scarce and so far no genocide in Burundi has been officially recognized by a Burundian government or commemoration events instituted. Most commemoration events focus on individuals (President Ndadaye in October and President Ntaryamira in January) or religious events such as Christmas, Easter, Ascension and All Saints for Christians and Eid for Muslims. Various governments purposefully ignored the issue, and the violent past of the country is totally absent in history textbooks used in Burundian schools and universities. Ethnicity is borne as a heavy burden given the sad memories it raises, and when it is affirmed it raises moral culpability. Hence, despite the ethnic quotas that Burundians agreed upon in the Arusha Peace Process, some Burundians, especially those of mixed parenthood, portray ethnicity as a *maladie honteuse* and portray those who uphold their ethnic identity as either primitive or retrogressive. This partly explains why some international NGOs preferred to leave Burundi when the government suggested that international NGOs (which allegedly employ Tutsis in majority) comply with the prescription of the Arusha Peace Process (Vandeginste, 2019). There is rhetorical 'obscurity and ambiguity' being used (ibid.: 181) since ethnicity is not part of positive identification in Burundi and yet is important in shaping experiences and determining how such experiences are 'known'.

THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY AS IDEOLOGY

From the colonial historiographies, outlined above, with their focus on physical and psychological characteristics of ethnicity there has been a shift to the level of ethnicity as ideology. Hence, one can find Burundians who celebrate the economic 'development' of Rwanda much more than the Rwandese themselves and who – especially on social media – present Rwanda as a role model that Burundi should follow. On the opposite side of the argument, putting Rwanda on the pedestal by young unemployed Burundians is seen by some as a strategy of self-aggrandizement which implies that Tutsi are better leaders than Hutu and that hypothetically Burundi would be better off if it was under Tutsi leadership. However, this pattern of ethnicity as ideology is also found in discussions of the policies of the Burundian government by its supporters.

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There is a universe of discourses one has to follow and a stereotyped vocabulary one has to use to show allegiance to the current government – otherwise one is accused of having lost connection with reality (*il a deconné* in French or *Yadekonye* in Kirundi) or of talking evil (*avuga nabi*).

Ethnicity as ideology also implies that Tutsi who hold cabinet positions in a Hutu-dominated government are considered as lacking moral probity and accused of being greedy. They are portrayed by ordinary Tutsi citizens as people who have sold their souls in exchange for material goods and social privileges. They are '*tutsi de service*' like their counterparts were '*hutu de service*' in Tutsi-dominated governments. This phenomenon of '*hutu de service*' described Hutu who served in Tutsi-dominated governments during military dictatorships in exchange for the social and material privileges that holding positions of power yields (Mbonimpa, 2000). It described someone seen as having no conscience and with decision-making power, someone who was brought close to the table in order to eat the crumbs that one receives through praising the real owner of bread and betraying his own kin (ibid.). This concept has been used increasingly by other authors. While the concept is difficult to translate in its full use it is used to describe someone as having no self-worth or dignity (Smith, 1996). The food metaphor is very important given the mistrust of certain sections of citizenry towards the political leadership, whom they accuse of putting their own privileges before serving the people. This phenomenon is well described in Jean-François Bayart's (2010) book, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. The metaphor itself even goes into the physical appearances of political leaders and most well-to-do Africans who, given various opportunities offered by political power and access to resources, sometimes develop a pot belly. Hence, like the '*hutu de service*' that Mbonimpa described, in some Tutsi circles cabinet ministers and other Tutsi leaders who are serving in the current establishment are sometimes ridiculed as '*tutsi de service*' or 'screensavers' with no real decision-making power but routinely following instruction from 'above' (higher levels of hierarchy), or implementing decisions they do not believe in as long as they keep their position and the financial and social privileges it brings.

Ethnicity as ideology is also expressed in the ways people describe the current political situation with disputes over which parts of history to focus on. Opposition leaders emphasize that 'the crisis in Burundi started in 2015' and that four years of crisis is too long and unbearable (Wielenga and Akin-Aina, 2016). They promote a narrative that casts Burundi as in crisis and elevates and celebrates the 'progress' made in Rwanda. Indicative of the tone of these narratives and debates, the opposition also sometimes insults the recently deceased President of Burundi by subverting his name. *Nkurunziza* means 'good news' but some of his opponents portray him as the incarnation of evil by changing the President's name to *Nkurumbi* which means 'bad news'.[20]

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Government supporters interpret these criticisms and claims as not genuine, portraying their opponents as 'spoiled kids' or 'nostalgics'[21] of the privileges they enjoyed during previous military dictatorships. Sometimes, there are also suspicions that opponents portray Burundi as uninhabitable in order to secure political asylum in developed countries. This partly explains the fact that during the demonstrations in 2015, Tutsi students spent days sitting in front of the US embassy in Bujumbura after rumours made waves that the 'project' to topple the Burundian government had the full support of the US government and that students who could no longer study in Burundi (fearing for their lives after their participation in the protest) would be given political asylum and scholarships in the USA.[22]

