



Ethnicity and political violence in Africa: The challenge to the Burundi state

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Abstract

This paper contributes to debates on the crisis of the African state, particularly the challenge posed by the rent-seeking elite, ethnicity and political violence. In most accounts, Burundi's persistent civil war fits contemporary discourse of the failed neo-patrimonial state in which opportunistic elites mobilize ethnicity for economic gain. Drawing on recent theorising on the politicization of identities and their intersection with state formation, the paper examines historically the development of ethnic consciousness and its links to the Burundi state. Ethnicity, it contends, has been the central organizing principle of the modern Burundi state with its successive policies of differentiation and exclusion. Throughout its post-colonial history, the Burundi state has not been a fully functioning sovereign state along the lines of its western counterparts. Yet, its citizens, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation, have not contested its territorial integrity. Instead the conflict reflects contested claims for enrichment, representation and security as expected from a model state. The on-going violence is attributed to an increasingly factionalised political elite, based on the multiple cleavages in Burundi society, who mobilize ethnicity in their struggle for control of the state. Recent peace negotiations, aimed at correcting ethnic imbalance through power sharing and reform of the institutions of governance are unlikely to resolve the political crisis as they fail to move beyond a methodological pre-occupation with ethnic identities and address the complex social reality of Burundi society and to include the people of Burundi as part of a broader non-ethnicized political community, a prerequisite for a stable pluralistic democracy.
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Keywords: Ethnicity; State; Conflict; Peace; Africa; Burundi

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Introduction

The small central African state of Burundi represents one of the few nation-states in Africa that, from the outset, possessed some of the basic elements for national unity in the post-colonial period. Unlike the majority of modern African states, it was a political and geographical entity in the pre-colonial period, and its people share a common socio-cultural and linguistic heritage. Since independence, however, Burundi has been highly unstable, with six governments between 1962 and 1966, the abolition of the monarchy (1966), four successful *coup d'états* (1965, 1976, 1987 and 1996), and the assassination of its first democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, in October 1993. Moreover, like its neighbour Rwanda, Burundi has witnessed violence of genocidal proportions; an estimated 200,000 people were killed in 1972 and a further 20,000 in August 1988. Between 1993 and 2000 civil warfare killed a further 200,000 people and forced over 350,000 into exile (Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, 2000; International Crisis Group [ICG], 1998). Insurgency attacks by rebel movements and reprisals by the military displaced more than one million people and created a climate of fear and impunity. Despite the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in August 2000, the establishment of a power-sharing transitional government in 2001 and the instalment of another democratically elected government after elections in June and July 2005, Burundi continues to exist in an in-between state, popularly termed 'no peace no war'.

This paper challenges two dominant discourses concerning warfare in Burundi. Firstly, that popularized by the media and policy makers, and which portrays the violence simply as the natural outcome of age-old enmity or 'tribalism' between the Hutu and Tutsi population.¹ While there is no doubt that the violence is manifested in predominantly ethnic terms, this paper argues against the simplification and de-contextualization of the ethnic narrative, and, instead, tries to unpack the trajectory by which 'ethnic' difference' has seemingly become a major de-stabilizing force in post-colonial Burundi. Drawing on recent debates on the conceptualization of political identities and their relationship to the modern African state, the paper argues that ethnic identity, though positioned as one of a range of identities that Burundians deploy in political contestations, has been, since the colonial period, an essential component of statecraft, and ethnic violence the main route for settling political difference.

Secondly, this paper questions the discourse that labels Burundi a 'failed state', understood as one that has lost its capacity to deliver welfare services to its citizens; to provide security because of the loss of its monopoly on violence, as well as being undemocratic (Pax Christi Netherlands, 2005). Proponents of the 'failed states' thesis argue that state capacity and effectiveness have been undermined by internecine violence, sometimes deliberate, and the exigencies of a neo-patrimonial and a rapacious political elite (Bayart, 1993; Bayart et al., 1999; Reno, 2002). Neo-patrimonialism, or the distribution of state funds through patronage, is applied almost universally to explain conflict in Africa (Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Ndikumana, 1998; Nkurunziza & Ngaruko, 2002; Reno, 2000, 2002). Policymakers at the Bretton Woods institutions and some western governments have placed the blame for ineffective neo-liberal

¹ Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are popular abbreviations of the Kirundi names. The correct terms are Bahutu (pl) Muhutu (sl), Batutsi (pl) Mututsi (sl), Batwa (pl) Mutwa (sl) and the nation, Burundi (pl) and Murundi (sl). This paper uses the popular terms but in extracts from scholars from the region and documentations from the Peace negotiations the correct terminology is left unchanged.

economic reform and rising poverty on ethnic conflict, political instability and corruption (Commission for Africa, 2005).

This paper, in line with recent contributions by geographers to our understanding of African statehood, attempts to move beyond the stereotypes and dysfunctionality thesis that pervades much of contemporary thinking on Africa (Sidaway, 2003). Such conceptualization, Sidaway argues, presents a distorted reading of African states, positioning them in contradistinction to a presumed western normality and attributing their 'abnormality' to recent forces occurring within the boundaries of the sovereign state. Reductionist accounts, therefore, represent African societies in overly simplistic ways and avoid the detailed historical analysis critical to our understanding of the complexities of identity politics in the context of the post-colonial state, and their relationship to the historical processes and structural forces that have continued to ensure the impoverishment of African communities and the persistence of non-representative politics.

This paper locates ethnicity and political violence in the failure of the neo-classical trajectory of modernisation (resource-extraction, free trade, multi-party democracy, international aid and Social Darwinism) to improve the social and economic conditions of the ordinary Burundian. It argues that proposed political and economic reforms, as articulated in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, 2000, while correcting ethnic imbalance among the elite through power sharing, will leave intact the contradictions within the society. The continued instrumental and often violent use of ethnicity by the political elite and the failure of the peace process to move beyond ethnic categorization undermine efforts to articulate a more inclusive democratic participatory politics that see the ordinary Burundian as part of a broader political community with equal allegiance and rights to the state — essential pre-conditions for the sort of societal transformation that is vital for lasting peace and stability.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first considers the conceptual debates about the role of ethnicity in contemporary African society and politics and its relationship to political violence. The second section examines the relationship between identities and state formation in Burundi over three historical periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. Of significance here is how ethnic identity intersects historically with other identities and the role of the colonial state and the African political elite in making ethnicity a central component of modern Burundi politics. The third section uncovers the exclusionary policies of the post-colonial state and their contribution to the violent manifestation of difference. The fourth section discusses the intersection of ethnicity with the national economy in the context of neo-liberalism; and the final section addresses political differences and state reform in relation to the Burundi peace negotiations and in the implementation of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000.

African ethnicity and the state

The literature on ethnicities in Africa has become increasingly diverse, as scholars, historians in particular, challenged the popular understanding of their primordial origins and shifted the debate to reveal the social construction of many groups under colonialism (Berman, 1998; Lonsdale, 1994; Ranger, 1983, 1993; Vail, 1989). A substantive body of research has revealed that a significant number of contemporary 'tribes' have no pre-colonial antecedents and exposed the colonial state's role in defining and categorizing the African population into supposedly distinct ethnic groups for the purposes of political control. Many post-colonial African leaders, liberals and neo-Marxists assumed that tribes, being either atavistic or based on 'false consciousness', would disappear with modernisation and the development of national identities

(Mafeje, 1971; Lonsdale). However, the degree of saliency that ethnic groups have now reached in contemporary Africa, the conflictual nature of inter-ethnic relationships, especially in the political arena, and the prevalence of genocidal violence have necessitated further investigation of the relationship between ethnicity and the state (Bayart, 1993; Berman, Eyoh, & Kymlicka, 2003; Joseph, 1999; Mafeje, 1995; Nnoli, 1998).