ETHNICITY AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICIT MEANINGS

One school of thought framing narratives of the past is the one that denies ethnicity on the grounds that there are no fundamental genetic and cultural differences between the Tutsi and the Hutu. It emphasizes that the socially constructed nature of being a Hutu or being a Tutsi can be deconstructed through aggressive nationalist re-education and policies that outlaw the mention of ethnic identity on identification documents or reference to those identities in speeches or private conversation. We have seen one manifestation of this approach in post-1994 Rwanda where the '*ndi umunyarwanda*' (I am Rwandan) campaign supports re-education programmes that aim at creating a mindset where people put their national identify before their ethnic identity. Associated laws carry heavy jail terms for people found guilty of referring to these identities or who overtly or covertly express ethnic hatred (Uwizeyimana, 2014). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate the success of this approach in Rwanda, but a similar strategy was tried in Burundi during the Second Republic (1976–87). Referring to the Hutu or Tutsi identity was outlawed, and people would be imprisoned for simply referring to a person as a Hutu or a Tutsi.[23]

Policies like these, which prohibit references to ethnic identity – in the Burundian case at least, have the potential to lead to repressed frustrations which later express themselves in violence after regime change. For instance, in 1988, only one year after President Pierre Buyoya came into power through a military coup, ethnic violence erupted in the north of the country in response to alleged ongoing ethnic discrimination in school admissions and access to senior positions in the army and public administration (see previous section in this chapter). The Buyoya government blamed the violence on an uprising planned by the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (Palipehutu), a then clandestine group based in refugee camps in Tanzania. At the same

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time, informal documents (tracts) alleged provocation of Hutu civil servants by local authorities who suspected them to be part of a growing underground movement of contestation and who wanted to eliminate Hutu 'intellectuals', as it happened in 1972. These types of allegations show the contrast between government official discourse and interpretations by its opponents. For 1972 and 1988 the then Tutsi-led government promoted a narrative of destabilization of the country driven mainly from a neighbouring country (Zaïre in 1972 and Tanzania in 1988) and a vigorous response by the army in the name of national security and self-defence. In contrast, Hutus allege a pattern of provocation, reaction and repression which would imply rumours of imminent attacks, arbitrary arrests of presumed leaders and massive repression against ordinary people of Hutu origin perceived as accomplices of rebel groups based in neighbouring countries.

The violence of 1988, however, is also an example of how the informalization of ethnic identity creates a situation where people cannot protest or ask for redress in cases of ethnic discrimination. In response to the violence, Buyoya initiated platforms where the question of 'national unity' would be discussed. During those colloquia which took place in 1989–90, people would refer to such discriminations in the Burundian state administration, describing practices of national examination papers marked with a 'U' for Hutu and an 'I' for Tutsi. However, given the informal nature of these identities it became difficult to document with precise figures ethnic representation in institutions, and allegations of ethnic discriminations were dismissed by the then government due to this lack of formally recognized evidence. Subsequently, a charter of national unity was drafted, a multi-party system was introduced (Reyntjens, 2000) and reforms were implemented that would allow the Hutu more political power (Wielenga and Akin-Aina, 2016).

These are important aspects of the politics of knowledge as sometimes accusations and counter accusations are thrown at various targets without due care for proper documentation and methodological rigour. This is especially so given Burundi's culture, where the unsaid and implicit meanings play a great role in the transmission of knowledge and a simple story can be full of meaning and insinuations. The unsaid makes knowledge 'tacit' and, in my view, subjecting accounts of violence in Burundi to scientific research may lead to a situation where the researcher misses 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1966), especially when narratives have to be translated from the local language to languages from other cultural contexts or when legal and sociological concepts well entrenched in other cultures are translated into Kirundi. Implicit meanings and anecdotes capture in a synoptic way several aspects of the epistemic

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context. Eboussi-Boulaga (1991), a respected Cameroonian philosopher, has captured this aspect of knowledge production as follows:

> They emerge from the habitus, the practical mastering of the symbolical significance of social relations. At every moment, they are capable of improvisations ordered in facts of perceptions, of representations, of appreciations and actions, in accordance with the context, the situation and the configuration of relations, and the balance of power.[24]

This creates an interesting contradiction for the study of the politics of knowledge in Burundi: on the one hand, ethnicity is publicly and politically relegated to the informal level. On the other hand, scientific studies and reports of local and international commissions claim methodological rigour and request positive evidence and proof for the existence of ethnicity and its operationalization.

There is, however, another dimension to the implicit meanings and the politics of ethnicity, as my second example illustrates. Ethnicity as ideology implies a chasm between those who 'have' and those who 'have not'. This pattern is not always translated into real material wealth but in the psychological satisfaction that 'we are ruling' especially in ethnic communities like the Hutu in Burundi who allege that they have suffered not only economic exploitation but also ideological subjugation and humiliation for decades. The symbolism is not just about material wealth but also a recovered freedom of social mobility (access to leadership positions) and emancipation. This intertwining of material, psychological and symbolic processes is not easy to discern as it becomes most visible spontaneously through daily events and banal occurrences. For instance, the Ministry of Health in Burundi is adjacent to the army's headquarters. Fearing attacks and intrusion which would come from the side of the ministry, for decades employees of the ministry were prohibited from opening windows facing the army headquarters in order to keep the army headquarters secure. One incident that is often related is that of a secretary opening a window facing the army headquarters. While the Minister of Health was passing for routine inspection, she brought to the attention of the secretary the fact that the windows facing the army should not be opened. The secretary simply said: 'Doctor, please allow us to have some fresh air, it (the army) has been mixed' (referring to the reforms introduced after the Arusha Peace Agreement).

A simple incident like this looks remote from politics. However, in a culture where unspoken and implicit meanings play a great role in the transmission of knowledge this simple story is full of meaning and insinuations. Firstly, the act of opening the window shows that the secretary 'now' feels safe in the presence of the military establishment, unlike with the 'previous' army which was perceived as ethnically discriminatory and repressive. Before the 2000 Arusha

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Peace Agreement and subsequent reforms the army was the symbol of Tutsi hegemony. This gesture of 'opening the window' portrays the opposite of the 'ancient' or 'old' army which threatened people. This 'new' army is 'mixed' implying that it is composed of both Hutu and Tutsi members in its forces – it is a symbol of inclusiveness which means the secretary can respond to a minister without fear of recrimination. The mention of 'fresh' air is not only a feeling of 'novelty' but also a metaphorical portrayal of the 'old' army and political establishment as suffocating. It is an implicit reference to accusations of killing by choking or piling people in military trucks. The military trucks were infamously referred to as '*je m'en fous*', i.e. 'I don't care', portraying a lack of compassion and human sentiment in repression processes.

THE POLITICS OF LABELS: GENOCIDE AND SELF-DEFENCE, VICTIMS AND MARTYRS

This section turns to the use of labels such as 'genocide' and 'self-defence' that are being used to describe specific events, and the impact this has on perceptions of being victims, martyrs and perpetrators.

Wielenga and Akin-Aina (2016) noted that as things stand, the opposition is largely in the diaspora, and it is to their advantage to paint a picture of Burundi on the verge of civil war or ethnic genocide, and in drastic need of external intervention. This narrative, which is relayed by most international media, can be seen as being based on a superimposition of the Burundian and the Rwandan narratives. Opposition politicians in Burundi exploit what is called the 'resonance effect' (Vandeginste, 2015) to attract international attention and to call for sanctions against the Burundian government (Wielenga and Akin-Aina, 2016). The main goal of the opposition is to have Nkurunziza ousted, but it remains unclear what they will do next if successful (ibid.). Unfortunately, President Nkurunziza died on 8 June, before his successor, Evariste Ndayishimiye, who was elected on 20 May, was sworn in. The constitutional court accepted the request by the cabinet that Ndayishiminye be sworn in earlier than planned. During Ndayishimiye's inauguration various speakers pointed to the urgent need to bring back refugees, to open the country to international partnerships for development and economic prosperity, to promote national reconciliation and to fight corruption.[25]

This strategy of describing Burundi as a country on the verge of genocide works, partly, because the horror of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is still vivid in the memories of the international community. This phenomenon has been observed by Leidner (2015) who noted that labelling a third-party conflict 'genocide' has an impact on intervention support through increasing a sense of guilt and thus foregrounding the responsibility to intervene. To provide another example of the politics of labels, when talking about 'genocide' in Burundi,

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Tutsi networks normally refer to what happened in October 1993, after the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye. The Hutu, on the other hand, evoke 1965, 1972, 1988, the assassination of President Ndadaye in 1993 and the violence by the Tutsi militia of '*Sans Echecs*' in the streets of Bujumbura from 1994 to 1996 as genocidal acts to which the international community has turned a blind eye. The Tutsi of Burundi, on the other hand, quickly make comparisons between Burundi and Rwanda, specifically between the Youth League of the CNDD-FDD (*Imbonerakure*) with the Rwandese *Interahamwe*. However, the Tutsi militia of '*Sans Echecs*' are rarely mentioned, possibly because they are now dismantled. Tutsi activists often portray themselves as a persecuted minority, describing their situation as an 'African holocaust', and assimilating the discourses and the actions of their opponents to that of the Nazis and sometimes inviting holocaust survivors to lobby for their causes and to speak at their commemoration events. The status of 'victim' seems to explain or even justify one's group's violent activities (especially organized violence in 'liberation' or 'rebel' movements) but it also seems to exonerate perpetrators of any moral culpability.

However, the politics of labels is not only reflected in the question of which events are labelled as genocide and which are not, but also in the contrasting of genocide with self-defence in the different narratives of the past and the idea of victimhood that emerges from this. For the Tutsi, the assassination of Ndadaye was a pre-emptive act to avoid bloodshed based on the Hutu's 'genocide' plans. For the Hutu, the killing of the Tutsi after the assassination of Ndadaye was the result of spontaneous anger (*agashavu*) and a pre-emptive act against a possible repetition of '1972'. This intertwinement of memory and actuality impacts not only discourse formation but also political claims. When describing contexts of violence, it seems that the two groups compete for victimhood. The Hutu of Burundi portray the image of an oppressed and discriminated majority and a martyred people – victims of repetitive massacres. For the Hutu, the armed struggle of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) is a heroic act that ended the Tutsi's monopoly on firearms and repetitive cycles of repression and exile. For the Tutsi, the military operations of the CNDD-FDD are terrorist acts and crimes against humanity and Tutsi activists have been calling for legal action against the leaders of the CNDD-FDD at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Moreover, although some scholars argue that there are no tangible differences in terms of language and culture between Hutus and Tutsis,[26] ethnic identity is manifested through various allegiances especially when one is narrating events. Rarely would a Tutsi mention the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye when narrating what happened in 1993, or the fact that there were protests in the streets and a military coup in action when the army