According to Nnoli (1998), ethnicity in contemporary Africa is 'associated with competition, exclusiveness and conflicts in relations among ethnic groups, which are members of a political community' (p. 11). Such manifestations of ethnicity are directly related to Africa's experience of colonialism and modernity. While bureaucratic efficiency demanded the organization of people into easily categorized ethnicities, Africans, attempting to negotiate the complexities of the new system, drew on the resources of affective ties and common cultural characteristics, simultaneously creating in a common political space what Lonsdale (1994) describes as 'moral ethnicity' and 'political tribalism'. Lonsdale sees 'moral ethnicity' as 'the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour a system of moral meaning and ethical reputation within a more or less imagined community' (p. 132). 'Political tribalism', in contrast, refers to 'the use of identity politics in political competition with other groups' (p. 132). Berman et al. (2003) claim that 'moral ethnicity' emerged in the context of colonialism and modernity, to 'protect people when they [were] most vulnerable and alone' — in urban centres and areas of colonial enterprise, and among strangers (p. 4). 'Political tribalism', on the other hand, is the outcome of the intersection between market and state in a discriminatory and undemocratic context.

Socially constructed ethnic identities tend to be fluid and historically contingent, yet 'moral ethnicity' refers largely to people who belong to a common cultural community, sharing customs, language and territorial attachment. Mamdani's (2001) conceptualization of political identities as opposed to cultural identities is useful in understanding the exceptions to the norm, where the colonial construction of ethnic groups drew on pre-colonial class or other socio-economic differences. Mamdani (2001) contends that political identities emerge from 'the process of state formation [which] generates identities that are distinct from market-based identities and cultural identities' (p. 20). For him, political identities are 'legally inscribed identities' constructed on the basis of group access to state power. Mamdani writes

If the law recognises you as a member of an ethnicity, and state institutions treat you as a member of that ethnicity, then you become an ethnic being legally and institutionally. In contrast, if the law recognises you as a racial group, then your relationship to the state and to other legally defined group is mediated by the state (p. 22).

It is the legal enforcement of these identities that makes them 'the basis of participation in state-organized institutional and political life' (p. 22). Mamdani exemplifies this with respect to Rwanda, where he argues that social differences became politicised as a consequence of the manipulation of race and ethnicity during the colonial period. Genocide is linked to how Hutu and Tutsi were constructed by the colonial state and the failure of Rwandan nationalism to transcend the colonial construction of racial difference and the 'foreignness' it bestowed on the Tutsi.

Proponents of the neo-patrimonial thesis have drawn attention to this instrumental use of ethnicity by the elite, whereby rent-seeking politicians attempt to capture or consolidate control over the state and economy as the main avenue to wealth and power (Bayart, 1993; Ndikumana, 1998; Ngaruko & Nkurunziza, 2000; Nkurunziza & Ngaruko, 2002; Ottaway, 1999). They claim that such situations have become acute in the late post-colonial period where

declining resources have intensified competition and patronage on an ethno-regional basis (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). The 'failed state' is presented as the extreme outcome of neo-patrimonialism.

The elite's ability to manipulate ethnicity successfully is related, historically, to the nature in which the colonials incorporated Africans into the modern state as, according to Mamdani (1996), either 'citizens or subjects', reproduced in the binaries of European or African, urban or rural. Thus, the colonial state structure laid the foundations with which the urbanised elites could appropriate for themselves the rights of citizenship and of nationality, whilst the masses remain 'tribal' beings. Mamdani also points out the contradictions in nationalist politics; while sections of the political elite, at the national level, mobilized people against the racial politics of the colonial state, they, nevertheless, retained its form at the local level and, in the exercise of state power, not only reinforced tribalism in civil society but embraced the de-humanizing ideology of Social Darwinism.

Berman et al. (2003) see the elite-centred perspective of the neo-patrimonial thesis as problematic, arguing that it depicts African elites 'as homogenous and static' and African masses as 'more or less gullible' (p. 3). Certainly, contemporary focus on the political elite fails to analyse the allegiance that the African populace have towards the state and the specificities of intra-elite and elite-masses interactions and, in so doing, helps to sustain a power structure that is exclusionary. Patron-client relationships can be highly exploitative, and ethnic elites often get involved in opportunistic behaviour that are not necessarily advantageous for members of their own ethnic group (Berman et al., 2003; Lonsdale, 1994). Nevertheless, ethnic identification becomes a crucial resource in the context of violent political struggles; it fuels sections of the elite, who use the discourse of ethnicity to obfuscate personal ambitions and to mobilize mass support for their political agenda, and it can offer security to the masses. Despite this, Mustapha (2002) is rightly critical of the body of literature that focuses on the political elite and ignores the people's role as part of the political community.

The monochromic fixation on elite politics implicitly reduces African politics to the struggle for spoils within the elite. The visions and passions that have fuelled broad-based African political life since the colonial period – nationalism, Islamic radicalism, African Christianity, communitarian self-improvement, ethnic mobilization, etc. – all disappear from analytical view (p. 10).

This 'monochromic fixation' is not peculiar to certain Africanists; it pervades almost all discussion of contemporary African politics and informs models of conflict resolution and prescriptions of power sharing, thus, affecting the degree of human agency attributed to the people. Perspectives centred on the ethnic elite sometimes fail to recognise the complexities of African political culture, and thus serve to obscure the multiple cleavages and points of contestation within the society, which may account for the high level of organized violence and institutional decay.

Ethnic conflict is not a natural outcome of co-existence in a multiethnic society. Nnoli (1998) draws our attention to the positive contributions of ethnicity especially during the period of nationalist politics. Peaceful plural societies depend on the degree of acceptance and inclusion of difference in the state. Ethnic identification is a complex phenomenon and members may not always act solely in the interest of their ethnic group. Observers, in their reification of African ethnic identity, oftentimes misinterpret and thus downplay the complex and pivotal nature of non-ethnic forms of identification. In any society, ethnic allegiances will be undermined and overlapped by other forms of identification such as clan, class or religion.

In Africa, electoral democracy, however flawed, has been widely promoted by the West as a panacea to patrimonial politics. Without any substantial transformation in the nature of state power, the inevitable outcome of multi-partyism is the continuation of undemocratic politics and the marginalization of the African people from the political process. Liberal democracy may be in its infancy in Africa, however, as Mustapha (2002) remarks:

Multi-party electoralism and technocratic 'governance' reforms created a formalistic and procedural political and administrative structure with little vision and affective content as far as the bulk of the population were concerned. Implicitly, this sentimental and affective deficit in liberalizing Africa is to be filled by civil society, variously defined (pp. 10–11).

The recent focus on African civil society as having transformative capacities appears misplaced unless it begins by addressing how to dismantle the form of power Mamdani (1996) labels 'decentralized despotism'. To him, the 'state that was created by colonialism was de-racialised, but it was not democratised' (p. 26). Ake (1996) affirms that true democracy is driven by the people who have a vested interest in the benefits of democracy and a responsible state. For progressive Africans, who are seeking to transcend the chaos of competing political actors, upholding the state while reforming its institutions of governance is of critical importance. Not surprisingly, the language of state reform informs the narratives of the political elite and their neo-liberal supporters while, they, simultaneously, undermine the contribution that the people make as part of the political community.

State formation and identities in Burundi

Unlike many states in Africa, the state of Burundi was not a colonial construct. It existed prior to colonial rule, although its boundaries were extended as a result of colonial conquest of neighbouring territories. Until its independence in 1962, Burundi was firstly part of the German colony of Ruanda-Urundi (1897–1916) and, after Germany's defeat in the First World War, was placed under Belgian trusteeship (1916–1962).