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'intervened' in 2015. The street violence of the Tutsi militia of '*Sans Echecs*' between 1994 and 1996 is rarely mentioned and when most reporters and scholars talk about militia they point directly to the *Interahamwe* in Rwanda and *Imbonerakure* in Burundi. Similarly, the violence against Hutu students on university campuses in 1995 is also not often mentioned although it created a situation where most elements of the current Burundian leadership including Presidents Nkurunziza and Ndayishimiye gave up on education and joined the armed struggle of the CNDD-FDD. Likewise, in commemorations both in Rwanda and internationally, Burundian victims such as President Ntaryamira and his collaborators are omitted. Some of these exclusion processes appear to be deliberate while others appear to operate at the subconscious levels. There is a trend of competing for the status of victim in a way that one's victimhood seems to legitimize one's violence as each group portrays itself as '*le people martyr*' (Lemarchand, 2006). Overt rejection of violence especially from children of mixed parenthood (especially those with Tutsi mothers and Hutu fathers) is sometimes interpreted as cowardice or mental illness emanating from identity crisis or brainwashing.[27]

The politics of labels creates controversies over historical events such as the massacre of secondary school pupils in Buta, Rwanda, on 30 April 1997. The description of the 'events of Buta' follows a narrative pattern which is common in Burundi and Rwanda – it can be found for instance in the portrayal of the victims of the massacre as martyrs. The narrative recounts a Hutu rebel group arriving and asking the students to separate themselves into Hutu and Tutsi groups. The students refused to identify their ethnicity and were then massacred.[28] The same narrative pattern is applied to another situation in which a passenger bus was attacked by another group. This event was popularized by the short film *Na Wewe* (You Too). The film is about a minivan transporting ordinary citizens being stopped on a Burundian dirt road. A group of Hutu rebels armed with Kalashnikovs get the passengers off. The rebel leader barks: *'Hutu to the left, Tutsi to the right!'* The sorting between ethnic groups fails as all the passengers hurry to the left and neither passengers nor rebels can distinguish Hutu from Tutsi. This leads to a situation where ethnic sentiment is repressed and relegated to the informal level. Consequently, reports or complaints of abuse and discrimination are not taken seriously and are instead portrayed as a manifestation of one's 'divisionist' spirit.

There is a strategy of downgrading the role of ethnicity in knowledge production in order to package ethnically motivated political claims or hatred into an internationally acceptable discourse of human rights and equality between citizens but also struggle for democracy. A strategy of denial is operationalized, i.e. claiming that the problem is economic, social, political and *not* ethnic. There is a certain haste in un-characterizing the ethnic identity of victims by mentioning that *all* Burundians have suffered, or by indicating that ethnicity

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is a 'stereotype' and hence a lesser-qualified dimension in identity definition than citizenship. For Burundi, it is even more complicated since the two ethnic groups this chapter is discussing shared a territory before colonization which implies that Burundi defeats the traditional theory of the historical precedence of the 'tribe' to the state in Africa or the concern over artificial colonial borders.

Lastly, the increasing cynicism in describing and labelling the events of the past is paralleled with an increase in polarization and radicalization through political slogans and symbolism. The Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), winner of the 1993 elections, used a cock as its symbol of awakening and the slogan '*susuruka*' (warm up) as a symbol to get the masses to take their destiny into their own hands against a background in which the masses were portrayed as 'innocent lambs' (*intama*) that would follow the butcher to the slaughterhouse unsuspectingly. Hence, the description of the masses as a sleeping bunch. The symbols of the CNDD-FDD in contrast portray a more radical stand. Whereas the cock was slaughtered without offering any resistance to the butcher – the assassination of FRODEBU's President Melchior Ndadaye by elements of an army of which he was on paper the Commander-in-Chief (Lemarchand, 1998) – the CNDD-FDD chose a stronger symbol: the eagle (*inkona*).[29] The slogan '*susuruka'* (warm up) has been replaced by '*shirira'* (get roasted), with the increase in temperature portraying not only increased commitment to the cause of 'liberation' but also increased strength through the ability to withstand higher temperatures (to face more challenges from the enemy). The threat of military action is seen as being permanent (*tuzobirukana n'ibirenge bishe*) as leaders have claimed that they pursue the enemy until they run out of energy.

TIME, TEMPORAL THRESHOLDS AND MEMORY: THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING

Recently, there has emerged a new school of thought that emphasizes what happened from 2015 to date as if the violence does not have long historical roots, adding another dimension to the politics of labelling by reverting to terms like 'crisis' or 'events' rather than historically contextualized conflicts, or even genocide (Green, 2015; Bouka, 2016; Paviotti, 2018). The phrase 'the crisis that started in 2015' is common in international reports linking the crisis to President Nkurunziza's third term in office.[30] The current discourse surrounding transitional justice in Burundi is thus polarized around President Pierre Nkurunziza's third term. The official narrative is that the Nkurunziza regime has resorted to repressive strategies to maintain political power (Vandeginste, 2015). According to Jobbins and Ahitungiye (2015) and numerous other scholars, human rights organizations and analysts, Nkurunziza's nomination to run for a third term in office led to sustained street demonstrations by opposition

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forces in the capital; an attempted coup d'état; and a cycle of insecurity, fear, human rights abuses and targeted killings. This linking of Burundi's crisis with the 2015 elections is also upheld by Grauvogel (2016: 4) who noted that 'since the presidential elections in 2015, Burundi has witnessed its worst political and humanitarian crisis since the country's transition to peace after the civil war that started in 1993' and was truncated by the installation of the transitional government in 2001 by the Arusha Agreement in preparation for the 2005 elections. The recent death of President Nkurunziza and his replacement by Evariste Ndayishimiye does not seem to have altered the stance of Burundian activists in exile and their international supporters.[31]

In addition to this shortening of the time horizon for the latest conflict, there is a second way in which time or temporal thresholds intersect with the politics of remembering and forgetting: for the Hutu and Tutsi of Burundi, the dates of 1965, 1972, 1988 and 1993 have become paradigmatic because of the controversies that surround those periods in collective memory, political discourse and scholarship. A common narrative and discursive pattern is to oppose 1972 to 1993 and 1961 to 2015. In addition, the same event is read, interpreted and narrated in vastly different ways. I will discuss the example of 1972 in detail.

This interlinks with the politics of labelling in that the reasons put forward to explain the violence seem to protect perpetrators from moral culpability as both groups claim to be in a situation of self-defence. The Tutsi ideology claims a right to self-defence against a failed military coup on the 18 October 1965 and an alleged mass murder plan inspired by the Rwandese 'social revolution' of 1959. For many Tutsi, there was no revolution in Rwanda in 1959 but there was a 'genocide'. For the Hutu of Burundi, 1972 is a genocide meticulously planned by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Arthemon Simbananiye, targeting all Hutu males with potential leadership abilities. The Tutsi claim that 1972 was a punitive action against rebels who attacked the south of the country on 29 April 1972, aiming at exterminating all the Tutsi. The year 1972 remains a point of contention as groups in Burundi and in the diaspora hold remembrance ceremonies separately with the 'orphans of 1972' reacting along ethnic lines, with the Hutu claiming their voices were ignored by the international community as a consequence of Tutsi propaganda while the Tutsi accuse the Hutu of reversing roles and claiming 'victimhood' while their rebel fathers *(abamenja)* were punished for initiating an ill-fated insurrection. There are also groups from the royal family – which considers itself to be outside of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict or an additional ethnic group, the Ganwa – who also meet around 29 April to commemorate the death of King Ntare V who was also killed in 1972.

The recent exhumation of the remains of the victims of 1972 as part of the work of the TRC showed that the politics of time and memory intersect with the politics of ethnicity in the production of knowledge, especially in the

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interpretation of historical events. Such an event was made possible because of the existence of the TRC and the influence of 'orphans of 1972' in the current establishment. The present Burundian leadership comprises several 'orphans of 1972' (including former President Pierre Nkurunziza) with most of them not knowing the real circumstances of the death of their fathers. Some are aware that after their fathers were assassinated, immovable goods were confiscated and their families subsequently lived in abject poverty in poor suburbs (Nshimirimana, 2004). The 'orphans of 1972' define themselves as an ill-fated generation. Those who managed to get an education consider themselves lucky and remember with a mixture of bitterness and gratitude the hardships that their mothers, 'the widows of 1972', went through not only to put food on the table but also to fend for their children alone. In contrast to the meaning the excavations hold for these 'orphans of 1972', there are many groups, including young Tutsi in exile, who belittled the event and questioned the timing of the exhumation. Their interpretation is one of an electoral gimmick ahead of the presidential, parliamentary and local elections, which took place on 20 May 2020.

With regards to 1972, the Hutu allege a genocide planned by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Arthémon Simbananiye who, while socializing with Tutsi from Rwanda in Belgium during his education, had vowed to reduce the number of the Hutu in Burundi to that of their Tutsi counterparts, creating a situation where the two groups would be equal in numbers in case a war erupts or elections are held.[32] The Simbananiye Plan – also entitled the Final Solution – included not only the killing of 'enough Hutu to achieve ethnic parity in the countryside' (Lemarchand, 1996: 26) but also the sacrificing of some Tutsi for the bigger goal, the hiding of these actions from foreigners or the intoxication of the population with propaganda.[33]

The controversy around 1972 is also manifested in ways in which Burundians across the world – especially in the diaspora – hold remembrance ceremonies separately and give opposing versions of the same event. I will provide two examples of separate remembrance ceremonies held by different diaspora groups to illustrate this point. On 28 April 2014, an organization called *Association Contre le Génocide* (AG-Cirimoso) held a remembrance ceremony in Ottawa, Canada. All the speakers were Tutsi. One of them was a former member of the '*force publique*', a type of police force in the 1960s, and held several positions in the ministry of defence at the time of the events. He claims that the country had been attacked by 'rebels' (*abamenja*) and that the government reacted 'vigorously'. The speaker portrays a situation of war and a patriotic army that managed to 'neutralize' a rebellion within three months. He rejects the number of victims stipulated by international organizations and keeps some events – such as the revocation of the government by President Micombero the day the massacres started – unexplained.[34]