Contemporary Burundi society is normally said to comprise of three ethnic groups, Hutu (85%), Tutsi (14%) and Twa (1%).² Most accounts of social differences within the society exclude divisions such as the significance of lineages, the existence of 220 clans, some trans-ethnic, the presence of the *Baganwa*, an aristocratic and distinct ethnic group, and the social and regional divide within the Tutsi and Hutu groups. Burundi scholars, Rutake and Gahama (1998), argue that clans remain the 'basic elements of social organisation in Burundi', and on 'various occasions Burundi identify themselves not in terms of their 'ethnic' belonging but indeed on the basis of their clans' (p. 82). Hutu and Tutsi have always inhabited spatially contiguous areas and have intermarried. Even so, marked regional distinctions existed between those Hutus who were closely associated with the Crown and the rest, and between the Tutsi-*Banyabururi* (southerners) and the Tutsi-*Banyaruguru* who were dispersed throughout the country (Lemarchand, 1970). Status differences also separated the high-ranking Tutsi from the pastoral Tutsi-Hima. Like other societies, the Burundians operated under a multiplicity of primordial cultural identities that underpinned social allegiances and which have persisted, despite the increased saliency of politicised ethnic identities.

² This percentage distribution is widely used despite the fact that there has been no ethnic census since 1956: figures were derived originally from an ad hoc survey conducted by the colonial state.

The origins of ethnicity in Burundi are highly contested not just between its people, but also between academicians, with the latter divided on the actual existence of ethnic groups in pre-colonial Burundi and on the colonial state's role in augmenting differences.³ From one viewpoint, Burundi offers a clear example of the constructivist perspective on ethnicity. Cultural homogeneity across the ethnic groups appears to challenge the degree to which they were historically mutually exclusive. Because the social categories known as Tutsi, Hutu and Twa shared a common culture, language and belief system, attributing primordial roots to the differences that are apparent today appears problematic. In contrast, there is evidence to show that what appeared to be socio-political differences were consolidated during the colonial period, through the introduction of 19th century racist theories linked to changes in state power.

Jefremovas (2000) and Mamdani (2001) have shown for Rwanda, with its replica ethnic composition and colonial experience, that the people have diametrically-opposed views of history and even of recent events. Hutus, conscious of their group's marginalization from power, have sought deep historical (pre-colonial) roots for their oppression in order to justify their struggle for social justice. In contrast, Tutsis, many of whom, self-interestedly, assisted the colonial state in the promotion of ethnic difference, refer to harmonious pre-colonial relationships and attribute blame for the rising ethnicity to the colonisers. The genocidal nature of contemporary Hutu/Tutsi conflicts has led to increased attempts by revisionist scholars to 'sanitise' the colonial records by looking for propensity to violence in the pre-colonial period (Vansina, 2005). The reality is somewhere in between. Despite the similarities in ethnic group composition and in their colonial experiences, the nature of the violence and the degree of inter-ethnic relationships vary considerably between Rwanda and Burundi, suggesting a more nuanced interpretation of Hutu/Tutsi relationship historically. However, it would be naïve to assume that the existence of ethnic conflict negates the fact that people are still able to deploy a range of identities, clan, regional and religious. As this paper argues, these non-ethnic allegiances have been critical to the persistence of conflict in Burundi.

As discussed earlier, the propensity for political identities to become violent depends on the nature of the state and its treatment of social differences. African scholars have highlighted some of the structural factors which may account for the differential incorporation of social categories into the state in different historical periods. Nnoli (1998), for example, associates states in the pre-colonial period with

...strong tendencies towards the integration and inclusion of ethnic groups with the goal of enhancing production and commerce, the colonial and post-colonial systems [in contrast] emphasised exclusion, competition and authoritarianism in inter-ethnic relations (Nnoli, 1998, p. 23).

While Mustapha (1999) claims that 'the colonial and post-colonial emphasis on resource distribution based on communal/tribal units tends to push towards the exclusion of others, both from the group and from resources' (p. 125). An historical analysis of changing state power and of resource access, and their intersection with ethnicity is therefore of critical importance to understanding inter-group conflict in Burundi.

³ Differences are pronounced between the Franco-Burundian School under the supervision of Jean-Pierre Chretien and the Belgio-American School (Filip Reynders and René Lemarchand).

The pre-colonial period

What is clear from Burundi's pre-colonial history is that a variety of social identities existed, some overlapping. In the hierarchical political structure, power was shared between the monarch (*mwami*) and aristocratic dynastic families (*Baganwa*), who, as deputies, administered the provinces. Rivalry between the two main *Baganwa* clans, the *Bezi* and the *Batara*, led to the formation of regional alliances with the Tutsi-*Banyabururi* and the Tutsi-*Banyaruguru* who became associated with the *Bezi* and the *Batara*, respectively. This inter-dynastic rivalry was heightened during colonial rule and was a significant factor in the instability of the early post-colonial period.

Occupational divisions were sharp, and more or less defined one's position in society. The unproductive royal clans (Tutsi) were divided hierarchically from the pastoralists (Tutsi-Hima), the cultivators (Hutu) and from the hunters and gatherers (Twa). Social stratification was reinforced by the existence of a clientelist system (*ubugabire*), based on the unequal distribution of cattle and wealth between the patrons and the clients.⁴ Although historical accounts demonstrate that the agriculturalists were predominantly clients, there are differences of opinions as to the extent of fluidity across social boundaries. Newbury (1998) interpreted Hutu and Tutsi as socially produced categories that were dynamic and that changed over time and with locale. 'There is not a single coherent "Tutsi history" or "Tutsi culture", just as there is no single "Hutu history" or "Hutu culture"' (p. 83). In some areas, particularly those with small populations, wealthy cultivators joined the ruling group and poor herdsmen became clients (Trouwborst, 1965). For Rwanda, Mamdani (2001) refers to the process of *Kwihutura* — whereby 'the rare Hutu who was able to accumulate cattle and rise through the socio-economic hierarchy', could 'shed Hutuness and achieve the political status of a Tutsi' (p. 70). In Rwanda, the boundaries were more rigid than in Burundi where Hutus occupied major ceremonial and administrative roles as *banyamabanga* (keepers of the state secrets) and as *bashingantahe* (community arbitrators). And at the local level, the presence of land, cattle and army chiefs ensured greater accountability and militated against the abuse of power.

The monarchy was a symbol of national unity with the Crown acting as a nexus for the various collectives. There were clear forms of social identity, whether by region, kinship or productive activities but there was no pan-territorial ethnic identity. Instead Burundi identified with the Crown and the state — an incipient form of national identity perhaps. The judicial *bashingantahe* promoted social cohesion and prevented the excesses of the ruling elite. This is not to say that the Crown did not respond violently against those who threatened its power; people were dispossessed (*ukunyaga*) and whole families were wiped out (*uguhonya*).

Colonial rule

The advent of colonial rule led to the transformation of socio-political boundaries into rigid ethnic identities. Colonialism, as Drayton (1995) argues, 'created a situation whereby a single identity, that of ethnicity, was privileged over the multiplicity of identities held by African people' (p. 10). In Burundi, colonialism transformed the political culture and destroyed the national

⁴ The client would seek the patronage of the lord, who would bestow him cattle, over which the client had usufruct rights. The client was then expected to repay the lord in the form of tribute labour and agricultural dues. See Lemarchand (1970) for a detailed description of the clientelism in Burundi.

consensus. Colonial social and administrative policies created and supported a new racial and ethnic hierarchy through the introduction of racist ideology and its application to pre-existing patterns of social differentiation.

The Germans and the Belgians entered Burundi with entrenched pre-conceptions of racial superiority and applied their biased interpretations to the hierarchical social structure of the pre-colonial society. Collectives based largely on economic specialization, a feature of many pre-capitalist societies, were racialized and ethnicized. The pastoralists, whose appearance resembled North Africans, were considered non-indigenous and racially superior to the cultivators, and the hunters and gatherers. What has been termed the 'Hamitic hypothesis'⁵ was used to justify European support for the Tutsis as natural leaders under the policy of indirect rule. The category Tutsi expanded to incorporate all those who were pastoralists and those with Caucasian features; the label Hutu to those who were defined as cultivators and with negroid features; and the label Twa to those who were hunters and gatherers and had pygmoid features. With the population classified into racially defined ethnic groups, racist ideology ensured that notions of superiority and inferiority became associated with Tutsi and Hutu, respectively.

Racial demarcation was given further justification by the promotion of a mythico-historical interpretation of the practice of clientelism in pre-colonial Burundi. In the popular mythology that became prominent during the colonial period, the patron was always Tutsi and the client Hutu. Missionaries and local Tutsi catechists assisted in the social construction of ethnic identity by writing a history of Burundi which perpetuated the myth of the Tutsi as divine rulers and rightful colonial intermediaries (Linden, 1977).

Although some wealthy agriculturalists maintained some economic independence under colonial rule, access to political power was effectively altered in favour of the enlarged Tutsi population. While the *Baganwa* retained their social status at the top of the hierarchy, their political influence, as with that of the monarchy, waned and did not survive into the independence period as the young mission educated political elite gradually displaced traditional leaders. Discriminatory colonial policies – political, education and religious – combined to produce rigid ethnic boundaries, and legitimised the consolidation of power within the Tutsi group. For example, according to Linden (1977), schools were segregated and streamed in a system that 'guaranteed the Tutsi were given a superior education, and [were] the means by which the Belgians were able to impose an ethnic definition of eligibility on the new political class' (p. 164).

Social inequalities were further reinforced through state privileging of the Tutsi in access to bureaucratic positions and in land dispute settlements. Furthermore, the incorporation of traditional power structures into the 'indirect rule' favoured by colonial administration led to the dissolution of the indigenous courts of the *bashingantahe* (Lemarchand, 1970) and their replacement with Tutsi-headed and biased native courts (*tribunaux indigènes*).

The colonial state increased the opportunities for the mobilization of ethnic relations. However, the political clientelism, which emerged in late colonial and post-colonial Burundi, excluded Hutu from being beneficiaries of political patronage. In essence, the structural changes brought about by the imposition of colonial rule led not just to conflict between ethnic groups, but extended and intensified intra-group strife, as Tutsi clans competed with each other, fuelled by the persistence of nepotism as a vehicle for social mobility.

⁵ According to the Hamitic hypothesis, the Tutsi, with their European-like features, were said to be descendants of the biblical Ham, son of Noah, and were therefore not Bantu or African in origin. The colonial state's use of it played a key role in the current foundation myths of the ethnic groups. Further explanation can be found in Sanders (1969).

Intra-elite factionalism: the struggle for the post-colonial state

Colonialism may have sown the seeds for ethnic conflict but, as Mamdani (2001) argues, blame must be partly attributed to the post-colonial state, which failed to promote a more inclusive vision of society, one that transcends external concepts of race and ethnicity. Acknowledging Burundi's heterogeneous population leads us to a more nuanced explanation for the persistence of conflict and the struggles over the state. Rivalries between clans, communes and families permeate the social structure and cut across ethnic boundaries. Because of the heterogeneity of the Tutsi group, its dynastic families, and the variety of social bases for inter-ethnic relations, observers, such as Lemarchand (1994), have long challenged the simplification of social identities in the discourse about conflict in Burundi. In the post-colonial state, the Hutu/Tutsi binary has only limited explanatory value. One can identify five distinct cleavages around which conflict occurred: intra-aristocracy, between the old guard and the young modernised elite, between Hutu and Tutsi, intra-Tutsi, between the military and the political elite, and lately intra-Hutu.

The first internecine conflict occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the rise of nationalist movements. As Mamdani (1996) writes:

The politics of Africanization was simultaneously unifying and fragmenting; unifying the victims of colonial racism [but dividing] the same majority along lines that reflected the actual process of redistribution: regional, ethnic, and at times just familial (p. 20).

In Burundi, the politics of nationalism and the struggle for control of the state divided initially the established, essentially Tutsi, political class. At the same time Hutu consciousness of their potential political power rose with the prospect of a majoritarian electoral democracy. At another level, the struggle for self-determination occurred at the same time as the global political restructuring of the Cold War, which had reverberations locally as the superpowers vied for political leverage over newly independent territories.

The old rivalries in the Tutsi aristocracy, principally between the two *Baganwa* clans, the *Bezi* and the *Batare*, resurfaced in the two leading nationalist parties: UPRONA (*Parti de l'Unité et du Progress National*) formed by members of the *Bezi* aristocracy, and unofficially headed by the *Mwami's* son, Prince Louis Rwagasore, who was married to a Hutu, and the *Batare*-controlled PDC (*Parti Démocrate Chrétien*). Due to the charismatic leadership of Prince Rwagasore, and the loyalty that many Burundi still felt towards the Crown, UPRONA was able to unite Hutu and Tutsi anti-colonialists under the slogan 'unity and progress'. Its progressive nationalist rhetoric, opposition to colonial rule and alignment with the Crown garnered it widespread Hutu support, and it easily won the legislative elections of 1961. The Belgian administration, fearing the threat of a mass-based party, branded Rwagasore a communist, and lent its support to the less radical PDC, which was not in favour of immediate self-rule. Rwagasore's murder on the 13 October 1961 supposedly planned by the PDC leadership with the tacit approval of the Belgians, led to the dissolution of the PDC and with it the *Batare* as a competing political force.⁶ The colonial state had to concede defeat momentarily, as UPRONA formed the independent government in 1962.

As social mobility was largely dependent on political patronage, young Hutus, without access to state elites, embraced the patronage of younger Belgian clerics, fresh from the

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the events relating to the murder of Rwagasore, the trail of the assassins and the role of the Belgians, see Chomé (1962) *L'Affaire Rwagasore, Remarques Congolaises*, 14 December 1962, Bruxelles.

Walloon/Flemish factionalism in their home country. Hutus were schooled and politicised in such a way as to see the Tutsi, and not the colonial state, as their oppressors. Despite the support of the missionaries, purely Hutu parties such as *Parti du Peuple* lacked a traditional power base to mobilize and, therefore, could not compete with the *Baganwa*-backed parties.

Hutu political marginalization at the point when the colonial state sought to introduce liberal democracy only served to heighten their consciousness of being the democratic majority. This was sharpened by the 1962 uprising in Rwanda and the establishment of a Hutu republic in that country. Rwanda's Hutu revolution contributed to the polarization of ethnicity in Burundi, as Banyarwanda refugees (Tutsi) entered the country, anxious for revenge and sought solidarity from the Tutsi elite. These refugees were actively involved in Burundi politics, and were a factor in the further deterioration in ethnic relations in the 1960s.