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A second speaker at the same event claims that 'there was never a genocide of the Hutu in Burundi'. This example portrays an important aspect of the politics of knowledge in Burundi, namely selectivity in the use of sources: the speaker references a document published by the Burundian government in 1972, a '*Livre Blanc*'. The speaker also raises controversies over UN reports and questions the professionalism of Nicodème Ruhashyankiko, the UN Special Rapporteur on Burundi in 1973 and author of a report *The Study on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, that was approved by the Sub-Commission at its thirty-first session (E/CN.4/Sub.2/416, 4 July 1979). A third speaker castigates the inertia of the Tutsi youth and claims that the Tutsi have been slow in understanding their predicament. She describes 1972 in terms of a big conspiracy against the Tutsi, leading to the massacre of Tutsi leaders of the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) in Rumonge and planned massacres during dancing parties organized all over the country. She derides the actions of the National Commission for Immovable Assets and Other Assets (Commission Nationale pour la Terre et d'autres Biens) in its attempts to return proprieties confiscated by Tutsi politicians after their Hutu owners had died or went into exile as an attempt to take away proprieties that have been occupied for more than 40 years without raising a debate on the relationship between occupancy and ownership.[35] This speaker furthermore suggests that Tutsi youths should avoid the 'regrets of shame' and 'the cost of treason'.[36]

On the same day, another organization called *Collectif des survivants et victimes du génocide contre les Hutus du Burundi de 1972* (i.e. 'Collective of survivors and victims of genocide against the Hutu of Burundi in 1972') held a remembrance event in Montreal while a peaceful march was organized in Bujumbura. Both commemorated the events of 1972. The speakers at this event describe finding it a relief that they can now sit down and hold remembrance ceremonies after being silenced for so long. At the event, testimonies were given by different speakers on how their parents 'were taken in 1972' and never came back. They paid respect for those who 'courageously' took up arms and reversed the process of 'Hutu extinction' and the propaganda that wanted the Hutu to 'forgive and forget' while the Tutsi not only held remembrance ceremonies but constructed monuments.[37] They note that AC-Genocide, an organization that was formed in the aftermath of 1993, has held monthly remembrance ceremonies every 21 October from 1993 and describe this as 'Tutsi privilege'.[38]

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THE INTERNATIONAL IN THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

The politics of epistemics in the context of Burundi also include the role of expatriates and the international community who are often accused of complicity. On the one hand, Tutsi groups accuse European missionaries of spreading ethnic division through teaching colonial historiography in schools. On the other hand, in Hutu circles, the theme of the relationship between the Hutu and the Tutsi with the white man (symbol of the international community) is recurrent, and it portrays a section of the international activists who are acquired to the cause of one or the other group either out of conviction or for personal gain including business connection, marriage, romance (sexual favours) or activism from the white man's proper political conviction. For instance, the movie *Na Wewe* (You Too) seems simple in its portrayal of identities as absurd when there is no clear-cut difference in terms of physical appearance, language or psychological disposition. But the movie – written by a (white) Belgian married to a Tutsi woman – is full of symbolism not in its contents but in its production. This movie reinforces the colonial historiography that Hutus are of lesser intellectual, moral and aesthetic quality (Ndura, 2003) to the extent that they can fight a war in which they cannot even identify the enemy. The Hutu and Tutsi identities are also overlaid onto perceptions of the views of international experts, with Jean-Pierre Chrétien (1991) being perceived as pro-Tutsi while René Lemarchand (2002) and Filip Reyntjens (2000) are perceived as pro-Hutu. Likewise, reports by journalists such as Collette Braeckmann (1996) and Marie France Cross are sometimes contrasted.[39]

The theme of the complicity of the 'white man' and the Tutsi re-emerged in 2016 when French Lawyer Bernard Mangain and a Burundian activist produced a controversial video which supposedly portrayed a massacre in Burundi but during which the perpetrators spoke Yoruba, a language which is not spoken in Burundi.[40] This created a situation in which the then President of Burundi took legal action against Bernard Mangain, David Gakunzi and the TV channel, France 3, but the charge of defamation was not retained against Mangain and his co-accused and the President of Burundi appealed the judgment.

Against this perceived complicity between the international community and the Tutsi, the Burundian government has increasingly employed an anti-colonial discourse. It has accused the former colonial power Belgium of interference in Burundi's internal affairs, and pointed towards interference from neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda where former army and police officers fled following an attempted coup in 2015. There have also been allegations of military training in Burundian refugee camps in Rwanda.

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Rwanda in turn accuses Burundi of supporting armed groups which have been committing violent acts on its territory. These allegations bring a regional dimension to discourse formation, with an alleged international conspiracy. This conspiracy implies that Burundians who lack popular support and who are aware that they will never win an election may want to get into power through a negotiated deal: the international community, with the complicity of precious minerals cartels, is trying to topple a 'democratically' elected government in order to put in power 'puppets' who lack the people's mandate. In this theory, a government lacking a popular mandate would be in permanent fear of a popular insurrection and would only survive through the support of international precious minerals cartels who supply them with weapons, military, media and diplomatic support in exchange for the country's minerals (and sometimes with minerals 'stolen' in the DRC). This narrative shows the impact of memory on discourse formation through the reminiscence of the 1994 to 1996 situation when parties that had less than one per cent of votes during the 1993 elections had the power of appointing a prime minister through the instrumentalization of street violence by the Tutsi militia of the '*Sans Echecs*'. The Burundian government has always rejected reports from international inquiries as regurgitating a script written by the Burundian opposition, and sometimes government supporters have organized demonstrations against UN reports or threatened legal action against commissioners in their individual capacity.[41] Burundi also closed the UN Human Right Offices in Bujumbura[42] and officially withdrew from the ICC in 2017 (Moore, 2017; Pauwelyn and Hamilton, 2018). More radical are allegations that reports by international experts do not reflect the reality on the ground.

Interestingly, this discourse of blaming the colonizers for the violence and among other things to ask for reparations from Belgium has re-emerged in the current ruling party in Burundi as a response to Belgian leaders, such as former Prime Minister and European Commissioner Louis Michel and his son (who is the current Prime Minister in Belgium), calling for sanctions against Burundi at the European Union level.

CONCLUSION

The politics of knowledge production in Burundi is such that it creates narratives and counter-narratives among Burundian and international scholars, as well as among citizens, the diaspora and the political elites in the country on the various episodes of violence that the country has experienced. Colonial historiography portrays a situation of exploitation of the Hutu by the Tutsi – a narrative which is sometimes accepted in Hutu circles. Tutsi scholars in general present a harmonious traditional society which was disrupted by the colonial regime. This disruption led to physical and psychological profiling of the Hutu

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and the Tutsi, linking intellectual, moral and aesthetic qualities to a Caucasian 'model'. This is used to explain favouritism in education and public administration as the Tutsi, perceived as being closer to the Caucasians in terms of mental ability, were offered education and leadership positions through a system of indirect government (*gouvernement indirect*) where traditional pre-colonial leaders retained their positions under the supervision of colonial administrators. However, this situation was challenged by Western-educated Hutus who sought to abolish what they perceived as the inborn privilege of the monarchy and install an election-based type of democracy.

There are still substantive controversies around how Burundians describe the acts of violence themselves (genocide vs. spontaneous self-defence or revenge). Similarly, the establishment of the temporal thresholds from which to speak remains controversial. For instance, 2015 has been a frequent date of reference by international media and Burundians in exile as the date of the 'beginning' of the 'current' crisis, whereas the Burundian government has forwarded the position, as expressed in the mandate of the TRC, that true reconciliation should take into account all the episodes of violence that Burundi has experienced since independence. Some actually suggest going back to 1896, the beginning of German colonization, and uphold that the Burundian government should demand compensation from colonial masters for forced labour, humiliation, cattle raiding and land dispossession and for introducing 'ethnic divisions'.[43]

Violence in Burundi is sometimes expressed in metaphors that may escape the attention of foreign researchers who may not be used to Burundi's culture of the 'unsaid'. This implies that subjecting accounts of violence in Burundi to scientific research may lead to a situation where the researcher misses 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1966). This dimension of remembering by forgetting is prevalent in history and civics textbooks where the various periods of violence that Burundi has experienced are not even mentioned. Other aspects of the politics of knowledge which are rarely investigated are mainly explicit in the construction of monuments and the holding of commemoration ceremonies. So far there is no narrative which is agreed upon by all Burundians, leading to a situation where various groups hold commemoration ceremonies clandestinely and separately. The politics of knowledge production in Burundi is no different from other cases in that it implies a mobilization of academics, media professionals, international experts and other modes of knowledge transmission such as school curricula, construction of monuments, naming of streets and other public places, or holding of commemoration ceremonies as a way of making one's voice heard.

From all these actors, ways of producing knowledge, and narratives of the past, bring diverging perspectives into an ongoing and future transitional justice process that Burundi is undergoing, or might undergo. They will have

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an impact not only on how history and the violence of the past are being interpreted but also on how the successes and failures of these transitional justice processes will be read. Any transitional justice process which seeks to achieve more than a superficial and short-lived sense of reconciliation will thus not only have to accommodate these different discourses, but it will also have to find a way of bringing these different strands together into an account of the violence, and its causes, that reflects the different perceptions of history while simultaneously paving a way for a less polarized future.

The unexpected death of President Pierre Nkurunziza brought to the fore – at least on social media – some the phenomena described in this chapter. Fabien Cishahayo – a professor at the University of Montreal – published a short article showing how President Nkurunziza is a product of Burundi's tormented history.[44] The responses included accusing Professor Cishahayo of a 'selective' reading of Burundi's history,[45] while another author calls for 'not making children bear the burden of the crimes of their fathers'[46] and yet another elderly author – self-portraying himself as an eyewitness from the 1960s – claims that Professor Cishahayo 'only acknowledges the suffering of the Hutu and not the founding atrocities of the endless suffering of Burundians, namely, the recurrent massacres of the small people of Tutsi'.[47] The new president Evariste Ndayishimiye has the challenges not only of fighting COVID-19, but also of initiating policies of national reconciliation that may led to the return of refugees, and also rekindling international partnerships for economic development.