It was in this period that violence, as means of expressing political frustration and resolving political difference, manifested along ethnic lines. A 3-year period of instability followed Rwigyema's death, with the Crown seeking to play a balancing role between pro-Hutu factions working to use democratic mechanisms to win a larger share of power, and a divided Tutsi community. UPRONA was divided between the older generation of royalists wanting to re-introduce their domination and the newly emergent younger radical elite some with communist sympathies — an issue of major concern for Western governments (Webster, 1966). The assassination of Hutu Prime Minister, Pierre Ngendandumwe on 18 January 1965, by a Tutsi employed at the US embassy, illustrates the role Cold War politicking played in fomenting tribal hatred (Lemarchand, 1994; Webster). The partisan actions of the conservative *Mwami* and the first democratic elections in May 1965 combined to expose the vulnerability of the Tutsi hegemony. To forestall its collapse, power was usurped by the low status Tutsi-Hima in a military *coup d'état* of 1966, which caused the dissolution of the monarchy several months later, and the end of the aristocratic *Baganwa* as a political force and the rise of the single-party state with UPRONA being transformed into an essentially a Tutsi party. The Tutsi-Hima, marginal actors in the pre-colonial kingdom, had been relegated to the low status military during colonial days. After independence, their prominence in the army put them in a position to (literally) capture the state.

In the 1960s, the senior ranks of the military emerged as a significant interest group, challenging the state, while aligning with sections of the political elite. For almost all 40 years of its post-colonial history, Burundi's political life has been dominated by Tutsi-Himas from the southern province of Bururi. Military leaders Michel Michombero (1966–1976), Jean-Baptiste Bagaza (1976–1987) and Pierre Buyoya (1987–1993 and 1996–2000) all originated from Bururi and are cousins. The *raison d'être* for the coups appeared to be intra-Tutsi rivalries, often along familial and regional lines. Tutsis from Bururi have long had antagonistic relationships with other Tutsis, especially those from Muramvya Province (north-central Burundi) — the home of the royal clans (Lemarchand, 1994) (Fig. 1).

The military (*Forces Armées Burundaises*), operated largely as a corporate body, independent of the state and political class, and used its might to facilitate its predation of the economy. Its success has been dependent on providing a vital security function for the Tutsi ethnic group in a regional context of persistent genocidal violence. In the late 1960s, purges within the army led to the elimination of virtually all Hutu officers and a significant proportion of the rank and file. Reprisals against Hutu uprisings were excessively brutal and often of genocidal proportions. A United Nations report notes:

In June 1995, the military allegedly hunted down the population of Kamenge and Kimana in the Gishingano *collines*, on the outskirts of Bujumbura, where they had hidden. The

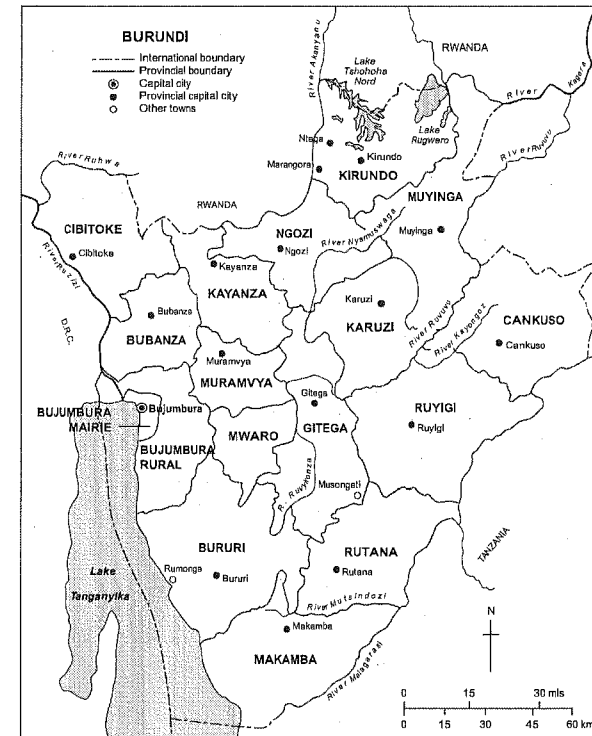


Fig. 1. Provincial Map of Burundi.

reportedly used bayonets and hatchets to kill over 100, mostly women and children. It is said a pregnant woman was even disembowelled. (United Nations, 1995, p. 20, para. 98)

Similarly, in 1997, a United States of America, Department of State (1998) report referred to violence of genocidal proportions perpetrated by the Burundi security forces amidst a culture of impunity.

Military forces committed extrajudicial killings, including massacres of unarmed civilian Hutus. With their superior fire power and wide dispersion, the armed forces committed the most widespread abuses. Tutsi civilian extremists sometimes accompanied the armed forces, during operations, and the armed forces permitted them to engage in violence against Hutus. (United States of America, Department of State, 1998, not numbered)

Until the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, openly discriminatory policies controlled the number of Hutu recruited into the military, but this did not prevent state mobilization of young Hutu men in para-military groups known as *Gardiens de Paix*, while introducing compulsory 12 month military service for secondary school students and for first and second year university students as part of its new 'solidarity' — civil defence programme (*Service Militaire Obligatoire* (SMO)). All the new recruits were Tutsi, including women and boys as young as 10 years (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

The militarization of Burundi society enabled members of the political class to sponsor their own militias. In the mid-1990s, the Tutsi militias, *Sans Echech* (the infallible), *Sans Defaite* (the undefeated) and SOJEDEM (*Solidarité Jeunesse pour le Défense Des Droits des Minorités*), sponsored by Tutsi political parties, wreaked havoc in urban areas in their *ville morte* (dead city) campaign. Government failure to prosecute the security services for acts of violence and human rights violations nurtured a culture of impunity, allowing both Hutu and Tutsi to commit crimes, predominantly against the civilian population and not necessarily ethnic related.

In sum, the Burundi state, still in the throes of modernisation, is a complex web of social relations, most of which defy ethnic categorization. Non-ethnic divisions, in particular factionalism within the political elite, are of critical importance to the understanding of the political struggles undermining its stability. Violence has become the instrument with which individuals and groups attempt to negotiate or acquire access to institutions of the state.

Ethnicity and the political culture of the post-colonial Burundi state

A key question here is why has ethnicity become the axis for violence as opposed to other lines of social cleavages? Referring back to Mamdani's concept of politicised identities, one could argue that in the context of the modern state, ethnicity acts as a resource around which group consciousness can be articulated, making it a competitive tool with which the elite and counter-elite can legitimise their claim to economic and political power. Control of the institutions of governance appears critical to maintaining group identity. The Tutsi elite, in view of their group forming the numerical minority, used their virtual monopoly of the state apparatus to maintain their hegemony until the political conditionalities and democratisation pressures of the early 1990s.

Successive Tutsi-dominated governments, under the guise of promoting national unity, have denied the existence of ethnic difference, while, simultaneously, legitimizing inequality and discrimination by using the Hutu majoritarian threat to exclude the Hutu population from playing prominent roles in the political and economic spheres of the state. Ottaway (1999) sees this as characteristic of post-colonial leaders who 'disregard ethnicity and its role in politics whilst manipulating it for political ends' (p. 304). To deny ethnicity protects the well-positioned Tutsi minority while to assert ethnicity is to promote the impoverished, powerless Hutu majority.

Moderate Tutsis and members of the Hutu intelligentsia were specifically targeted in acts of violence, a strategy to forestall the Hutu threat (Lemarchand, 1994; Reyntjens, 1993). Persistent state failure to acknowledge the ethnic nature of the violent conflicts, especially in the massacres of 1972 and 1988, implies state sanctioning of the brutal reprisals carried out by the security forces.

Ntoli (1998) draws our attention to the symbolic capability of ethnicity:

Of defining for the individual the totality of his existence including embodying his hopes, fears and sense of the future ... any action or thought that is perceived to undermine the ethnic group evokes very hostile and sometimes violent response (p. 5).

In Burundi, ethnic extremists appeal to ethnic sentiments by emphasising the threat posed by the other group. The concept and threat of genocide are deployed by political actors to strengthen individual position. Tutsi extremists point to every Hutu-on-Tutsi acts of violence in order to foster a sense of community against the coming Hutu threat and thereby consolidate their hold over the state and its coercive apparatus. The Tutsi elite's justification for monopolising power has been the fear of a Hutu-led genocide against them, with constant reference to the Rwandan crises of 1959 and 1994 and acts of violence against Tutsi in Burundi in 1988 and 1993. Observers, such as Lemarchand (1998), view this as the cause of persistent conflict. At the same time, Tutsi dominance of the security services and state apparatus reinforced by violence and threat of violence — has strengthened a Hutu self-identity. Moreover, Lemarchand writes:

Hutu's shared consciousness of being a martyred community gives them their sense of forming a group apart. Their concrete, everyday experience of subordination and oppression serves only to reinforce their awareness of being the expiatory victims of Tutsi hegemony (Lemarchand, 1994, p. 103).

Hutus see themselves as the indigenous Bantu people, claim ownership of the land, and continue to promote the 'mythical racialized history', which externalises the Tutsi by representing them as pastoralists from north-east Africa (Malkki, 1995). Tutsi, on the other hand, deploy the language of genocide solely when referring to attacks against their communities.

For many external observers the 1988 massacre marked a sea change in the Burundi state's approach to ethnicity. Faced with external criticisms of its repressive actions, and in the context of the ending of the Cold War and the need for donor funding, President Pierre Buyoya set up a national commission to study the question of national unity and to investigate the 1988 massacres. Its report was criticised for placing the blame for ethnicity solely on the colonial administration, without examining the role of the post-colonial state in giving saliency to colonial constructs (Lemarchand, 1989; Ndikumana, 1998). In contrast, Reyntjens (1994) saw it as useful in acknowledging for the first time the existence of an ethnic problem and in establishing a national debate on ethnicity. On 19 October 1988, Buyoya nominated Hutu to 11 of the 22 ministerial posts. However, Tutsi maintained control of the key defence, foreign affairs and interior ministries (Simon, 21.10.1988). Despite exonerating the Tutsi government, the report led to the approval by referendum of a Charter of National Unity in February 1991 and the setting up of a Government of National Unity with 12 Hutu and 12 Tutsi. Other major changes in state institutions included the ending of discrimination of Hutu in the education system; the exception being the armed forces which resisted change.

The co-optation of Hutu into the regime did not prevent a further incident of state-sponsored genocidal violence in November 1991 when the security forces retaliated against the Hutu population following an insurgency by the Hutu rebel movement, PALIPEHUTU (*Parti Pour la Libération Du Peuple Hutu*) (Amnesty International, 1992). Nevertheless, the Burundi state could not withstand the democratic impetus that was sweeping the continent and, almost 4 years later, was forced to move towards multi-party elections. A new constitution was enacted in 1992 and on 3 and 10 June 1993 Burundi had its second democratic elections with the predominantly Hutu party, FRODEBU (*Front Pour la Démocratie au Burundi*), winning 80% of parliamentary votes and 65% of the presidential votes (Gahama, 1995; Reyntjens, 1993). Barely 100 days after taking office, on 21 October 1993, the country's first democratically elected Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated in a failed coup.

International opposition to this attack on democracy led to the country being run for 2 years by a multi-party coalition, forcing the democratic-elected party FRODEBU to share power

with UPRONA and other minor political parties in an agreement known as the Convention of Government. It was a period of intense political rivalry between and within the ethnic groups, as the government, faced with a rebellious army, was unable to control the violence and chaos perpetrated by the militias. Hard line Tutsis carried out a sustained campaign of persecution of Hutu leaders and violence against the civilian population to prevent a return to the democratically elected government. Accusations of genocide were used to displace moderate Hutu politicians. Not surprisingly, in July 1996, an army coup led to the reinstatement of Buyoya — the previous Tutsi president. The mid-1990s marked a key moment for the Hutu political class, which divided between moderates and extremists and between advocates of violence and non-violence. FRODEBU split after Ndadaye's death, as some members moved to form the more radical *Conseil National Pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD), which later formed a military wing, *Forces Pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (FDD). Other parties such as PAL-IPEHUTU and FROLINA (*Front pour la Libération Nationale*) also formed military wings, *Forces National de Libération* (FNL) and *Forces Armées Populaires* (FAP), respectively. Each rebel group carved out its territory of operation against the Burundi army. In 2000s, the rebel forces splintered into further factions that were pro or anti-negotiated settlement; these differences escalated into Hutu-on-Hutu conflict as FDD ending up fighting FNL. Factionalism within the Hutu and Tutsi political groups was both an expression of ethnic extremism and of individual rivalry among key members; the latter becoming more significant in the allocation of ministerial portfolios in the post-conflict government.

The apparent hopelessness of the situation has led commentators such as Lemarchand (1996) to propose the segregation of groups, to make *de jure* what they claim is already *de facto* as a result of forced displacement and the government policy of enforced encampments (*regroupement*).⁷ He infers that post-1993 violence has produced new spatialities, as the Tutsi become increasingly urbanised and the Hutu rural, and recommends a division of the territory into Tutsi-lands and Hutu-lands based on the allocation of provincial governors in the 1994 Convention of Government.⁸ This would be an immense challenge to the territorial integrity of the Burundi state and unacceptable to most Burundi when, historically, no particular geographic location is associated with an ethnic group and where ecological variability and land pressure would prevent equitable redistribution. Lemarchand's view finds no support in Burundi where there is no strong movement for territorial fragmentation.

Ethnicity and economic access

Differences, be they ethnic, regional or clan, are compounded by the economic challenge to the state as its institutions and the free market have, so far, failed to develop the economy. Post-Cold War conflict in Africa has been attributed to differential access to economic resources (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). However, such thesis often downplays the historical processes and the global structural forces that contribute to inequalities and violence. The viewpoint of neo-classical economists and political scientists, who explain conflict as the direct outcome of the capriciousness of the political elite, has become hegemonic in the discourse on the relationship between economy and state in Africa (Collier & Hoeffler; Reno, 2000). Their thesis contends that

⁷ *Regroupement* camps were set up by the Burundi government in 1996 supposedly in an attempt to isolate the rebels from their support base among the Hutu people in rural areas.

⁸ This was an agreement between the major political parties made in September 1994, which divided the institutions of government almost equally between UPRONA and FRODEBU. It was overturned by the Buyoya coup of July 1996.

in the post-colonial African context the state controls the medium through which development takes place; as its capacity to promote development is eroded by economic crisis, it is captured by a predatory elite, aiming to secure economic privileges for the few. This is the argument of Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2000) who set out to show how Burundi's bureaucracy became an instrument of a rent-seeking ethnically biased elite, while the army played 'a prominent role as both an actor and guarantor of the mechanism of rent collection and distribution within the elite' (p. 24).

This thesis has some plausibility as state power conveys status and economic privileges, and power is linked closely to ones' ability to be successful in commercial ventures; as one Burundi politician explains, 'if you are not in power, you are nothing.'⁹ Ngaruko and Nkurunziza (2000) write:

Almost all private firms belong to high ranking civil servants. It has also been noted that in general, every change in the country's leadership at the highest level provokes changes in firms' profitability: a whole fringe of businessmen go bankrupt with the departure of former leaders, while at the same time, a new class of 'businessmen' emerge with the arrival of new leaders (p. 387).