NOTES

1. I here maintain the idea of dictatorships on the ground that these governments were instituted through military coups and functioned for several years without a legislative assembly. In addition, most decisions were made by the presidents through decrees.
2. Accessed 17 June 2020 at https://theconversation.com/burundi-and-rwanda-a-rivalry-that-lies-at-the-heart-of-great-lakes-crises-63795
3. Accessed 6 July 2020 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Commission_on_the_Promotion_and_Protection_of_Human_Rights#Whitaker_Report
4. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://theconversation.com/burundi-and-rwanda-a-rivalry-that-lies-at-the-heart-of-great-lakes-crises-63795
5. Paragraph 214, accessed 20 June 2020 at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/commissions/Burundi-Report.pdf
6. Ibid., especially paragraph 5.
7. Ibid., paragraph 496.
8. Ibid., paragraph 46.
9. Ibid., paragraph 54.
10. Ibid., paragraph 49.
11. Ibid.

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12. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/burundi-les-reflux-repoussant-des-medias-de-la-haine/
13. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/02/burundi-is-on-the-brink-a-crisis-explained-dc4113d4-af48-4f63-b6b8-6a8c42acb78b/
14. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://m.facebook.com/notes/roland-rugero/lextraordinaire-capacit%C3%A9-de-d%C3%A9doublement-au-burundi/1098402783557753/
15. Minerva was the Roman goddess of wisdom.
16. See e.g. Lemarchand (1966, 1972). For a discussion of ethnicity and political violence see Daley (2006).
17. This perception is often referred to in Kirundi traditional sayings. For a detailed discussion of the stereotypical portraying of Hutu and Tutsi identities in historical accounts see Ndura (2003).
18. For a discussion of these policies from the perspective of the CNDD-FDD see https://cndd-fdd.org/2016/02/18/communique-n-0032016-of-the-cndd-fdd-party-of-february-17th-2016/ (accessed 5 July 2020).
19. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tDlCfYkw1I. For a discussion of the role of sayings and folklore in ethnic identity making in Burundi see Kadende-Kaiser and Kaiser (1997).
20. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.facebook.com/Urunani2015/posts/1611316762522406
21. Accessed 6 July 2020 at https://www.burundi-forum.org/1766/
22. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32548350 and https://www.foxnews.com/world/500-students-sleep-outside-us-embassy-in-burundi-amid-political-protests
23. Accessed 19 June 2020 at https://books.google.co.zw/books/about/Actes_du_Premier_Congr%C3%A8s_national_du_Pa.html?id=14wNAQAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y
24. 'Ils ressortissent de l'*habitus*, à la maîtrise pratique de la symbolique des interactions sociales, capables à chaque moment d'improvisations réglées en fait de perceptions, de représentations, d'appréciations et d'actions, selon le contexte, la situation et la configuration des relations, les rapports de force' (Eboussi-Boulaga, 1991: 157).
25. See https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/ndayishimiye-sworn-burundi-president-200618103042383.html (accessed on 21 July 2020).
26. See Daley (2006) for a brief overview of this debate.
27. I have observed on social media fierce attacks on Aloys Niyoyita, a journalist of mixed identity.
28. Accessed 22 May 2020 at https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/6924
29. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Book/Inkona-Ntiyaruzwa-Kirazira-855742064442933/
30. See for example reports by Human Rights Watch (accessed 5 July 2020 at https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/burundi) or the International Crisis Group (accessed 5 July 2020 at https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/burundi).
31. Accessed 21 July 2020 at https://afrique.lalibre.be/52530/burundi-le-successeur-de-nkurunziza-garde-la-meme-ligne-celle-de-la-fermeture/
32. Accessed 14 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tDlCfYkw1I
33. Accessed 14 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tDlCfYkw1I. Translation by the author.

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34. Accessed 14 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaVAvd7G5Zk
35. Accessed 14 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MWLXmYxF9Q
36. Accessed 14 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQMjhC5c38o
37. Accessed 15 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBeTwvvKCYY
38. Accessed 15 March 2020 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBeTwvvKCYY
39. Accessed 22 July at https://afrique.lalibre.be/52530/burundi-le-successeur-de-nkurunziza-garde-la-meme-ligne-celle-de-la-fermeture/
40. Accessed 14 March 2020 at http://www.france-rwanda.info/2016/01/burundi-maitre-bernard-mangain-et-david-gakunzi-pris-en-flagrant-delit-de-manipulation-d-images-pour-accrediter-la-these-d-un-genocide
41. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-rights-un/burundi-threatens-to-quit-un-human-rights-council-sue-critics-idUSKCN1LX2EB
42. Accessed 20 March 2020 at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-rights/burundi-forces-u-n-to-shut-human-rights-office-u-n-says-idUSKCN1QM10M
43. Accessed on 18 December 2020 at https://www.africanews.com/2020/08/27/burundi-demands-43bn-in-reparations-from-germany-and-belgium//
44. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/opinion-debat-il-etait-une-fois-pierre-nkurunziza-un-burundais-ordinaire-ni-un-saint-ni-un-salaud/
45. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/reaction-a-larticle-du-pr-cishahayo-une-lecture-tres-selective-de-notre-histoire/
46. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/reaction-a-larticle-de-fabien-cishahayo-ne-pas-faire-porter-aux-enfants-le-poids-des-crimes-du-passe/
47. Accessed 16 June 2020 at https://www.iwacu-burundi.org/reaction-a-lopinion-du-professeur-cishahayo-je-ne-fais-pas-de-distinction-dans-les-souffrances/

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