They explain the periodic violence as being linked to a cycle of predation by the Tutsi elite, rebellion by the Hutu majority and repression by the Tutsi-dominated military, which impedes growth. More economic liberalization with its attendant shift from state to private sector development is put forward as the solution to the economic crisis and the resolution of the violent conflict. Such perspectives focus too much on elite capture of resources and intra-elite dynamics, while ignoring the international terms of trade and the scarcity of productive resources which partially explain the competitive nature of politics.

Burundi is a small, landlocked country, with a predominantly subsistence economy and few perceivable economic resources. Its population of 6.6 million has an average density of 266/km², one of the highest in Africa, with only 8.2% of the population living in urban areas (Republic of Burundi [RoB], 2003). Agriculture constitutes the primary economic activity for 94%. As discussed, forced displacement in the 1990s made the rural/urban divide an ethnic one, and enabled some Hutu politicians to encourage Hutu peasants to stop producing for the urban (Tutsi) markets.

In terms of human development, Burundi ranks relatively low on any index. In 2003, its Gross Domestic Product (GNP) per capita, US \$80, was well below the sub-Saharan African average of US \$663. Its principal source of foreign exchange earnings has come from the export of traditional crops such as coffee, tea and cotton. These, especially coffee, were a major source of rent collection for the elite, despite the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1992, which caused a reduction in foreign exchange revenue (Oketch & Polzer, 2002). In mid-2002, the Governor of the Bank of Burundi reported that the country was suffering from a deficit in the coffee sector, whereby the cost of production of coffee was higher than the sales price (Irinnews, 2002). To offset the deficit, the Burundi Franc was devalued by 20% at the end of August 2002, pushing up the price of basic commodities by a similar margin.

The on-going civil war has had devastating impacts notably in terms of loss of life, destruction of the physical infrastructure and curtailment of productive activities. Mass internal displacements and the policy of *regroupement* disrupted production. During the 1990s, the

⁹ Interviewed, London: February, 1994.

economy contracted by 25% and there was an 80% increase in rural poverty (World Bank, 1999). Nkurunziza and Ngaruko (2002) note that 'in 1993, just before the war, 40 percent of the population lived below the monetary poverty line; by 1998, this proportion had increased to 60 percent, a rise of 50 percent in five years' (p. 52). External debt now stands at 1.13 billion US dollars, constituting 180% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Debt servicing in 2002 amounted to 157% of exports (RoB, 2003).

Between July 1996 and January 1999, regional sanctions, imposed by neighbouring states to force the Burundi government into peace negotiation, contributed to an increase in criminal activities as state and non-state actors used illegal means to procure goods (Nkurunziza & Ngaruko, 2002). Association of the Burundi state with criminal activities is far from new. Burundi's pivotal geographical position in Central Africa made it a transit point for the illegal exportation of ivory and minerals, such as gold, diamonds and coltan from the eastern Congo (United Nations Security Council, 2001).

Across Burundi the impact of modernisation has been socially and regionally unequal. Land accessibility is of critical importance and a cause of intense conflict, particularly for returning refugees. Some commentators attribute the uprisings of Hutu peasants to conflicts over land or discriminatory coffee pricing policies (Uvin, 1999). Certainly, rural Burundi have borne the brunt of any rent-seeking activities, as well as being subjected to the worst of the fighting. But urban poverty doubled between 1992 and 2002 largely due to in-migration as a result of the fighting (RoB, 2003).

Burundi is heavily dependent on external aid to buttress its economy. In the 1980s, it was the highest per capita recipient of low interest loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and was considered a model reforming state after introducing structural adjustment programmes in 1986. External aid peaked at US \$312 million in 1992, the year before the second democratic elections, and virtually ceased in the mid-1990s, when conflict engulfed the country (World Bank, 1999). The signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in August 2000 led to the unblocking of aid flows. In 1999, donors pledged US \$ 410 million for post-conflict reconstruction and a further \$832 million in 2001.¹⁰ Actual aid transfers remain well below that figure. Grants from the IMF (US \$54 million) and the European Union (US \$191.25 million) have been given from their respective post-conflict programmes to kick-start the economy on the understanding that Burundi would carry out further structural reform. SAP, restarted in January 2004, is aimed at further liberalization of the economy through new monetary and exchange rate policies, privatization and civil service reform (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2002). The latter policy has already resulted in civil servants strikes. Such reforms have serious implications for the provision of social welfare policies in the post-conflict situation – a time of acute demand of health and other social services. Amnesty International (2004) notes:

During a period when the Burundian population has been most in need of adequate and affordable healthcare, in 2002, the government of Burundi instituted policies of cost-recovery in the health centres. As a result, very few Burundians are now able to afford services provided by health centres (p. 8).

Irrespective of the civil war, Burundi's economic viability has always been questionable. The developmental failure of the 1980s and 1990s and the underdevelopment of the private

¹⁰ At donor conferences in Paris and Geneva respectively.

sector ensure that economic entrepreneurs become dependent on the state for acquisition of contracts. Neo-liberal reform has contributed to the collapse of state legitimacy, but, rather than bypassing corrupt state actors, it enabled them to capture external aid directed at privatization, NGO service provisioning and humanitarian interventions.

Fundamental to any reform programme is the need to take seriously the issue of re-distributive justice, whereby the limited and, in the future, expanding opportunities are open to all social groups. While members of the political elite may manipulate the conflict along ethnic lines, the intensity of the violence may be partly attributable to the economic marginalization of the majority peasant population.

Political parties, peace negotiations and state reform

Apart from the cessation of violence, peace negotiations offer an ideal opportunity to transform the political space and address issues of equity. However, contemporary conflict resolution models promote political reform via power sharing between warring factions, with the goal of instituting liberal democracy, and economic reform through the extension of the free market. To what extent did such a formulaic peace process reflect or take account of the contradictions in Burundi society and what effect, if any, did they have on the outcome?

The Burundi peace negotiations, a regional initiative, began first in the northern Tanzanian town of Mwanza in April 1996 and shifted to Arusha in June 1998. It culminated in the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in August 2000 and the imposition, 1 year later, of a 3-year transitional government. Despite elections in June and July 2005 and the election to office of a Hutu President, Pierre Nkurunziza, on 29 August 2005, peace remains elusive, as ceasefire agreements have not been reached with all the warring Hutu factions.¹¹

The mediators, Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela, interpreted the conflict as essentially an ethnic one, with Mandela drawing parallels with apartheid South Africa.¹² Yet as Article 4 of the Peace Agreement states, 'the parties recognise that:

The conflict is fundamentally political, with extremely important ethnic dimensions; it stems from a struggle by the political class to accede to and/or remain in power (Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, Chapter I, Article 4, p. 16).

Nineteen interests groups were represented in the Arusha negotiations; 17 political parties, of which 10 were Tutsi-dominated and seven Hutu, as well as the Government of Burundi and the National Assembly, the latter two comprising members from the military and from the main Tutsi party, UPRONA. Not all parties were ethnically exclusive in their membership, they varied from the integrated FRODEBU and UPRONA to the Tutsi extremists, *Parti Socialiste et Pan-Africaniste* (INKINZO) and PARENA (*Parti Pour le Redressement National*), and the purely Hutu, PALIPEHUTU. Members of the *Baganwa* belonged to both Hutu and Tutsi parties.

Though riven with internal divisions the ethnic groups sought to present common positions in the negotiations and grouped themselves into the G7 (Hutu-dominated parties) and G10 (Tutsi-dominated parties). Factionalism was acute among the Hutu who were divided on the issues of

¹¹ At the time of writing the Agathon Rwaswa faction of Palipehutu-FNL had not agreed a ceasefire with the government.

¹² Nelson Mandela took over after Julius Nyerere's death in November 1999 and handed over to Vice-President Jacob Zuma of South Africa in 2003.

negotiations with the Buyoya government and over power-sharing arrangements. Among the Tutsi, intra-regional and personal clashes manifested between former President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza and his party, PARENA, and Pierre Buyoya's UPRONA party.¹³ Some of these contemporary intra-Tutsi differences can also be attributed to competing entrepreneurial cliques (Nkurunziza & Ngaruko, 2002). UPRONA acknowledged this at Arusha when it claimed:

In our country the state is practically the only employer. The political game that gives access to material resources is a fact of life and death where the winner takes all and the loser loses all. For Burundi politicians the democratic game has been reduced to sharing the national cake. The people only serve as a springboard for the political class. Under this system democracy loses its identity as the river in the sea (Statement by UPRONA, Arusha III, 1998).

The Hutu rebel movements FDD and FNL sought direct negotiations with the military, arguing that they were the architects of the conflict.

The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, in seeking to correct ethnic imbalance in government, officially, institutionalised ethnicity as a criterion for participation in the state. The power-sharing arrangements serve to allay the Tutsi fears of a majoritarian Hutu democracy by giving them disproportionate representation in the institutions of government (40%) and by providing the political space whereby former presidents can be guaranteed seats in government. Under the Agreement, opposition parties with less than 5% of the vote would be entitled to a seat in Cabinet. It could be argued that the proliferation of Tutsi parties was a strategy to ensure the retention of their advantage in the ruling bodies, such as the Senate, as each party gets representation. Hutu parties opposed the composition of the Senate, to be made up of one Hutu and one Tutsi representative directly elected from each province. Even though this was a Government of Burundi proposal, some Tutsi parties opposed it claiming that 'unrepresentative Batutsi' would be elected rather than 'Batutsi on whom only Batutsi trust' (Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, 2000, p. 164). The ethnic requirement forced some Hutu parties, mainly CNDD/FDD, to recruit Tutsi members.

Tutsi parties sought to maintain their existing dominance by demanding that the transitional government comprising representatives from the 17 political parties be headed for the first 18 months by a Tutsi and for the second by a Hutu, Pierre Buyoya and Domitien Ndayizeye, respectively. Reform of the military, a Tutsi stronghold, was vociferously opposed by the Tutsi parties, forcing the Hutu parties to accept a 50/50% age ethnic split. Not surprisingly, soon after the military started to recruit Hutu into the lower ranks, while using lack of professionalism as a factor to slow down recruitment of Hutu officers.

Bangura (1994) contends that power-sharing benefits weaken parties and works best where political differences are minor. Many of the 17 parties had no recognised constituency and had not tested their legitimacy with the disenfranchised Burundi population since 1993. Apart from those expressing extreme ethnic ideologies, there was very little difference between the parties. Very few had a conceptualization of democracy that extended beyond the demand for equity. Democracy simply amounted to equal guaranteed access to state institutions and ethnic quotas in the judiciary and army. On a developmental level, they shared similar concerns focusing on issues of equity in education and employment opportunities, and in reducing the scale of urban

¹³ One such clash was over which Tutsi should lead the first 18 months of the 3-year transitional government. A small group of Tutsi parties opposed Buyoya's candidature.

and rural disparities, though these were underscored by the need to redress bias of an ethnic or non-ethnic nature.

The unwillingness of the political elite to open up the political space is evident in the discussions relating to the participation of civil society groups in the conflict. Women's organizations campaigned to be included in the peace talks and garnered considerable international support by asking for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which calls for 'measures that support local women's peace initiatives and ... involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements' (UNSC Resolution 1325 (2000), 8 (b)). Despite Nyerere's meetings with civil society groups in Bujumbura, and with a women's delegation, there was considerable opposition from the Burundi political parties to their inclusion in the negotiations, some expressing the fear that these groups were not sufficiently independent of the Buyoya government. This exclusion of civil society representatives from actively participating in the peace process reinforced the idea that peacemaking is solely the prerogative of political parties, rebel movements and men. In this respect, the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement promoted an elitist and ethnicized politics of the state and failed to conceptualise a more inclusive politics that give the agency a multiple-voiced Burundi political community. The operations of the peace process support Mafeje's (1995) assertion that the liberal concept of conflict resolution by power sharing only serves to regularise the established set-up, leaving the contradictions within the society unresolved.

Conclusions

This paper examines the prioritization of ethnicity as a framework for understanding political conflict in Burundi — a state popularly characterised as being riven with ethnic violence between the Hutus and Tutsis. Mamdani's (2001) conceptualization of political identities assists in the analysis of how ethnicity emerged as a key element in the discriminatory practices of the modern Burundi state. Reaffirming Nnoli's (1998) and Mustapha's (1999) articulation of the differential incorporation of African peoples in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial state, the paper argues that Burundi's pre-colonial rulers recognised the need for a policy of inclusion in order to enhance productivity and security, while colonial and post-colonial rulers, in contrast, used racial and ethnic exclusivism to facilitate accumulation through extraction. If the ethnic identities of Hutu and Tutsi are essentially political identities and have relevance only in reference to the state, so long as competition for access to state power and to state resources remains intense, ethnicity will persist as a convenient tool. Colonial discriminatory policies privileged Tutsi over Hutu, politically and economically; a situation later threatened by democratisation and accentuated by the limited resource base of the post-colonial state. The elite, in order to gain mass support and to obfuscate other differences, whether personal, clan or regional, used ethnicity instrumentally. Where an ethnic boundary provides a critical fault line, elite discourses around access, democracy and representation tend to be articulated in the language of ethnicity. The genocidal violence that ensued reflects the de-humanizing tendencies of the racialized and ethnicized politics of the modern state and not just the workings of neo-patrimonialism in the context of diminishing resources.

However, a focus on ethnicity as the primary cause of political strife ignores not only historical—structural factors, but the contradictions within the society, which may, on the one hand, contribute to strife, but could, on the other, provide a basis for progressive non-ethnic alliances. This paper reveals how the heterogeneity of political and social alliances among

a factionalised Burundi elite has contributed to the iterations and protractedness of the violence. Regional and intra-ethnic differences of class, clan and personal rivalries have all played a role in the conflict and in producing a climate of insecurity.

The paper also challenges the description of the Burundi state as a 'failed state', by arguing that the conflict signals not the end but the still difficult birth of the modern state. It is not that the modern Burundi state has failed only that it has never served its citizens, providing neither representation nor security nor development for all. The political and economic system instituted as part of the modern state was dependent on the promotion of discriminatory practices based on racial and ethnic identities and was, therefore inherently unstable. Pre-colonial patron–client relationships took on new forms within a more rigidified ethnic structure, and security from violence, social disruption and the ravages of an unequal economic system helped to strengthened ethnic allegiance among the masses. A critical transformative moment in Burundi's history was the aborted attempt by Prince Rwagasore to unify the ethnic groups under a radical anti-colonial agenda; the prospect of another such moment is not untenable, considering the capacity of the Burundi elite to transcend ethnic differences for individual gain.

Finally, in a discussion of the peace settlement, the paper concludes that the continual portrayal of the Burundi people purely as ethnic beings (Mandela implored them 'to join the modern age') serves to absolve the elite from blame and fosters a culture of impunity, while limiting the people's political participation to that of bystanders, robbing them of the capacity to be full participants in the political and economic transformation of the country. It is arguable that the majority of people see themselves as poverty-stricken workers or peasants not as ethnic beings. Peace and stability in Burundi requires a non-ethnicized vision of state power, one that is inclusive and which stresses stability and security for all — almost a national consciousness as opposed to an ethnic one.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Colin Clarke, James Sidaway and two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and special gratitude to Cartographer, Ailsa Allen, who produced the map.

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